

Online Learning:
Sharing What You Know
with
New Farmers
and
Agriculture Service Professionals

A Workbook for Designing, Constructing
And Delivering an Online Course

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May 2003

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Online Learning: Sharing What You Know with New Farmers and Agriculture Service Professionals

A Workbook for Designing, Constructing And Delivering an Online Course

Section I -- Getting Started

Introduction

The Growing New Farmers (GNF) Project is pleased to offer this Workbook to help you use the Internet to share important ideas, concepts, services and insights with new farmers and service providers.

Periodically, GNF will offer an online design seminar to help you build your own online course. You'll find the latest version of this Workbook, and the schedule for the next online seminar at <http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org/online>. You may use the Workbook independently to create your course, but participating in the online design seminar will give you extra support. This Workbook, and the online design seminar, will help you:

1. Define your subject matter and get clear about what participants will learn as a result of the course.
 2. Plan your course content -- what the topics and subtopics are that you wish to cover.
 3. Select a method for engaging learners – self-paced tutorial, lecture, seminar, or online learning group
 4. Develop the background materials needed for the course and determine the best way to deliver them.
 5. Learn the mechanics of offering your course through GNF.
 6. Get your course together and offer it.
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Using this Workbook

This Workbook has several sections:

Section I - Getting Started: That's where we are now.

Section II - Introducing Computer Conferencing: We introduce you to computer conferencing as a key method for supporting distance learning. Not all courses developed here will make use of computer conferences, but we want you to know a bit about this form early on.

Section III - Worksheets: We've created a series of Worksheets to help you think through and plan each aspect of your course. Feel free to print the Worksheets in this Workbook and then write your responses, or simply use the questions as a guide and write or keyboard your responses elsewhere.

Section IV - Thinking About Technology -- Yours and Theirs: A review of equipment and software requirements

Section V - Putting Your Resources Together: We will walk you through the options to design a set of web pages to offer course resources.

Section VI - Offering Your Course: Finally, we'll look at the basics of how you will conduct your course.

Appendix -- Useful Links: A collection of links with examples and resources on distance learning.

You don't need to do this alone, by the way. GNF will offer an online design seminar, from time to time, to help you design your course. In the online design course, a member of GNF's technical team will help you work through these steps, together with several others who want to offer new courses. Visit the [Growing New Farmers](http://www.growingnewfarmers.org/) Website (<http://www.northeastnewfarmer.org/>) and then click link in the text to [GNF Service Provider Consortium](#) to join the Consortium and receive e-mail notification of upcoming seminars for designing your course.

Where to Begin

First, please visit <http://www.northeastnewfarmers.org/online> to find out what's happening right now with online learning opportunities through Growing New Farmers. You'll also find information there about contacting GNF to begin discussions of your ideas for a new course. Please contact GNF right away and let them know what you're thinking about.

What Is Distance Learning?

Distance Learning is a process that lets people sit down in front of a computer in their home or office at any time that's convenient to them to learn things that are important to them. More and more, Distance Learning makes use of the Internet to connect learners with each other, with teachers and other resource people, and with resource materials that allow them to learn what they want. Other media may be used as well -- live-satellite broadcasts; distribution of materials (documents, CD-ROM, audiovisual presentations) by fax or mail; and correspondence courses. This Workbook concentrates on Distance Learning using the Internet.

What do you need to start?

Someone who wants to teach (or learn) on the Internet needs to have a computer, a connection to the Internet, and fairly standard software.

For most work these days, the computer needs to be one built within the last four or so years. It can be a PC or a Mac. Of course, the computers that are the newest will operate fastest and will run all the latest versions of software. But for most distance learning work that we'll talk about here, you don't need fancy equipment.

Likewise, you don't need the fastest connection to the Internet for this to work. You need a computer with a modem and a dial-up account. Faster modems are better, and a cable connection or a high-speed (DSL) connection is great. But for most of what we're doing here, any connection will work. Faster is, of course, faster!

What may be most important is your own attitude. How do you like to interact with others? Are you comfortable learning and sharing at a computer screen? Would you appreciate being able to sit down, at your convenience, and share with others? Are you self-motivated, comfortable with a computer, and a little bit adventuresome? Do you need to be with others, in the same room, in order to share? Just think those questions through and see if you can picture yourself helping others learn on the Internet. And, if you can, please proceed!

What can be taught on the Internet?

Just about anything that you can communicate with words, pictures and graphics can be taught on the Internet. For instance, you can use the Internet to help someone learn about different fertilizers and how they affect crops -- but it would be pretty hard to teach someone how to drive a tractor.

Think about your own experience on the Internet. You know that written words and graphics travel pretty fast. Pictures, depending on the size, travel fairly fast as well. Audio takes longer to get from one point to another on the Internet, and video takes the

longest of all. Anyone with an Internet connection can get any of these media -- written words, graphics, pictures, audio and video. The ease with which they get them depends on the speed of their Internet connection. So, as you think about what you want to teach, just realize that the more you can teach with words and graphics, and the less you rely on audio and video, the better off you are. But if it requires you and a learner to have your hands on the same thing (like the controls of a tractor) at the same time -- the Internet is not the best medium to use.

Who can teach or facilitate?

For the work we are doing here at Growing New Farmers, we think of teachers in two ways:

- **You may know a lot about a particular area**, with experience and expertise you want to share with a group of learners. You need to be comfortable working with people and able to think about what a learner needs to know in order to do something better. Your goal as a teacher is not to tell learners everything you know, but to help them learn what they can really use, right now.
- **You may know a little about a certain subject**, have a lot of curiosity, and want to work with other motivated people to learn more. In other words, you're not an expert, but you are interested in working with a group of people to see what you can collectively learn about a given area. In this case, you need to have some skill in facilitating a group of people to help them learn and work together. If you have experience doing this with people in the same room, it can be adapted to use on the Internet.

Who are the learners or students?

