

# The Role of Presence in Online Courses

Constructing presence in the online learning environment is very important to establishing a successful online community of learners. To design an online course with a sense of “being there” and “being together”, presence should be viewed from the following perspectives: social, psychological, and emotional:

- **Social perspective** - Social presence pertains to how instructors and learners see each other as “real people” in the online environment. Social presence is important to online learners as it combats feelings of isolation and gives learners a feeling of community.
- **Psychological perspective** - Presence is a psychological state in which the technology seems to disappear and learners feel a sense of “being together” as opposed to separated by time and location.
- **Emotional perspective** - Emotional presence is the ability to show feelings in the online environment. This type of presence is achieved when learners and instructors are able to emotionally connect throughout the learning experience.

Establishing presence is important for the following three areas: the online environment, online interactions, and the online learning community.

## The Online Environment

Presence is naturally created in the face-to-face classroom, but instructors must make an effort to design online courses with the concept of presence in mind. Learners need to perceive something tangible, which may include the type of technology used for the course, the instructional strategies chosen by the instructor, and the role of the instructor.

## Online Interactions

Online interactions and emotional connections are increasing with technological advances such as social networking tools. In order to foster presence in the online learning environment, instructors need to be aware of emerging technologies, as well as the evolving role of instructors as guides and the movement of learners to the centre of the learning experience.

## The Online Learning Community

The Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2003) recognizes three elements that are essential for a successful online learning experience: cognitive, social, and teaching presence.

- **Cognitive presence** relates to thinking and involves the ability of learners to construct meaning through reflection and communication in the online environment.
- **Social presence** involves personal and emotional connection to the group and the ability of learners to project themselves as “real people”.
- **Instructor presence** represents the course facilitator, who directs cognitive and social processes, and provides regular and constructive feedback to online learners.

*This guide provides information condensed from chapter one, “The Role of Presence in the Online Environment”, in the book, **Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching: How to “Be There” for Distance Learners**, by Rosemary M. Lehman and Simone C. O. Conceicao (2010).*