

Exemplar 11

Course area: Floristry (Care for Floristry Stock and Merchandise)



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This Exemplar illustrates how a specialised online resource can be developed and used to provide a valuable supplement to face-to-face teaching.

“At the moment, I’m trialling a module that I developed for TAFE NSW—Sydney Institute with the assistance and skills of the Centre for Innovative Learning and Teaching (CILT). The module is called Care of Floristry Stock and Merchandise. It is a requirement for anyone enrolled in various Certificates in floristry.

I need to point out that we haven’t finished the trial yet—we’re only partway through. Students have not yet submitted their first assessment.

The online module deals with botany and horticulture-related knowledge. An average florist might use 300 or 400 types of flowers and leaves. What I did was to go and take digital photographs of a large cross-section of these flowers and leaves, and put them online. As far as I know, the result is unique, and I’m very pleased with it. It is fairly complete. You can click on a photograph and see it in enlargement, and the module contains a lot of theoretical and reference material as well.

Some sections of the industry would love to grab this resource! We debated how to make the material available to students, whether to distribute it by CD. But in the end, for security reasons, we decided to put it out through TAFE’s *Janison* platform, so that we can keep tighter control over it.

Students started the module with a three-hour, face-to-face induction. Two members of CILT and I met with the students. We began by going through our expectations, organised passwords and pin numbers, and went over how we could keep in touch electronically. I tried to give them a picture of how much work they were expected to do, at least two hours per week. Then, we gave them time to explore the site. They practised logging on, looked at the *Janison* features, and at the course material.

The induction went well. Some of the students even applauded when they saw the quality and amount of information that was available!

Issues of acceptable online conduct need to be discussed early in the sessions. Other important considerations like not sharing or giving out passwords and PIN numbers to others must be mentioned.

Some of my students are familiar with computers, but others are not. So I couldn't assume that they would be comfortable with things like emailing. I wanted to be sure that any lack of computer skills would not get in the way of the subject matter. I made sure there were always options for people without easy access to a computer, like being able to submit assignments in writing. I also got them all to send me an email, so I was confident they could email me for help if they needed it. Students without email addresses were assisted in getting a Hotmail address [hotmail.com]. In retrospect, it is important to set up high level screening for such an address. Otherwise, you can get a multitude of spam messages.

As time's gone by, I've realised that a few of them are still struggling with the basics, like getting onto the site. Next time, I'll hand out some simple, step-by-step notes covering things like logging on and moving around the *Janison* site in the introductory session. Appropriate notes were created and distributed to struggling students as the problem was realised.

Students must have a full knowledge of assessment tasks early on, probably in the introductory session to motivate the group. Students unaware of assessments are slow to get online and end up requiring face-to-face to get them moving.

The online floristry module has three assessment tasks, each based on the information and photographs I've provided. They do the first two by themselves, and email the results to me. The third assessment is going to be on campus as a group. Using a data projector, what I intend to do is project some of the photographs onto a screen, and give them assessment tasks relating to these images. I think that, in the interests of validity and reliability, some assessment should happen face-to-face.

I keep in touch with students in a variety of ways. I use *Janison* to check on who is logging on, and how often. The danger with teaching online is the students who are shy or under-performing can draw back and, before you know it, they have disappeared into cyberspace. So you need to intervene before that happens. Regular contact is essential!

These students are studying other floristry modules on campus, so it is easy to see them and help with any difficulties. I've also emailed them a reminder that I'm happy to discuss any problems they're having, and on two occasions, I've organised blocks of time in the computer room to meet with any students who need assistance.

I've found it is important to prepare other teachers who have face-to-face contact with the students. They are a key link in the communication chain. You might need to spend time on what they should say or not say, and how they should respond to questions about the online module.

It is early days yet, but we have got some preliminary feedback from students about the module. A common theme in their comments is that, while they've found the online resource very valuable, they would not like to see the program go completely online. Face-to-face still plays an important role in their learning:

'The online materials are an excellent tool, but I don't think they're a substitute for face-to-face.'

'I benefited a lot from the face-to-face classes, and had a great time.'

'Using the online resources is fine later in the term, but I'd rather start with more face-to-face. That way, you get the benefits of talking and you can clear up your own weaknesses. Then you feel more confident working online by yourself.'

Comments on my own learning...

The online module was developed with the support of Sydney Institute, and they and others have taken a lot of interest. For me, it's been a steep learning curve.

Even though I'm generally computer-literate, this is the first time I've been involved in things like website design. The people from the CILT have been a huge help, sharing their skills, working together and full of encouragement. I've learnt a lot from them about the technical side of this project.

I've also done *Introduction to Teaching Online*. I both struggled and enjoyed participating in the online project work, where you're in the role of learner. It taught me a lot about the issues that come up, and how they affect the online learner.