In the Growing New Farmers Project, our primary learners are new farmers and agricultural service providers. However, our courses are open to everyone, including all farmers and others interested in the subject matter.

So, a course may be led by a farmer or a service provider. The students in a particular course may be only farmers, only service providers, or a combination.

What methods of learning can be used?

Growing New Farmers is concentrating on four basic methods for learning:

1. Self-Contained Tutorial. One way of helping others learn is to simply put together a presentation or a tutorial using the Internet. In this case, you, as the teacher, do all of your work up-front, putting together a set of instructional materials -- essays, references, links, PowerPoint presentations, pictures and graphics, audio or video clips -- which someone can access at their convenience. Learners work their way through the material independently, at their own pace.

Typically, a tutorial would simply be available on the web; people would click on a link from the Growing New Farmers distance learning page, and use your materials. You might choose to make it easy for people to ask you questions about the material you've presented -- by e-mail, or letter, or phone. Or you might decide that you don't want to offer further contact.

This method works best when you have a discreet body of content you want to convey. The more straightforward the content, the more likely this is to be a successful approach.

2. Lecture. Another method is to offer a course in which you intend to be present, electronically via the Internet, interacting with the students or learners. In this case, you would design a course to be offered over a period of time -- typically 2-6 weeks. You would develop, usually, one lesson per week, with instructional materials (text, graphics, pictures, audio and/or video), key questions and assignments, and an overall syllabus that describes what you expect to do, and what you expect learners to learn. Think of this as using the web to provide your particular expertise to the students.

With assistance from GNF, you would develop your lesson plans into a suite of webpages. And then you would decide how to interact with your learners. You might use e-mail as your basic means of communication. You would bring a class together, introduce them to each other by e-mail so they would know who else is in the class, and then you would communicate with the class, and they with each other, via e-mail. You might augment this with some telephone conferences with the group.

3. Seminar. The third method we are supporting is online seminars. In this case, you as a teacher have skills, processes or a body of content you wish to present, as with the lecture course method, but you also want to engage the participants in group discussion of the subject matter.

In a seminar, you would develop a syllabus, assignments, key questions and instructional materials provided over the web. In addition, you would make use of distance learning software called Catalyst, which brings a community of learners together to understand the same subjects. "Computer Conferencing," as it is called, is an exciting way to for a group to learn and work together. Please see Section II, below, for an overview of Computer Conferencing. Also, please see <http://www.distancelearners.org/demo/catalystconferencing> for a demonstration of how Catalyst works.

4. Online Learning Group. Finally, you may have an area where you know something, but don't consider yourself an expert. We will support you in inviting a group of people into a "computer conference" to explore a topic together.

What types of resource materials can be used?

Just about anything you want!

First of all, always remember that even with distance learning you can still send books and articles and other things via postal mail.

You'll want to use the web for providing resource materials to your learning group wherever possible. If you've cruised around on the web, you know almost anything is possible. We won't get into details here, but just know you can do everything from simple text files to pictures, graphics, audio, video, slide shows, PowerPoint presentations and more.

Section II -- Introducing Computer Conferencing

You've probably heard some talk about online learning or e-learning. Its a new educational form that's really begun to come into its own in the last five years. If we go back before the Internet, there were "correspondence courses" for a long time. And, in fact, if you go back just ten years or so, many people thought that online learning was just an electronic form of "correspondence courses". That's all changed.

Electronic Conferences -- which come in a wide variety of forms -- make it possible to convene groups of people on the web to think, learn, plan and act with each other. This comparatively new learning mode includes everything from live-satellite conferences to "real-time" web-based computer chats. It includes using audio and video conferencing on the Internet as well so called chat rooms where people get together to exchange ideas.

The kind of Electronic Conference we are using at GNF is asynchronous Computer Conferencing. With an asynchronous Computer Conference, a group of people agree to meet in an electronic conference environment on the Internet. They agree that they will meet over a certain number of weeks to work and learn together. Here are some key characteristics of this form:

- A key premise behind computer conferencing is that people are co-learners and that they have a lot of knowledge to share with each other. Computer conferences promote learningful exchanges among groups of people who are concerned about the same issues and topics.
- While learners in a computer conference agree to meet over a period of time, there is broad latitude in terms of when, exactly they meet. For example, a course about designing a marketing strategy may be scheduled for a four-week period. During the period, the expectation is that everyone will visit the computer conference -- the classroom on the Internet -- three times a week. Let's say we have two learners, John and Sally. John may typically check into the conference

at 2:00am on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Sally at 1:00 in the afternoon, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. They will both come to the same classroom, and work with the same learning materials, during the same period of time -- but at different particular times.

- When Sally and John come to their classroom on the Internet, what they find is easy access to all the articles, websites, multimedia presentations and other resources that will help them learn.
- They also find a discussion forum where they can share, and respond to questions. This is what we call a computer conference. The conference software GNF uses has a simple three level structure. First level is the course. Second level is topics within the course. Third level is the learners' discussions of the topic, organized chronologically based on when they were written.
- Different features of the computer conference environment make it possible for learners to go directly to work that has been posted since they last logged into the conference, to find materials in conference libraries, to search the conference for keywords in other people's entries, and to jump around within the conference environment.

We'll talk about conferencing more, later in this Workbook. For right now, to explore this form of sharing and learning a little bit, please check out the public conferences that GNF offers at <http://gnf.bigmindcatalyst.com>. Also, please look over <http://www.distancelearners.org/demo/catalystconferencing> for a more comprehensive presentation on how Catalyst Computer conferencing works.

Seminars and On-line Learning Groups will use computer conferencing as their main way to convene classes.

Section III -- Worksheets

We have developed a set of Worksheets to help you design your course. Please print out these sheets, or make ones like them. **Each sheet is very important.** You'll want to complete each one, entirely – even if you think there are some redundancies. Your words, and your references from these sheets will be used, directly, in constructing your web pages and course content.

