Blog 259

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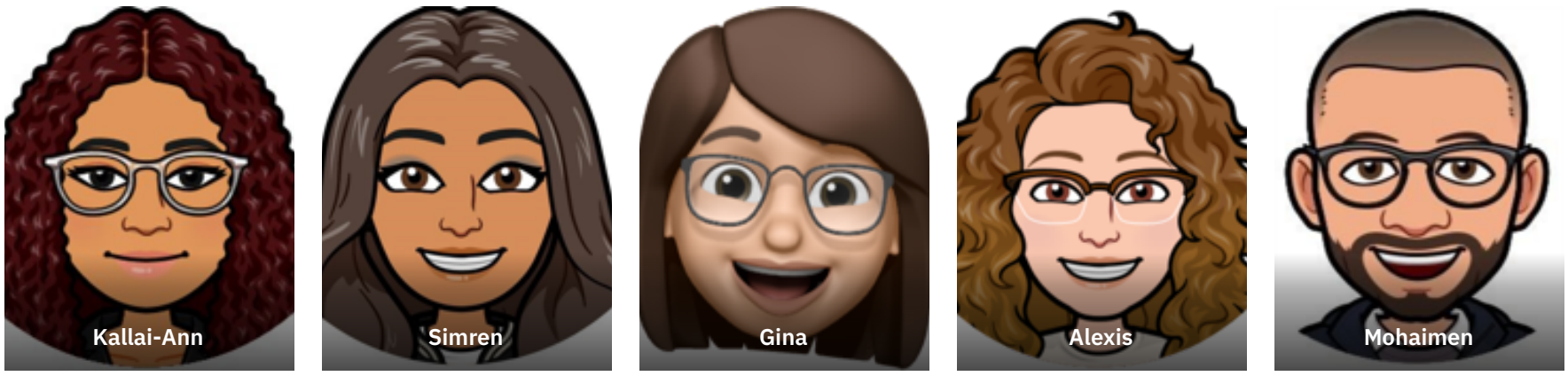
Mastering eClass: Insider Tips by Students for Student Success

This 2024 eClass blog post was carefully curated by five Student Consultants at the Teaching Commons. Student Consultants work closely with faculty through partnership to share their experience, and to work towards a shared goal of improving education at York University. They have compiled 10 tips to optimize your eClass and support student success through online learning management systems. All quotes and testimonies are from the Student Consulting team.



1) Use Headings to Your Advantage

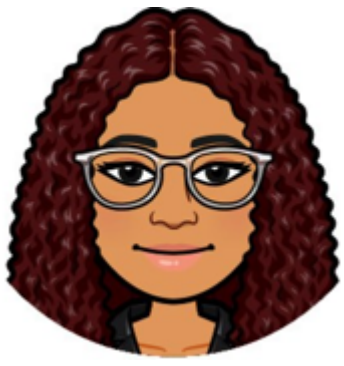
The weekly headings are some of the first pieces of information that students pick up since they are highlighted and sectioned. It is also a way for students to quickly identify the progress of the course. As such, utilizing the headings to relay information pertinent to the course can make a difference. According to feedback received from students, week numbers, dates, and relevant topics are key information they look for in the heading. Under these sections, adding specific reading materials, content, and assignments also adds a lot of value.

“There have been many occasions where I was looking for specific topics to review in a course. Having the topic names on these headings helped me as I did not have to go through multiple weeks of content to find what I was looking for.”

“Weekly headings and the correct information within the weekly tabs are a huge help because they help keep the eClass organized. Without them, I often get lost in the course and have issues navigating what I am supposed to work on each week. In addition, ensuring the sections are expandable and collapsible also makes it easy to view everything on one page rather than being redirected to another tab.”

2) Grading Systems are Important to Student Success

Grading systems are important for supporting student success. They provide a way for students to keep track of their academic progress without the anxiety of uncertainty. Timely updates on student grades give students room to assess their progress and plan for improvement.



The gradebook on eClass is something I check regularly, as it is quite important for me to track my progress and without it, I feel anxious. Having constant updates on my grades is super helpful because I know where I need to improve. The grading system is a tool that needs to be used because it is important for my success.”

“I have personally experienced situations where I did not receive a grade until the end of the semester, and it caused me to not do my best because I couldn’t track my progress and see where I needed to improve. For instance, before going into an exam, it can be helpful to know my grade so I can calculate what score is required to achieve the grade I want.”

3) Important Information at the Top of the eClass Page

By including essential information at the top of the eClass page, information is readily accessible to students! When students open eClass, their learning is best supported when the essential information is right at the top. Essential information includes faculty member name, email, office hours, zoom links, office location, and syllabus.

Rather than scrolling down to find the information in different sections, they can see it as soon as they open the class website.

