



Project Based Learning Survival Guide

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Teaching PBL Online: Where to Begin?

In any course, good advanced preparation helps instructors set themselves up for success. This is particularly true in an online course. This is partially because the instructor has the added responsibility of ensuring that adequate instructions and course materials are available for students to access through the Internet. All of this takes planning and time.

The first question that may arise for those new to online teaching is: Where do I begin? The following six steps are recommended to help you begin planning:

1. **Develop a project idea:** This could be a “big question,” a theme, a scenario, etc.
2. **Determine the scope of the project:** This includes identifying two or three key standards, as well as desired content/curriculum objectives. *Hint: Use “Bloom” verbs to identify your objectives.*¹
3. **Identify knowledge and skills:** What will students need to know and/or know how to do in order to complete the tasks? Include curriculum/content skills, information literacy skills, technology skills, cooperative learning skills, organization skills, etc.
4. **Developing Assessments:** This may include items such as objective tests, checklists, or rubrics as assessment instruments. The type of assessment selected depends on the products and activities of the project

Teaching Strategies: The following list includes teaching strategies that might work well in an online PBL:

- **Scavenger Hunt:** Ask students to locate definitions, develop web portfolios, or collect resources. *Hint: Students can publish their results online: <http://poster.4teachers.org/>*
- **Web Quest:** Set up a structured online investigation. *Hint: You can create a formal webquest at <http://webquest.org/questgarden/author/>.*
- **Reflection Journal:** Students write their thoughts and ideas while developing a PBL unit. *Hint: Have students create a metacognitive blog. Free blogs can be set up at sites such as: <http://wordpress.org/> or <http://wordpress.org/>.*
- **Students as teachers:** Students work with partners or in small groups to prepare lessons to teach their peers about a specific topic. *Hint: Students can assess their peers by creating online quizzes at sites such as: <http://www.webwinder.com/quiz/index.html>*
- **Students as experts:** Students uncover incomplete, misleading, or incorrect information published on the Internet. *Hint: Have students expand on a Wikipedia “stub.”*
See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Stub>

¹ Bloom’s Taxonomy:

http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/educ_school2/docs/stai_manual/manual8.htm

Before You Begin

Prior to planning your project, you may want to take a look at your teaching style and classroom environment. There are three 'conditions' that are necessary for successful Project Based Learning:²

1. ***A strong teacher-student relationship.*** PBL works best when you have established a positive, communicative relationship with your students. PBL is a community-oriented, relationship-driven style of teaching and learning. If you enjoy working closely with students, you will enjoy Project Based Learning.
2. ***An atmosphere that emphasizes rigor and accountability.*** If you have set high standards for your students—and they know what is expected of them—they will perform much more successfully in projects. Project Based Learning requires that students **take responsibility** for their own learning. The more they understand the importance of solid learning and being accountable for results, the more they will be self-directed and high-performing.
3. ***An opportunity for student involvement.*** Project Based Learning does not require that your classroom be 'student-run.' However, it does require process-oriented instruction. That is, you are in a constant dialogue with your students about what they are learning and what is important to them. Respectful listening and good communication will improve the quality of your projects. Provide students with opportunities to make choices and decisions.

² Adapted from: <http://edtech.boisestate.edu>