- 1. Choose Your Subject: What do you want to teach?**
- 2. Identify Your Participants: Whom do you want to reach?**
- 3. How Will You Work With Learners? What is your topic?**
- 4. Select Your Resource Materials: What will you share?**
- 5. Identify Areas of Exploration: Starting questions**
- 6. Assignments and Field Experiences: What will help your learners understand?**
- 7. Measures for Success: How will you know what is being learned?**
- 8. Pull the Pieces Together: Consolidate and organize materials from all worksheets**

Please pay particular attention to Worksheet 8– that's where you will be consolidating all your thinking, gathering it in one place for production of your course web pages, and for the online conference for your course, if you are using one.

Worksheet 1

Choose Your Subject: What do you want to teach, and whom do you want to reach?

To begin, think through what you want to share with others and what you hope they'll learn as a result. Please use the space below each question to make notes to yourself in response to the questions. This isn't a test! These are just a series of questions to help you clarify what you hope to do. Once you figure out what to say in writing about your course, others will be able to understand what you're offering.

So, let's begin. Pay attention to the words you use here, please. We're looking for simple, clear statements from you – which will focus you as well as communicate to others.

A. What skills, processes or content you are dealing with? What things do you want to help others understand about it?

B. What's your own background and expertise in this area?

C. Do you already have a defined body of information and knowledge that you want to present? Please describe it.

D. Or do you see yourself more as a co-learner? Please describe what you most want to learn, in the company of others.

Worksheet 2

Identify Your Participants: Whom do you want to reach?

A. Who do you see as the primary participants in this course? Be as specific as you can. For example, are you trying to reach farmers in their first three years of operation, people considering a farming career, service providers interested in beginning farmer policy development, or someone else? Remember, you may have several audiences -- all kinds of farmers, new farmers and/or service providers.

B. What do you know about the learning needs and preference of these participants?

C. What do you hope learners will be able to do as a result of being in this course? What competencies do you hope they will develop?

Worksheet 3

How Will You Work With Learners? What Is Your Topic?

Given what you have said about your learning objectives, and your course content, what is your sense of the best way you can help people learn?

A. Think about yourself, your subject, and your learners. Who are you? Do you have a well-developed expertise? Or, are you in your early stages of mastery of this topic? Are you passionately interested in this topic, but without much current experience? Look back at what you wrote on the first Worksheet and think about these four methods for doing a course. **Select the approach that feels right for you:**

If you are considering a **tutorial**, **lecture** or **seminar**, please complete this and the next 3 Worksheets. We'll help you look at how to construct a course in which you are directly sharing your resources and expertise.

If you find yourself leaning towards an **online learning group**, you may want to just skim Worksheets 3,4,5, and 6 -- you probably have some thinking and resources you want to share to start the group off, but you will need less advance preparation. And then complete Worksheet 8.

Recall the overview of these four primary methods from **Section I -- Getting Started**:

1. Self-Contained Tutorial. You have a discreet body of content you want to convey. It can be summarized with text, visuals, and perhaps some audio or video files in a series of web pages. You do not need to be available for others to learn this material.

2. Lecture. You have a body of content that you wish to present over a 2-6 week period. Your "lecture" will usually be a written presentation, offered on the web. You may use graphics and audio and video files. You might even do "tele-lectures" where people listen to you on the phone. You'll have key questions and assignments, and be available to interact with learners in a limited way -- usually by e-mail.

3. Seminar. In this case, you as a teacher, have skills, processes or a body of content you wish to present, as with the lecture method, but you also want to engage the participants in group discussion of the subject matter. In addition to preparing your material, you will offer a "computer conference" to bring your group of learners together for a period of time.

4. Online Learning Group. Finally, you may have an area where you know something -- but don't consider yourself an expert. You will lead a group of co-learners, sharing your expertise and drawing theirs out in the group. Like a seminar, you will use a "computer conference" to convene the group.

If you have selected **tutorial**, **lecture** or **seminar**, let's begin to construct the course. Much of the preliminary work is the same, so you'll have a chance to switch among the three forms later, as you get clearer about what you want to do. The final determination of which of these three to use will come naturally to you -- just picture yourself in the different forms, as you come to understand them here and see which one feels most natural and appropriate for you.

B. What exactly do you want to teach/share? Please think this through from the perspective of your learners. What are the different building blocks you're working with? Please develop a topic outline of your course. What are the major topics? What are the subtopics that make up each major topic?

C. For each subtopic, what is it you want people to learn? What are the important aspects of this subtopic that you will want to be sure to address. Make notes here.

Worksheet 4

Select Your Resource Materials: What will you share?

Since this is an online course, your resource materials are especially important. By resource materials we mean:

- things you've written;
- other articles and books you think are useful for understanding the topics and subtopics
- links to websites with helpful materials
- presentations done with PowerPoint, or audio or video to broadcast on the Internet
- pictures and graphics

Go back and look at what you wrote for course content. Now, with your topics and subtopics in mind, think through how you will present information.

- If you are doing a tutorial, you'll need resource materials to cover each point.
- If you are doing a lecture, you will craft a series of presentations you can deliver on the web -- what we're calling a lecture. And, you will augment those lectures with additional resource materials.
- If you are doing a seminar, your resource materials will help people go deeper into the subject to assist them in the discussion.

Select and arrange your resource materials in the sequence you see the course using. Please list them all here, give the name of the resource material, the media or format it is in right now and a brief description of the resource, including length. Expand this chart as needed:

Topic/Subtopic	Name of Resource	Media/format	Brief Description

Worksheet 5

Identify Areas of Exploration: Starting Questions

One of the ways you will guide your learners by defining the questions which will unlock this topic. Again, looking at each of your subtopics, what are the questions you could ask your learners to guide their exploration of the resource materials?

Questions: What are key questions that will guide them through the material and help them understand the topic better? Write those out here and expand the chart as needed.