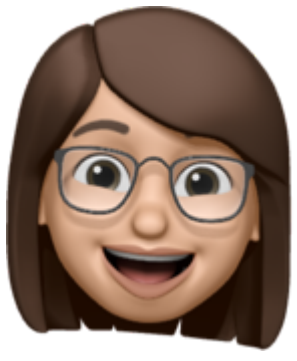
“Having important information at the top of the eClass page makes life easier since I do not have to search through emails or the course website to find what I am looking for. Rather, I see it as soon as I click on the course. I have had experiences where students could not find the course Zoom link because it wasn’t at the top of the page, so they ask people in the class group chat for it.”

“Any time I am in a panic to contact a professor or would like to meet with them over office hours, the general information at the top of the eClass is so helpful! Sometimes, in a panic, I cannot think straight and forget where to find the professor's email! When the information is at the top, I always know where to find it.”

4) Humanize your eClass Page with a Welcome Section

Incorporating a welcome section to your eClass page can help develop personal connections with students, and they may feel more comfortable reaching out should they need support. A welcome section can be personalized and delivered through a short paragraph or video that introduces you. This information can be useful to students while also helping them feel more comfortable with the instructor, especially at the beginning of the year or if all engagement with students is online.

“I often feel intimidated by instructors, especially at the beginning of the year, because I don’t know what to expect from the course. Having a welcome section or video, particularly for courses delivered online, sets the tone for the rest of the year. I felt that the instructor was easier to talk to.”



“A welcome section or video helps personalize and bring life to the eClass page. Without it, the eClass is just full of course material.”

5) Visual Aspects are Key

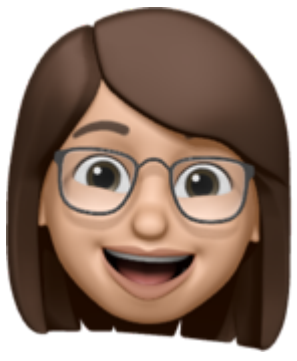
The use of a banner custom to the course makes the course feel welcoming and helps your course stand out in the grid of other course tiles on eClass! A little pop of color and customization helps students find their course faster. Students love it when sections of the eClass are filled with information and resources. A good tip is to upload everything beforehand and keep it hidden from students until you are ready to use it. That way, students have access to slides and course content information all year round. If you use a banner or images, for accessibility purposes we would encourage you to add an alt-text.

“I find it awesome when my professors use a cover picture that relates to the course content for their eClass; it helps the course not blend in with all the other ones! It also makes the course seem more welcoming and thoughtful."

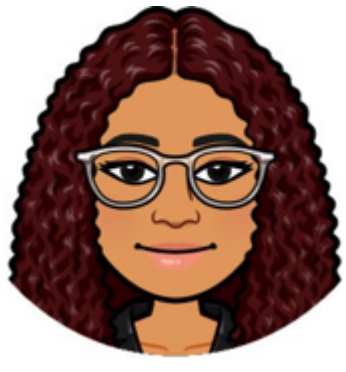
“Having different visual aspects makes the eClass more appealing to view. Often, it is full of so much information and documents, which can make it seem dull. However, the visual aspect can make it more exciting to interact with.”

6) Assignment Sections: Streamlining Success in Your eClass

Think about devoting a dedicated section to assignments on your eClass page, and for quick access also place each task in its respective week. By including direct links to the submission portal, the eClass is more organized and simplifies the student journey through seamless navigation. Consider putting assignments in their own section and including them in the week that they are due in the submission portal.



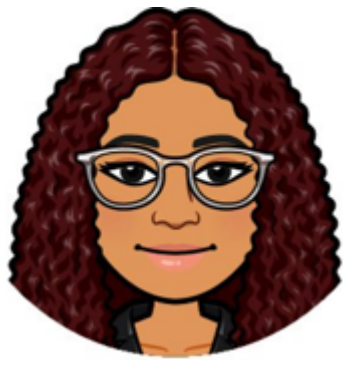
"Creating a designated assignment space transformed chaos into clarity for my students. They navigated their coursework with ease, hitting deadlines effortlessly. It's about setting them up for success from the moment they enter the virtual classroom."



“Having assignments in their own section is helpful. Sometimes, if I finish an assignment right before it is due, I frantically search for the submission portal because the eClass is disorganized. When the eClass is organized, it is less anxiety-inducing and allows me to find assignments and portals in a timely manner.”

7) Accessibility is Important for My Success

Academic accessibility is crucial for student success. Course design is enhanced when videos on eClass have transcripts. It is an excellent resource for students who cannot grasp information through videos or recordings. Some students find it difficult, and transcripts aid them in their understanding. Additionally, adding information about how to access learning accommodations, in the York University Student Accessibility Services is a fantastic way to guide students toward getting the support they need!



