

Retention Guide: Face-to-Face

This is a guide to facilitate retention strategies for face-to-face courses.

The aim is to establish and maintain regular contact with students, adapted to suit their learning style, your teaching style, and the course itself. We suggest contacting students directly (via Blackboard/email) approx. once a week or fortnight, whether in the form of announcements, reminders about course content, video announcements, or more focused emails touching base at key points in semester. Brief weekly announcements are useful in maintaining student contact. Be clear about each week's objectives.

Key points:

- Track student engagement via activities, assessments, readings, attendance, classroom participation and discussion. Consider adapting tutorial work to serve multiple purposes, e.g. group work activity that focuses on improving student engagement with course material/content and requires participation.
- Weekly or regular activities in workshops that combine coursework with developing a cohort (e.g. groupwork on assigned readings).
- Contacting students who aren't attending or engaging in class discussion, reminding them the significance of engaging in the course to perform well and understand the material. Affirming strong engagement and results.
- Encouraging student attendance to PASS (where applicable), or forming their own informal study groups to revise course materials.
- Contacting at risk students in the lead-up to final assessments, ensuring they are on track to submit and pass the course.
- Issue regular reminders for students to contact tutor/course coordinator with any questions or concerns, reminders about due dates, etc.
- Using Blackboard tools to check student engagement – checking at-risk students.
- Use the Discussion Board forums on Blackboard for FAQ, assigning a separate forum for student discussion, assessment questions, and course questions.
- Quick turnaround of marking with detailed feedback is important for retention. If your first assessment is due and returned before the census date, students may feel more confident of their performance in and understanding of the course.

Sample Retention Timeline

Time	Action	Action Completed?
Weeks 1-2	Blackboard: Introduction and welcome to the course: everything they need to know. Remind students to check their student emails regularly. Ensure contact details, course outline, assessment information is available on Blackboard.	

	Check student engagement in Blackboard–have they logged on to Blackboard? Remind students to contact you if they have any concerns. You can check this in Blackboard by clicking Evaluation in the left menu>Retention Centre. You can also follow Evaluation>Performance Dashboard to view the last time students have accessed Blackboard.	
Weeks 4-5	Continuing regular announcements, focusing on establishing clear weekly objectives. Checking and facilitating Discussion Board.	
	Reminders about upcoming first assessment (structure as appropriate for your timeline/due dates). Direct to additional resources, key information, and extension process through Adverse Circumstances if necessary.	
Weeks 6-8	Strong emphasis in lead up to key dates and assessment due dates: ensuring information is clear, issuing a FAQ for assessments. Regular reminders about due dates, assessment requirements, and directing students to additional resources.	
	After assessment due dates (ideally within 1-2 days), contacting any students who did not submit with personalised email checking in. Remind students about how to apply for extensions through Adverse Circumstances if necessary. Remind students that for each day past the due date, they risk 10% of the total possible grade for that assessment being deducted from their mark.	
	After first assessment results are released, contact students based on results and engagement in the course. Emphasis to be placed on encouraging peer support and recognising strong engagement–e.g., encouraging ‘team leaders’ who can lead discussion and assist their peers’ engagement – and offering support for students who may be at risk or hesitant to speak up in class. Consider how to best adapt your approach for your students – gentle support and encouragement may be best suited to some students, whereas a firmer approach may be more beneficial for others. See templates at the end of this guide.	
Semester Break	Use semester break as opportunity to encourage students to catch up on content they’ve missed, or to take a well-earned break.	
	Follow steps in Weeks 1-2 to check student engagement/retention; contact using templates below.	
Weeks 9-10	Reminders about upcoming assessments, resources, skills workshops available online through UoN library.	
Weeks 11-13	Continuing regular reminders and posts, touching base with students, particularly those at risk.	
	Emphasis on final assessments/exams, providing resources, additional information. Reminding students to consider applying for Adverse Circumstances if appropriate.	

Email Templates

Templates should be adapted and personalised to suit the context.

For students who were active initially, but have since lessened their engagement:

Hello, I hope you're well! I'm writing to discuss your performance in **COURSE**. I've noticed you were quite active early on in the course, demonstrating strong engagement with some great discussion, but haven't necessarily been as active of late in class discussions. I wanted to reach out to make sure you were still on track – please contact me if you have any concerns with the course. I look forward to seeing you bring your thoughts to class discussions.

For students who've performed well in the first assessment, but haven't been attending/engaging in class:

Hello,

I hope you're well! I'm writing to discuss your performance in **COURSE**. You performed well in the first assessment, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the concepts we've been exploring in class. It would be a real benefit to hear you share your ideas in class. Please contact me if you are experiencing any issues with the course or your attendance.

For students who haven't been attending/are at risk (tweaked to suit particular students/modes of engagement):

Hello,

I'm writing to touch base with you regarding your engagement with **COURSE**. I wanted to reach out and make sure you were on track with the course and course content. Engaging directly with material, and demonstrating your understanding of content in class discussions is vital in succeeding in the course. If you feel you're falling behind, or would like to discuss this further, please let me know. I encourage you to start actively engaging with the course material as you progress, which will have the added benefit of strengthening your final assessments.

If this is something you'd like to discuss further, or if you feel you may need further assistance, don't hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to seeing you in class!

For students who have been ideal students:

Hello, I hope you're well! I'm writing to commend you on your performance so far in **COURSE**. You've been an active participant in each step, and it's been great to see you engaging with the course content, as well as having many interesting discussions with your peers. We'd love to see you continue setting such a strong example as the course continues, encouraging others who've been more reserved to share their ideas and opinions.

I look forward to continuing to hear your great points in class!