Topic/Subtopic	Key Questions

Worksheet 6

Assignments and Field Experiences: What will help your learners understand?

Assignments: Are there assignments that might help participants in your course learn? A short paper they might write? A research project they might undertake?

Topic/Subtopic	Assignment

Experiences: Are there "field experiences" that will help them learn? Experiments you might want them to do? Things you want them to observe? For any of the subtopics, is there a possible experiential component of the learning? Please describe the experiences here.

Topic/Subtopic	Experiences

Worksheet 7

Measures for Success: How will you know what is being learned?

Please begin to think through how you might assess how well learners are understanding what you are presenting. Once again, we would ask you to look at each subtopic, and to list in the chart below a key question you could ask which would assess whether or not learners "got the essence" of what you were presenting -- in other words, did they learn something?

Topic/Subtopic	Important Key Question

Worksheet 8

Pull the Pieces Together:

Consolidate and organize materials from all Worksheets

Please look over Worksheets 3,4,5,6 and 7. Even if you don't think of yourself an expert holding a seminar, the fact that you are interested in hosting an online learning group means you've given your topic area some serious consideration. You've been thinking about it, you've read various books and articles, and, undoubtedly, there are a number of questions that have been stirring in your mind.

Material from this Worksheet will be used by you, and any helpers, to construct a suite of web pages supporting your course.

Please read Section V of this Workbook for an overview of construction of these web pages before completing this Worksheet.

Home Page

A. Welcome Message. How would you like to welcome people into this course? Why are you offering it?

B. Key Question. Please give clear statement of the key question(s) you will examine in this course.

C. Purpose. What do you hope this course will achieve? What purpose do you hope will be served by calling the group together?

D. Learners. Who is this course intended for?

E. Instructor. Please say a little about yourself and your background.

Resources Section

Please review the resources you listed in Worksheet 4, and build this section from that Worksheet. If you did your work on the computer, you can simply copy and paste entries from that Worksheet here.

A. Documents. Please list the documents (books, articles, magazines, etc.) you want people to read for this course. Note whether they are for the course as a whole, or for a particular subtopic. Please note where the documents can be found. Make some priorities here – the top five documents for the topic overall and/or the most important one or two documents for each subtopic. Be sure to write two or three sentences summarizing each document.

B. **Links.** Likewise, please list and describe each link to a website or other online resource you want people to explore. As with the documents, note whether they are for the course as a whole, or for a particular subtopic. Make some priorities here – the top five links for the topic overall and/or the most important one or two links for each subtopic. Be sure to write two or three sentences summarizing each link.

C. **Media Files.** You may want to include a limited number of media files in your web resources. Please describe them, with the same summaries and detail as you used for links and documents.

Course Section

You will be creating a main course page, and then separate files or pages for each subtopic in the course.

A. **Summary.** Begin with a summary of the course content and learning objectives. This will be like what you included on the **Home Page** -- but perhaps said in a slightly different way.

B. **Mechanics.** Describe the mechanics of the course -- when does it begin and end, how many participants will you expect in the course.

C. **How Are You Available.** Tell how learners will interact with you (e-mail, phone, postal mail, online conference, not-at-all, etc.).

D. **Subtopics.** Briefly introduce the subtopics of the course.

E. **Measuring Success.** Tell participants how to measure their success in learning the content, from the work you did on Worksheet 6.

F. ***SUBTOPIC PAGES.*** Now, we're into the core content. On a separate page for each subtopic area:

- present the core content for each subtopic, using text, graphics and any embedded media
- give key questions for learners from Worksheet 5.
- give any course assignments for the subtopic from Worksheet 6
- offer different field experiences, also from Worksheet 6.

Section IV -- Thinking About Technology (Yours and Theirs)

Okay, we're almost ready to begin to pull all this work together.

Computer Needs

Our recommendation is that teachers and learners have the following minimum hardware configuration. At 2002 prices, such a system will cost between \$800 - \$1,000. If you're not sure, consult with someone more familiar with computers than you, or your local computer store or a computer technician to see if your computer meets these recommendations:

- 800 MHz Pentium Processor III (PC based system) or G3 or G4 350MHZ (Mac based system)
- 96 MB Ram (preferably 128 MB Ram)
- 10 GB Hard Drive
- 8 MB Video Ram
- CD ROM Drive
- 56k modem or DSL or Cable Modem
- 15" SVGA monitor
- 3.5" 1.44MB Floppy Drive.
- Standard ink jet or bubble jet printer or laser printer

We also recommend the following minimum software:

- Windows 98 SE, 2000 or XP operating system (PC) or OS9 or higher (Mac based system)
- Microsoft Office 97 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint) or Office '98 (Mac based system)
- Anti-Virus software; Norton, McAfee, etc. (Latest update)
- Latest version of Netscape or Internet Explorer browser software
- Adobe Reader 5.0

All teachers and learners need an account with a local Internet Service Provider (ISP), and an individual e-mail address. These services are very competitive, and most service providers include e-mail with their Internet access. DSL or Cable Modem broadband Internet access is faster and makes work online easier.

As a teacher, you should remember that not all of your learners will have this level of equipment. You'll want to be sensitive and not create resource materials that require high-speed computers and high-speed connections as the norm.

Section V -- Putting Your Resources Together.

Where are We?

Let's pause here for a minute. If you're at this point in the Workbook, you have:

- Clarified the subject you want to help others learn about, and thought through what you have to offer.
- Figured out if you want to lead an online learning group, or if you have content you want to present through a tutorial, lecture or seminar.
- Thought through the topics and subtopics you want to cover for a tutorial, lecture or seminar.
- Determined what resource materials you want to use in your class.

If you are going to be conducting an online learning group, you should review this section as a reference. Your next work will be in Workbook Section VI.

Now, we're ready to pull all these pieces together. How do we proceed?

Next Steps

The next steps involve putting your course on the web. Your course will be offered via the Internet. It will use web pages to present material and some combination of e-mail, computer conferencing and perhaps some other media for interaction between you and your learners.

