Most instructors supplement their face-to-face courses with some online learning materials such as online syllabi, handouts, PowerPoint slides, and course-related Web links. All of these can add to the learning experience, but they are merely a start to making full use of the learning potential of the online learning environment in either a hybrid or totally online course. Although there is no standard definition of a hybrid course, one characteristic that makes a course a hybrid is the use of the Web for interaction rather than merely as a means of posting materials, says LaTonya Motley, instructional technology specialist at El Camino Community College in California.

Motley, who teaches faculty and staff how to develop online content for hybrid courses, says that one of the biggest challenges of developing a hybrid course is deciding which materials and activities to deliver online and which to deliver face to face. “It’s something that each instructor must decide for him- or herself, working with an instructional designer or someone on campus who can help them think about the consequences of putting something online,” Motley says.

Motley offers the following advice for creating a hybrid course:

1. Consider how much time you have to create the online portion of the course, including how long it will take for you to learn how.
2. Consider the students’ needs and skills. Will working online be an obstacle for some students?
3. Use a course management system if possible. A course management system has the tools to make the online course content interactive. If your institution does not have a user license for a course management system, consider one of the several free, open-source course management systems that are currently available.
4. Reuse materials. Creating online education materials can be time consuming. In addition to reusing content-related materials, whenever possible, reuse messages or announcements.
5. Manage your time. Teaching a hybrid course means you will be online more than you normally would. Plan accordingly.
6. Provide an in-class orientation to the online portion of the course. This is a luxury that is often not available to instructors teaching totally online courses. Still, you should provide in the syllabus all the information students will need to know about working online.
7. Use class time for lectures. This can help reduce the time it takes to develop online materials, because posting lectures online is often the most difficult and time-consuming aspect of creating hybrid courses, Motley says.
8. Encourage online interaction. The online portion of the course can be an extension of what occurs in the classroom. Students can work in groups to build on the interaction begun in the classroom. Motley recommends tying interaction to grades.
9. Remember that just because students are working in two environments and are free from some time constraints does not mean that students should be expected to do twice the amount of work as in a comparable face-to-face class.

From Online Classroom, March 2007.