When you meet someone for the first time you use your senses to help you understand who this person is. Consciously or unconsciously, the newcomer’s tone, manner of speaking, and dress help to form your initial impressions. These impressions guide you in determining how to interact with the person and helps you to feel comfortable in your surroundings. This aspect of human nature holds true in a classroom as in everyday life.

In an online classroom, however, the natural ways that we use our senses to feel comfortable in our surroundings changes. There’s less stimuli available to orient us. For example, who hasn’t sent an email for which the recipient misunderstood your intention? Without the benefit of hearing your intonation or reading your body language, the recipient uses all he had available—knowledge of you and the text before him—to interpret your communication.

Even though a class may be online, student->instructor engagement and discourse is at least as important and perhaps more important than in a face-to-face class. Because of the inherent differences in available stimuli, however, an online instructor must consciously plan how to establish her presence in an online course.

Before delving into course development, spend a little time thinking about how you want your students to perceive you. Professional or personal—or both? Do you want to encourage independence or encourage communication with you if they have issues or questions? Do you want to establish relationship with each student, or prefer to stand back? Take time to jot down 3 or 4 keywords that express the presence you wish to have.

Include a short video introduction in your first module or in the Bb Start Here. This will allow students to connect with you and put a face to the voice they may be hearing in online lectures.

Next Stop: Visit the Establishing Faculty Presence page in the Starting to Teach Online section of Lindner College Online.

(Today is a faculty-only page and will require your credentials to access. If you are not taken to the correct page after logging in, click the above link a second time.)