1. If you have not done so already, please visit <http://www.northeastnewfarmers.org/online> to contact GNF and let us know about your thinking so far. We'll respond to you via e-mail or phone and discuss your ideas and plans for an online course.
2. You will have course content you wish to place on the web: resource materials, tutorials, directories to your favorite links. The first part of this handbook helped you get clear about what those materials are. A key next step is constructing your web pages. We'll turn to that step shortly.
3. You'll need to decide how you want to be in touch with your learners. That might be: not at all, by e-mail, by phone, by postal mail, or in a computer conference. We'll soon turn to helping you make that decision and set it up.
4. Once these steps are completed, you'll need to get the course offering scheduled with GNF, and work with us on marketing the course.

Constructing Your Web Pages

You will be constructing web pages to deliver your course.

If you are already experienced in constructing web pages, this section of the Workbook will serve as a review of what we think is important.

If you're new to web page construction, this Workbook will give you pointers and resources for learning how to make web pages. Your work will be easier if you get some technical help with this stage of designing your course. **The good news is that help is close at hand!**

- Many high school students and community and junior college students have experience in putting together web pages. You might contact a student directly. You can call a local high school or community college and ask for the instructor who teaches students how to create web pages. Tell that teacher what you're doing and see if s/he has a student who might be willing to assist you.
- If you have a young adult at home, you may want to begin by asking them if they can help. You might think of families you know with young adults who might have these skills.
- Check with your organization to see whether a colleague, webmaster or department can assist you.
- Contact GNF to see if you are eligible for project-sponsored technical assistance.

Here are some basics about web page construction, to help you *and* your helper!

Writing in HTML

HTML -- HyperText Markup Language -- is the basic language of the web. You will need to either learn to write HTML "code" or use software that does -- or, most likely, some combination of both. This is a bit like learning another language -- but it is a pretty simple language.

Here are the steps we would recommend:

1. Learn What HTML Looks Like. You can find a simple overview of HTML codes at <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/iacenter/htmlhelper.shtml>. If you are more adventuresome, go to the library and check out a book like "HTML For Dummies," You may want to learn to write simple HTML commands (for example <p> introduces a space between paragraphs). But, mostly, you want to understand a little of what it looks like so it won't be quite so confusing.

2. Experiment With Software For Creating Webpages. We've found that Dreamweaver and Homesite from Macromedia are about the best. You can download trial versions from the Macromedia website (<http://www.macromedia.com>).

Netscape, as part of its free suite of software available at <http://home.netscape.com/download/> has a decent composer that's free.

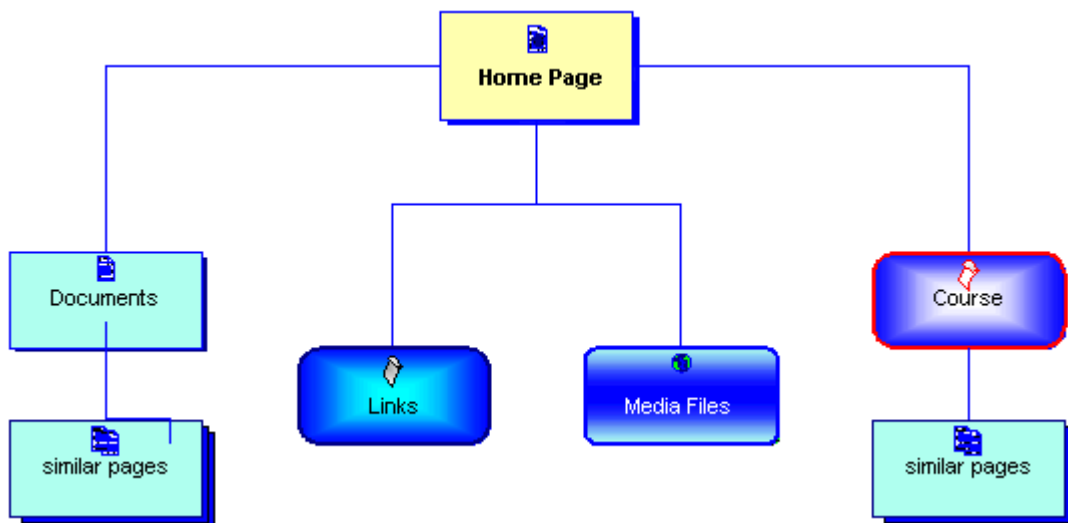
You can download a variety of "Web Development Tools" or "Web Authoring Tools" from the web and try them out for free. Two good download sites are <http://cws.internet.com/index.html> and <http://www.zdnet.com/downloads/>.

3. Eventually, buy the software you will use. Copies of various web authoring software can often be purchased for considerably below market price at discount houses like <http://www.accessmicro.com> or <http://www.buy.com> or <http://www.computers4sure.com>. You can also frequently get great buys on software from <http://www.ebay.com>.

Either become comfortable writing in HTML code, or find some software you like, or find someone to work with and proceed to the next step.

Imagine Your Overall Set of Pages

Imagine that you are going to create a set of web pages that has some, or all, of the following components:



Your **Home Page** is where you will set the context for your course and provide links to the various resource material you will offer. You will:

- welcome learners
- introduce yourself
- describe the purpose of the course
- announce what you hope participants will learn
- summarize the other sections and pages on the site.

Documents are the pages you will upload that contain various text reference materials you would like to share with others.

Links will be a listing of the websites you have found that you think are useful in explaining your subject matter.

If you have **Media Files** – real audio or real video, PowerPoint presentations, more complicated flash presentations – you'll want to upload them and have them linked from your home page.

Course Pages are the set of pages where you give your full syllabus and offer your tutorial or your lecture.

