

# Spotlight on Teaching and Technology

**Indiana University  
Kokomo**

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## How Did You Manage To Do That?

By Joe Ben Hoyle

CENTER FOR  
**TEACHING, LEARNING  
AND ASSESSMENT**

*This essay is one of a series of essays on teaching in college by Joe Ben Hoyle, the David Meade White Distinguished Teaching Fellow at the University of Richmond. The essay is reprinted by permission of the author. Other essays about teaching by Joe Hoyle can found at <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/~jhoyle/> Copyright 2006*

How can a teacher communicate positive reinforcement to the best students? How can a teacher elicit helpful feedback about a class? How can a teacher guide each new group of students at the start of the semester?

Here is a simple and genuinely nice gesture that provides a legitimate response for each of these needs, a single action that should provide three specific benefits.

Typically, between 10 and 20 percent of my students earn the grade of A. Sometimes it is a few more and sometimes a few less but that is a fairly normal range. Throughout the semester, I stress that attaining an A requires a serious amount of time and effort. Occasionally, I like to throw out a challenge to the students, "If you can make an A in this course, you will have achieved something worthy of telling your mom."

After the semester, when grades have been calculated but before they are officially released to the students, I e-mail a congratulatory note to each one who earned an A. "Congratulations!

You Did It!" It describes what they accomplished during the semester and how proud they should be of such an outstanding effort. My goal is for them to feel extremely pleased with their educational achievement. Former students sometimes tell me, years later, that they held onto that e-mail as a treasured memory of college.

At the end of these e-mails, I ask each A student to do me a favor and write a paragraph or two describing how he or she managed to earn the grade of A when so many other, equally bright, students did not. They are told (as they should already know) that these messages will be passed along verbatim to the next group of students in this same class. The A students are directed to think about how they accomplished so much during the semester and then write a serious and honest description of what they did. This essay can be submitted anonymously, if they wish, but most prefer the recognition.

The responses are absolutely fascinating. I peruse each one carefully. What insight are these students providing about my class? Is this the way that I want a student to earn an A grade? If a student writes that the A came from excessive cramming and memorization on the night before each test, is that a sign that serious changes are needed immediately? More can be learned about a class from this short assignment than from most formal student evaluations. These essays are honest

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words from the best students.

All of the paragraphs are then cut and pasted into a single document which is distributed to the next class of students on the first day of the following semester. It is one handout that they read with interest and care; they are always inclined to believe the words of their follow students. These short essays help remove any rumors or mystery associated with my class. From the beginning, I want every student to understand exactly what it takes to earn an excellent grade. In most team sports, the players who are seniors are expected to teach the freshmen what it means to be part of the team. That is what I am seeking: One group of students instructs the next on how to achieve excellence.

*Reference:*  
<http://oncampus.richmond.edu/~jhoyle/documents/Book-Teaching-X.doc.pdf>



## Best Practice Tip for Oncourse CL

Oncourse CL provides many more ways to deliver a course than its predecessor with the result that students might find it confusing initially as each Professor is likely to use different tools.

On the home page for each course there is an option "Worksite Information". Use this to describe to your students what to expect from your particular course. I am sure they will find this extremely helpful. (See example below.)

<a href="#">Workspace</a>   <a href="#">Administrator Tools</a>   <a href="#">Functional Req Com</a>   <a href="#">CENTER TOWN HALL</a>   <a href="#">SP07 KO</a>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Home</a></li> <li><a href="#">Syllabus</a></li> <li><a href="#">Roster</a></li> <li><a href="#">Calendar</a></li> <li><a href="#">Assignments</a></li> <li><a href="#">Resources</a></li> <li><a href="#">Podcasts</a></li> <li><a href="#">Library</a></li> <li><a href="#">Resources</a></li> <li><a href="#">Gradebook</a></li> <li><a href="#">Post'Em</a></li> <li><a href="#">Message Center</a></li> <li><a href="#">Announcements</a></li> </ul>	<h3>Worksite Information</h3> <hr/> <p><u>Options</u></p> <p>Cherie Dodd's practice course site Spring 2007.</p> <p>I use Oncourse in the following way:</p> <p>Assignments - typically you will find my Assignments under the Assignments tool.</p> <p>Please use the Resources tool to upload your files for your group projects.</p> <p>Grades for assignments and projects will be found in the Post'Em Tool.</p> <p>Due dates for all my Assignments are in the Calendar.</p>

## Training

We will be conducting MSOffice 2007 training, as well as Oncourse CL training, and open lab sessions to assist you with your transition to Oncourse CL and MSOffice 2007 from May through August. Please check the online training schedule soon for an update on times and to reserve your place on the courses.

**URL:** <http://www.iuk.edu/~koctla/technology/Schedule.shtml>

We expect that MSOffice 2007 will be the version of Office used on instructor computers *in classrooms* in the fall. We invite you to bring your PowerPoint presentations with you to one of our open lab sessions to try them out in the newer version of Office.