# A Guide to Integrating Online Collaboration into a Course

1. **Plan, Design, Review**

   a. ASK YOURSELF WHAT ADDED VALUE THE TECHNOLOGY WILL BRING TO YOUR COURSE. Tech should never be added for its own sake. Indeed, doing so can undermine your teaching strategies. Instead, choose a technology for its ability to support, or add to, student learning and the teaching experience.

   b. DESIGN AN ACTIVITY WITH A CLEAR OBJECTIVE. The backward design model is a useful way to plan a course or learning activities. According to this model, you would plan your course or activity around a clear learning outcome and the assessment of students' attainment of it. Some teachers find it helpful to also develop the marking criteria before deciding on the details of the activity itself. This model helps ensure that the course or activity is well aligned with the assessment and the learning outcome.

      The [Technoped Activity Design Template](#) is an available tool that can help you with this process. You may also find it useful to your course or activity design with a pedagogical counsellor or colleague who has implemented a similar technology into a course.

   c. CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE PLATFORM OR APP FOR THE ACTIVITY. In deciding if a platform is appropriate, consider the following:
      - *Environment:* Do you want students to work synchronously (at the same time) or asynchronously (any time), in-class or at-home? Do you require a platform that provides some classroom management features?
      - *Interaction:* Student–content, student–student, and/or student–teacher
      - *Support:* Consider how much you will need to run the activity with the chosen platform. (Feel free to contact the PSI office and members of the OCSA team who can provide technopedagogical support.)
      - *Privacy and Intellectual Properties:* Consider the user rights and privacy policies of the platform. Does the platform allow you to control whether student work will be visible to you, to the class, or to the public?

      *Tip: A variety of platforms can be useful for digital collaboration. Several are reviewed and their pedagogical value discussed here: [http://collab.vanierpsi.profweb.ca/](http://collab.vanierpsi.profweb.ca/).*

2. **Practice, practice, practice!** Get to know the technology before you introduce it to the students. This gives you the opportunity to familiarize yourself with its functionalities, discover its potential as a learning tool, trouble-shoot potential challenges, and find useful short-cuts. This step will simplify introducing the platform to students.

3. **Ride the curve!**
   a. BE PATIENT WITH THE PLATFORM, YOUR STUDENTS, AND YOURSELF. There will always be a learning curve the first time you use a platform to students. As much as you may practice using it on your

own, until students use it, you won't know the ins and outs of how it works with a group. This is why it can be helpful to talk to other educators who have already used the platform.

    b. ENCOURAGE PATIENCE IN YOUR STUDENTS. Let them know you are all experimenting with something new. This helps create buy-in from your students.

4. **Scaffold the use of the technology.**

    a. START SMALL AND BUILD. When first introducing a platform, it's important to start with a small-scale, manageable activity and build on what works.

    b. PROVIDE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS ON THE NATURE OF THE ACTIVITY AND HOW TO USE THE TECHNOLOGY. Most students are used to mobile apps with simple interfaces and so are unaccustomed to working in more complex platforms. It's important to take some time to teach students the platform's basics, including its help features, and to provide them with resources such as Youtube instruction videos. Doing so will prevent unnecessary frustrations. Again, the PSI office or OCSA team are available to help.

    c. ENCOURAGE THE USE OF THE RIGHT DEVICE FOR THE PLATFORM. There are differences between using a platform on a desktop versus a mobile device. While more and more educational platforms are mobile-friendly, many lack the functionalities on mobile devices that are available on desktop.

    d. FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR STUDENTS AS THEY BEGIN TO USE THE TECHNOLOGY. Checking in with them on a regular basis will allow you to identify any challenges they face and to intervene sooner, reducing frustrations and distractions from the main goal—reaching the learning outcome.

5. **Choose an appropriate setting.**

If your chosen platform works best on a desktop rather than a mobile device, you may want to send a request a computer lab or versatile classroom with laptops. If you can't book one, you can encourage students to bring their own devices. In that case, it is worthwhile booking a classroom with easily movable desks or tables.

6. **Prepare your students to work in a collaborative digital environment**. While students regularly interact online, they may not be used to doing so in an academic or professional context. This can be a learning opportunity for them: a chance to share tips on respecting netiquette and providing peers with constructive criticism. Below are resources for both:

- [7 Netiquette Rules](#)
- [Advice on Giving Constructive Feedback](#)