File Names and File Folders (Directories)

When you create your home page and files for documents, links, media and course pages, you will be storing them on your own computer. It will make things easier later on if you store these files in folders or directories with certain names and structure, as listed below. This will make them easier to upload to the Internet

Please create a file folder called "***coursename***," where "***coursename***" is the name of your course. File folders are also called directories. In the "***coursename***" directory, you will create a series of subdirectories including: ***documents, media, course, images***.

- You will title your home page *index.htm* and place it in the ***coursename*** directory.
- You will give each of your document or article files a simple name -- six letters and/or numbers, no spaces -- using lower case letters. You will store all of your document or articles files in the ***documents*** subdirectory.
- You will place all images you will be using in the ***images*** subdirectory, and media presentations in the ***media*** subdirectory. And any lectures or tutorials in the ***course*** subdirectory.

Case matters! A subdirectory named *Images* will often not be found if you are searching for *images*. A file called **Tree.htm** will not always be found if one is looking for **tree.htm**. An easy way to remember this is to make all directory, subdirectory and file names on your computer in lower case letters.

Now, let's move on and create each of these sets of pages.

Start Home Page

Your home page can be as simple, or as elegant as you want to make it! Here are a couple of samples from courses already designed:

Describe and Link to One Course Home Page Already Created

Describe and Link to Another Course Home Page Already Created

Basically, what you are going to do on your home page is describe what resources are available. One simple way of doing this is to log on to the Internet and save this form: <http://www.newstories.org/courses/courseform.htm>.

Begin to fill out this form. Return to the work you did earlier in **Section III Worksheets - 1. Choosing Your Subject: What You Want to Teach?** On this **Home Page**, you should:

- describe the course and what you will help others learn
- tell who the course has been designed for and why you think it is important
- introduce yourself

- summarize the materials available in this set of web pages

You won't be able to complete this **Home Page** until all your files are named, but you can at least get a start now, and think things through.

Hopefully, you'll just use the *courseform.htm* as a starting point. Perhaps you'll add some images to this to make it more appealing.

(And remember, any images you use should be actually stored in the *images* subdirectory. Your Web Authoring Software will help you "insert" the image files into your home page.)

Documents

Return to the work you did earlier in the **Section III Worksheet 8 -- Pull the Pieces Together: Consolidate and Organize Materials from all Worksheets**

You'll be using all that content now. It is time to make your final decisions about what you will actually include in the course.

You will need to either convert the documents and articles you want to use HTML, or convert them to a "PDF" or Adobe Acrobat file -- or a combination. Generally speaking, unless you have a medium skill level in creating HTML files, PDF is easier -- and GNF can easily assist you.

Converting documents to HTML is something you can do yourself. It is somewhat labor intensive. Once you've done it, you have a file that anyone with a web browser can read. If the document has images, these must be uploaded to the website, in the same directory, for them to appear when the file is displayed. Copy and paste the text into your Web Authoring Software. You can usually do this from either the "edit" or "insert" menu. All, or most of the formatting from the document file will be lost when you cut and paste and you will need to go through and hand-edit the formatting back into the document. It is also the case that word processing software like WORD and WordPerfect give you the option to save files as web pages. This works -- but is sometimes sloppy because of the extra coding the word processing programs put into the file.

Alternatively, GNF will be able to take document files and convert them into PDF files for you. Visit <http://www.northeastnewfarmers.org/online> for information on how to submit files to GNF for conversion. Converting documents to a "PDF" or Adobe Acrobat file requires software that most people don't own -- but GNF does. With the software, the conversion is easy -- and images are automatically included. However, people need to have a PDF "reader," which can be downloaded free from Adobe, to read a PDF file.

Save each completed document file in your document subdirectory. Give it a short filename, with letters and numbers only. Note the file name on a list. You'll be inserting the file name in your Home Page when you complete it.

If you have a number of documents, you will want to create a Table of Contents page which simply lists, and briefly summarizes each document. If you have only a few documents, you can do this on the *Home Page*.

Each article should end with a link back to the *Home Page*, as well the Table of Contents page, if you made one.

Links

Go to **Section III Worksheet 8 -- Pull the Pieces Together: Consolidate and Organize Materials from all Worksheets** to gather this list of links. Identify all the websites you want your home page to refer to. Typically, it is best to write a short paragraph about each site, explaining what you think is important or useful about the site and what you want to direct your learners attention to as part of the course.

If your final list of links is short, you should just include it directly on the *Home Page*.

If you have a long list -- say more than six sites, it makes most sense to create this as a separate HTML page, which you will link to from the Home Page. You'll want to have a link at the bottom of this page that takes the learner back to the *Home Page*

Media Files

Your Worksheet may also have some media files -- such as a PowerPoint Presentation you have created, some audio or video clips, or some other resources -- you want to include on your course website.

Place those files in the *media* subdirectory.

Just as you have done with documents and links, write a short paragraph describing each.

And, as you have done before, if you have a number of media files, describe them on a separate HTML page. If you have a few, just list them on your *Home Page*.

Course

You will prepare a set of course pages for a **tutorial**, a **lecture** or a **seminar**. There will be common elements, regardless of the method -- as well as elements which vary slightly for each method.

Common Elements

You will create a main course page, and then separate files or pages for each sub-topic in the course.

The *main course page* should:

- begin with a summary of the course content and learning objectives. This will be like what you included on the **Home Page** -- but perhaps said in a slightly different way.
- describe the mechanics of the course -- when does it begin and end.
- tell how learners will interact with you (e-mail, phone, postal mail, online conference, not-at-all, etc.).
- briefly introduce the subtopics of the course and lead people to those specific pages.
- tell participants how to measure their success in learning the content, from the work you did on Worksheet 6.

You will use text, graphics and any embedded media, on this main course page. You'll want to have a link at the bottom of this page that takes the learner back to the *Home Page*.

The *subtopic pages* should:

- present the core content for each subtopic, using text, graphics and any embedded media
- give key questions for learners from Worksheet 5.
- offer different field experiences, also from Worksheet 5.
- give any course assignments for the subtopic from Worksheet 6
- At the end of each *subtopic page*, you'll want to have a link that takes the learner back to the *main course page*, as well as a link that takes them to the next *subtopic page*.

