

# Social Presence Resources

## Social Presence and Its Importance

### Suggestions from “Social Presence in Online Learning: 7 Things Instructional Designers Can Do To Improve It” by Edgar Garcia-O’Neill

The following suggestions are curated from [Garcia-O’Neill’s article on the eLearning Industry website](#). The various materials in this collection relate back to one or more of these suggestions. They are designed to help you improve presence by offering convenient tools, pre-written announcements, and a literature review of academic and anecdotal articles and videos.

1. **Encourage learners to incorporate their feelings, experiences, examples, and ideas in works completion.**

It is not just about just about meeting the minimum work requirements. You have to frequently promote learners to bring what they have to share to the class from their own experience. Students open themselves when talking about their situations and how they handle it and get their emotions out more often.

2. **Use video feedback.**

Visual feedback enables instructors to be more effective in establishing social presence in online learning because they can speak with emotions, talk in a conversational manner, and create a sense of closeness with students. Learners can also ask questions in real time thus promoting a better instructor-learner interaction. In case real time is not an option, allow learners to respond to the feedback using video as well in an asynchronous mode. There are many companies out there working on improving the way video is used to improve these interactions.

3. **Incorporate personal profiles and photos.**

Learners like to learn something about each other to feel more connected. Personal profiles and photos help especially at the beginning of the courses as natural “ice breakers”. Request learners to post “full body photos”, to take advantage of the body language factor and heighten social presence. Face only photos do not display the social cues that a full body photo shows. Ask for profiles to incorporate what learners like to do in their social life: This is one of the successful characteristics of the social networks that Instructional Designers can put into practice immediately.

4. **Provide messages that are respectful, positive, encouraging, timely, and frequent.**

Online instructors have to be proactive in their communications with learners to encourage social presence. Providing messages that are respectful, positive, encouraging, timely, and frequent assists learners to develop social presence

and caring behaviors. This also advances affectionate interactions, mutual respect, and finding meaning in relationships with learners, peers, and instructors.

5. **Be responsive to students' needs.**

Learners value the timeliness of information and feedback. Students acknowledge the importance of understanding the expectations of the course, including assignment requirements and due dates, and value feedback on their performance. Timely feedback means to learners that their work is given priority and allows them to make adjustments as the course or training advances.

6. **Ensure quality of the media.**

Use high quality media that promote a better view of personal traits such as physical distance, eye contact, smiling, and other social cues that enhance social presence in online learning. Instructional Designers must be careful with their instructions about how to make good videos, especially in High Definition (HD), and take high quality photos that foment a richer social presence environment.

7. **Encourage learners to evaluate their positive and negative feelings.**

For example, offering optimistic comments about learners' participation and contribution to the course forms a sense of intimacy among learners. Sharing experience about assignments and training activities creates this sense of belonging to a group, which facilitates and enhances social presence.

## Other Resources on Social Presence

- [“Creating presence in an online course... without working around the clock.”](#) By Laurie Freidman, *Temple University Center for the Advancement of Teaching* website.
- [“Increasing Social Presence in Online Learning through Small Group Discussions.”](#) By Mete Akcaoglu and Eunbae Lee in *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*.
- [“The Indicators of Instructor Presence that are Important to Students in Online Courses.”](#) By Kathleen Sheridan and Melissa A. Kelly in *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*.
- [“The Power of Social Presence for Learning.”](#) By Aimee Whiteside, Amy Dikkers, and Somer Lewis, *Educause Review* website.
- [“What is the Value of Social Presence in Online Learning?”](#) Michelle Pacansky-Brock on *YouTube*.