1. Online courses are easy to forget and can build up fast, so it is good to design it so it gets the students attention regularly—like weekly Discussion sections on Blackboard, and periodic announcements.

2. Design multiple formats for display and assessment of knowledge. For example, multiple choice weekly quizzes, discussion comments, project reports represent three formats.

3. Use screencast-o-matic to capture your screen as in a movie while adding voice-over narrative. This means you can go through your PowerPoint or narrate your syllabus. You can pause it while you go to a website that you want to insert or for whatever else you want to put on your screen. You can get it for free. I went all out and paid the $15 for the pro version. Students don’t need it to see the MP4s (Screencast-o-matic lets you save in a variety of formats) http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/

4. Multiple formats of the same or similar information. For each academic content area I had an online text chapter, copy of notes, copy of my PowerPoint, and a narrated version of my PowerPoint (via screencast-o-matic). Students have preferences for different formats and some need multiple formats to help them process information.

5. Don’t assume all students know how to take an online course.

6. Check the storage space for your course. I was a quarter of the way through making my Screencast-o-matic MP-4 video presentations when I filled up the storage space on Blackboard. It was not on my radar that this would ever be a problem because I had not needed much online storage in my decades of teaching. Fortunately I had requested storage space on a university server or some such storage thing (note to self: find out more about what that is and where it is).

7. Post documents as PDFs so they take less storage space and so they require have some integrity as documents because they require a conscious effort for anyone to edit them and pass them along. A PowerPoint can be made into black & white, two slides per page in a pdf version, which saves the student who might otherwise get trapped printing out 180 full-page color slides for a fortune in ink, paper, and time. They will thank you. Let them know the size of documents in more than just megabytes.

8. Put a disclaimer in that the material is only for use by students in the class for purposes of the class. Not that I have much intellectual property but it sets a good example and it respects material “borrowed” from others.

9. Figure out how to use Blackboard Assignment for submittal because it sets up the Grading columns. Be sure to specify acceptable submittal formats—Word, Excel. I had a student that kept submitting stuff I could not open because she was not checking back to see that it was not getting graded and the system had an email that she did not use.

10. Have students put an introduction of themselves with a picture. I know we can use “My USM” to see what they look like, but this demonstrates they can use the Discussion on Blackboard and can attach a document. Also, it helps build the online community.

11. Find people who can help you. I was fortunate in having the guy at the helpdesk (Shane O’Hara) and my more experienced department colleagues (shout-out to Daniel, Joe and Travis).
12. When you set up new things on Blackboard briefly disable the edit feature in Blackboard so you can see what the student sees. I did not think to do this till the course was near done. Probably because I was fearful.

13. Specify the rules for everything like how many times an assignment can be submitted, deadlines, etc. Post examples too. Check frequently and get a student to tell you how things are working because some rules and procedures need to be changed.

14. Cast around for suitable low-cost, reliable, accessible information and materials. We got to be learning about different, new formats. I did not know enough to even ask about this and I was fortunate to be told about screencast-o-matic (I did not want to have a video of me a la Camtasia because it was too distracting—the sound of my voice is bad enough).

15. Plan ahead. An online course requires you to think out likely (and even some unlikely) scenarios ahead of time. It takes about two or three times as much work up front to develop an online course and it takes at least as much time, maybe a lot more time in fact, to deliver it.

16. Invite formative feedback and be willing to modify the course vehicles within the scope of your objectives (which should be clearly identified and narrated in the syllabus).