Tutorial Elements

If you are doing a tutorial, you will want to make sure that your materials are organized to be self-contained and self-paced and require little "real-time" intervention from you, or anyone else.

If you make assignments in the tutorial, and if you are willing to review the assignments, be sure to say so and tell people how to submit them to you. If you are not reviewing any assignments, you should communicate the purpose of the assignment clearly when you introduce it.

Your success measures in the tutorial should be largely self-contained. In other words, if you do some sort of "test" to help a learner see if they understood what you presented, be sure to have an answer key they can refer to on the site.

Lecture Elements

If you are doing a lecture, you will need to:

- specify the beginning date and ending date for the course.
- provide, outside of your webpages, your learners with a list of names and e-mail addresses of the other participants.
- describe the provisions you are making for learners to be in contact with you, and with each other.

Seminar Elements

If you are doing a seminar, you will need to include information on how learners access the online conference in Catalyst. You will probably handle all other issues and considerations inside the Catalyst conference environment.

Finish Home Page

Now, you have all the pieces in hand.

Go back to the home page you started (perhaps <http://www.newstories.org/courses/courseform.htm>) and fill in the blanks.

You'll make a "hot link" to each of the resources you reference. Software like Dreamweaver will let you search in your computer to find the file, and then to insert the filename as a hotlink from your *Home Page*. This is the easiest way to do it since you will be using the same directory and subdirectory structure online that you have on your desktop computer.

Each time you give a link to a resource, give a short (2 or 3 sentences) description of the resource.

Remember, name your *Home Page* as *index.htm* and save it in your *coursename* directory.

Spell Check and Preview

Now, last steps!

You'll want to do a final check of spelling, grammar, wording and flow for everything you've put together. Does it represent you well? Is it what you want to say? Does it communicate?

If you can, have someone else proofread for you as well! Also, if you have a friend or colleague who is interested in this material, have her or him read through everything as well. Does it seem to work?

When you have all the material in the shape you want to present, the last step is doing a preview run. This is something software like Dreamweaver lets you do. Open your *Home Page* in your software. On one of the menus you will find a command to "*Preview in Browser.*" Select this option.

Now, go through and check out each link on your *Home Page* as well as all the links on the pages you link to. Find any dead ends? If you do, it means you either don't have the right file name, or don't have the right directory name. Note each link that "fails;" figure out why it failed and make the corrections.

Now, you're ready to upload to the web!

Uploading Your Web Pages

There are three basic options for uploading your web pages to the Internet:

1. Place your course on the Growing New Farmers website. This is the most effective way for farmer and service provider learners to find your course. Check for directions at <http://www.northeastnewfarmers.org/online>.
2. You may have access to **personal web space** as part of your own personal e-mail account. A number of "ISPs" (Internet Service Providers) provide this service. If you don't know whether or not you have this available to you, check with your ISP. While

you're at it, get the web address for your personal web space, your userid and password (if different than your e-mail account) and any special directions for uploading files.

You'll need FTP (File Transfer Protocol) software on your computer. One favorite is CuteFTP, available from <http://www.cuteftp.com>. You can also check out other FTP software at <http://cws.internet.com/index.html> and <http://www.zdnet.com/downloads/>. Most of this software is available for free trial use.

Let's say that your personal web space is located at <http://www.yourdomain.com/yourname>. In order to upload your web pages you will:

- create a new directory, let's call it ***coursename***. So, the full address for your course will be <http://www.yourdomain.com/yourname/coursename>.
- you will upload your ***Home Page (index.htm)*** into the ***coursename*** directory.
- next, you will create a set of subdirectories such as: ***documents, media, course, images***.
- you will then upload the files from these same subdirectories on your desktop computer to the web to these same directory names on the web.

Remember, case matters. Make all your directory and file names in lower case.

Once your directories are created, upload your files into the appropriate directories.

3. Your home institution or organization may have webspace on which you can store this course. In that case, simply contact your web administrator. Review the information, above, in terms of directories and work out a plan with him or her for loading your files.

Section VI -- Offering Your Course.

You are now in the final stretch!

If you are offering your course as a **tutorial**, you simply need to work out any final details with GNF about when the tutorial will be offered and hand things over to us. GNF will provide you with copies of any learner responses to "Measures of Success" you built into the tutorial.

If you are offering your course as a **lecture**, your next step is working out timing details with GNF and standing by to communicate with GNF and your class via e-mail, phone, or postal mail.

If you are offering your course as a **seminar** or **online learning group**, your final steps will be to work with GNF to customize a computer conference in Catalyst. We will cover this next.

What Is A Computer Conference?

A computer conference allows you, as an instructor or as a facilitator, to convene a group of learners in an electronic classroom on the Internet. You, as well as the learners, log in to the conference using their normal web-browser (no special software is required.) You'll enter a "virtual classroom" at anytime convenient for your schedule.

In that virtual classroom, you will have a set of "conference topics" which will represent the topics and subtopics for your seminar, or the discussion topics for your online learning group. You and your learners will use these topics to carry on an organized discussion, addressing your course materials, or exploring the themes of interest to the online learning group.

Computer conferences are an excellent way for groups of people to learn together!

Growing New Farmers uses Catalyst Conferencing, developed by [Big Mind Media](http://www.bigmindmedia.com) (<http://www.bigmindmedia.com>), and works with [New Stories](http://www.newstories.org) (<http://www.newstories.org>) to help us use Catalyst Conferencing with farmers and service providers.

Familiarize Yourself With Catalyst

Please begin by visiting <http://www.distancelearners.org/demo/catalystconferencing> for a demonstration of how Catalyst works.