“I learn so much better through reading than I do through listening. When my professors provide me with a transcript of a video, it absolutely supports my learning. It also helps when I cannot listen to videos in public places. Sometimes I have a tough time finding where to renew my academic accommodations, so when my professor provides that link on their eClass, it helps me request my accommodations in time, and it also makes me feel like they care about my learning.”

“During the pandemic, when school was online, I felt frustrated trying to listen to 2-hour lecture recordings. Sometimes, I lose focus or may not understand something, and it is difficult for me to remain on track. The course would have been easier if I had been provided with reading notes or transcripts.”

8) A Thoughtful Yet Impactful Switch: Shifting from Word to PDF's

Making a switch from Word to PDFs on your eClass is an important way to streamline information. If a Word document is uploaded on eClass, any time a student wants to access it, they need to redownload it. By the end of the term, they might have 20 downloads of the syllabus! The browser interacts with PDFs in a much more accessible way, where when interacting with a PDF on eClass, the document is simply opened on another tab.

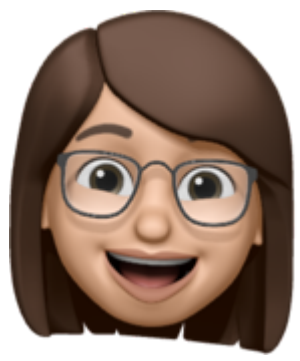
“When professors upload PDF’s instead of Word documents, it makes it so much easier to keep track of all my documents because they open as tabs all in one place!”

“Having a PDF version is great as I do not use the Windows operating system. Whenever I try to open DOCX files, the formatting is different as I do not have access to Microsoft Word. A PDF is great, however, as it looks the same across all systems.”

9) Reach Out to Students to Hear About Their Experience

Having student feedback about what works and what does not work can really help organize the eClass in a manner that focuses on the students’ experiences. At the end of the day, the eClass is a tool to help students in their learning journey, so it is valuable to have their perspectives integrated. One way this can be done is by having a survey asking the students w*hat works for them, what does not work for them, and what they would like to see in the future*. This could even be tied to 1% of their grade to add some motivation for the exercise. We also encourage faculty to seek feedback during the course to implement ideas while those students are taking the course. As a result, the survey can be used in the beginning, middle, and end of the course.

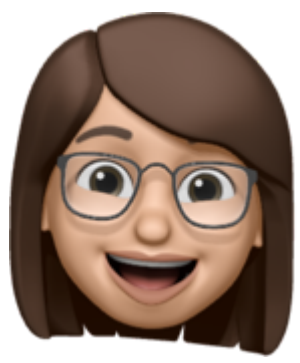
“In many instances, I wanted to commend my professor for going above and beyond on their eClass page. Unfortunately, I did not have a place to do so, as an email felt too formal for such a discussion. I wish I had a place to add my comments."



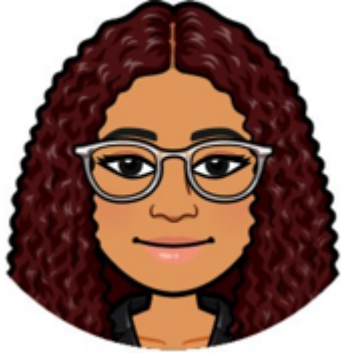
“Having a place to provide feedback on a course shows me that the instructor really cares about the student perspective and how they can improve the course for the next set of students. Surveys can be great way to do just that!”

10) Forum Fusion: Elevating Engagement in eClass

Revitalize your eClass experience by leveraging forums strategically. Use discussion forums as an enticing opportunity for optional participation grades. Sometimes students may feel uneasy and nervous to participate out loud in class. Offering participation forums is a great way to keep participation accessible. Forums can foster connections through introduction threads, ensuring only students and TAs can share insights.



"Unlocking the power of forums breathed life into my eClass community. Participation became a choice, not a chore, and the discussions became a shared exploration. It's about crafting an environment where every interaction adds value to the learning journey."



“Discussion forums are a wonderful way to foster participation. I find it difficult sometimes to participate in class, and having the option to participate online allows me to feel more confident with my participation responses.”

Building an accessible and student-centered eClass is a great way to improve learning in your courses. As course directors and faculty members, eClass is your biggest tool in guiding your students to success. After all, students depend on eClass weekly! All of the tips mentioned above are small changes that can make a great impact on your courses.

This post was created by our inaugural group of Student Consultants on Learning and Teaching who worked in the Teaching Commons in the 2023-24 academic year. You can learn more about our past Student Consultants on Learning and Teaching, as well as our other Students as Partners initiatives, by visiting the Teaching Commons website.

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