Ask GNF to Set Up an Online Conference For You

Follow the instructions at <http://www.northeastnewfarmers.org/online> to ask GNF to go ahead and set up a conference for you to use for offering your course. (

Customize Your Online Conference

You'll want to think through your **opening** to the conference, as well as the **initial topics** you will use to begin.

Opening

For an opening, consider a short message -- two or three paragraphs -- and perhaps a picture or graphic which will welcome people into the space. You want to set an inviting, welcoming tone which will help people feel at home in this new space. This message should be consistent with what you've said on your Course Home Page -- but should be in a tone that invites people into conversation with each other in this course.

Initial Topics

Typically you'll want to begin with some standard topics. Good ones are:

- 1. Check In Here.** Create an opening item where you ask people to check in and let each other know they have arrived in the space. Use this item for people to notify others of when they will be off-line for a while, as well as to share information about what might be going on in their personal lives.
- 2. Course Instructions and Norms.** This topic should be a combination of Course Instructions and links to the set of web resources you have created. Also use this topic for responding to any questions about the course.
- 3. Cafe.** It's nice to have an informal gathering spot, a place for general conversation about the subject.
- 4. Online Learning Group.** If you are conducting an online learning group, you may want to simply stop with these first three items, and see what begins to emerge in the conversation in the cafe. As conversation around any particular topic begins to get lively, then set up a new topic in Catalyst for that discussion. Or, you may have a starter discussion question you wish to pose to the group. Go ahead and pose that question as the fourth topic of the conference.

4. Seminar Topics. If you are conducting a seminar use subsequent topics for the different subjects to be covered in the seminar. There are many ways of organizing from this point forward. One simple way is this: In your course instructions, list the subjects to be covered in the seminar and the approximate time periods in which they will be covered. Then, as it becomes time for each subject to be brought to the group, open a new topic for that subject in the conference.

Typically, the topics in the online conference will be the same as the topics and subtopics you identified in your course home page materials.

Set Course Norms

It will be important for you to set "norms" for your course. You should include these norms as part of your course instructions. Areas in which "norms" should be set, and examples of how you might set them include:

- **We're All Here Together.** *When you come into this space, think of it as coming into a room where we are all present. Look around the room and "see the faces" of the others. Think of sitting around a table, or around a circle as we have our discussions.*
- **Participation.** *In order to move our work along here, it is important that everyone "show-up" at least twice a week.*
- **Reading and Writing.** *We need everyone's participation here. Please plan on contributing to each topic as well as reading what others have said.*
- **Ask Questions.** *When someone writes something you don't understand, or that you think you disagree with, ask questions about it. Sometimes, with this sort of written communication online, misunderstandings develop.*
- **Practice Courtesy.** *Most of us don't know one another. Give others the benefit of the doubt. Remember, we're all trying to learn together. Call each other to our highest and best selves!*
- **Limit Length of Posts.** *If you have something really long to share, please write it off-line, and save it as a document. Use the Catalyst insert command to insert a link to the document, and give just a bit of contexting. That way, the rest of us can easily print it off to study it more closely.*

Lead the Course

If yours is an online learning group, you're the facilitator. If you're doing a seminar, you're both the facilitator and either the resident expert, or one of the experts present.

In either case, your job is to attend to the learning of the group. Ask questions. Draw people out. Clarify -- or give your clarification -- of points being raised and discussed. The more you can attend to the class as a whole, and each person in the class, the more you'll make them feel invited in and eager to engage in learning.

Use E-mail!

Most people you're working with aren't used to being in online conferences. You may not be that used to it yourself!

Remember to use e-mail as a way to encourage participation and dialogue. Do this in two ways:

1. On a regular basis -- perhaps once a week -- send an e-mail out to all of the participants in the course. Highlight things you've thought about during the week and give a preview for the coming week.
2. Communicate individually with anyone when you feel a need to take things "off line." Be a bit of a coach and a mentor to them. Give them encouragement around points they are trying to make -- but not quite getting there. Ask them to stop any disruptive behavior. Ask them to take on a special role you see needed in the class.

Just remember, the computer conference is one critical way of communicating -- but not the only way!

You're Ready To GO!

Congratulations! You've created a course to support new farmers.

You're ready to work out the final details with the staff at Growing New Farmers. Contact them at GNF@smallfarm.org.

Congratulations!

Workbook by

New Stories
<http://www.newstories.org>

Appendix -- Useful Links

Accredited High School Instruction on the Internet -- <http://www.internationalhigh.org/>

Collection of Distance Learning Links -- <http://www.collegiate.net/infoa9.html>

Distance Learning On-line Resources -- <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/bradshaw/distance.htm>

Distance Learning on the World Wide Web --
<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/ctptg/ctptg.html>

Distance Learning Resources Library -- <http://www.wested.org/tie/dlrn.html>

Distance Learning Resource Network -- <http://www.dlrn.org/>

Engineering Outreach at University of Idaho -- <http://www.uidaho.edu/evo/distglan.html>

Graduate Degree in Community and Economic Development at Pennsylvania State University -- <http://cedev.aers.psu.edu/>

Issues in Distance Learning -- <http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~lsherry/pubs/issues.html>

Pennsylvania State University Internet Directory of Distance Learning Activities --
<http://www.dle.state.pa.us/>

Pennsylvania State University's World Campus --
<http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/pub/index.shtml>

Purdue -- Reference Materials -- <http://www.agcom.purdue.edu/AgCom/Pubs/menu.htm>

Resources for Distance Learning --
<http://webster.comnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/distance.htm>

UC Berkley Online Courses -- <http://learn.berkeley.edu/newopps/46home.html>

Using the Internet to Teach Economics -- <http://ecedweb.unomaha.edu/teachsug.htm>

Virtual University for Small Business --
http://www.vusme.org/VU3/EN/HomeDefault_XX.asp

Web-based Learning Resources Library -- <http://www.outreach.utk.edu/weblearning/>

What is Distance Education and Distance Learning? --
<http://www.hoyle.com/distance/define.htm>