Chapter 15 describes issues related to orientation to MUVE learning in general and, by way of an exemplar, to Second Life® orientation in particular. This chapter supports orientation to Second Life® but could be used as a guideline for an orientation to any other MUVE, as basic functions are similar and similar issues need to be addressed. This chapter will include a Student Second Life® Orientation Checklist, elements included in the Instructor Orientation Checklist, and discussion of special issues such as privacy and griefing.

This chapter is for you if:

1. You are interested in reviewing an existing instructor or student orientation in preparation for teaching a MUVE learning activity.
2. You are interested in developing your own instructor or student orientation materials in preparation for MUVE teaching.
3. You are planning to use a MUVE other than Second Life® and are interested in exploring key elements of orientation of students and instructors to MUVE learning.

Second Life® Orientation: In Class, on Paper, and in the Syllabus

This chapter will review important issues and elements for orientation to Second Life®. The issues discussed and skills outlined in this chapter can also be used to create an orientation to any MUVE. A MUVE learning activity can only be successful if students have an opportunity to complete an effective introduction and orientation to MUVE learning. They must be given the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to function in a MUVE prior to being assigned a learning activity. Ideally, the orientation is spiraled through the course, with key points repeated several times. Students need to be exposed to important concepts multiple times and through multiple media. For example,
the importance of using a wired Internet connection (not a wireless connection) can be emphasized when the instructor introduces MUVE learning in class, later when a specific learning activity is introduced and in both the written activity description and the course syllabus. Although MUVE activities work best when scheduled for the middle of a semester, the instructor can begin talking about MUVE learning as soon as the course is under way, so the orientation begins slowly and the class gradually becomes familiar with, and excited about, MUVE learning.

The course syllabus must contain a description of MUVE learning activities planned for the semester. Performance requirements for each MUVE learning activity can be listed in the syllabus or in attached MUVE materials. The MUVE materials for the course ought to include a written MUVE learning orientation, a detailed introduction to and instructions for every MUVE learning activity that takes place in the course, and grading matrices for each learning activity. A sample introduction to Second Life® for students is included in Appendix 26.

Detailed outlines of student and instructor orientations to Second Life® are included in Appendixes 27 and 28. It should be emphasized that simply completing the instructor orientation checklist does not mean the instructor is ready to design and implement a MUVE learning activity. Other important issues, such as those described in Chapter 13, must be considered, as the role of a MUVE learning activity instructor goes beyond specific skills. Problem solving, managing change, working with tech support issues, and other elements are all necessary for successful design and implementation of a MUVE learning activity.

A comprehensive assessment of whether a sufficient orientation can be provided for students is an absolute deal breaker when it comes to making the decision to do a MUVE learning activity. If students cannot be adequately oriented to MUVE learning, they cannot be expected to be successful in MUVE learning activities planned for them. Ideally, discussion of MUVE learning begins early in the course, so students can gradually assimilate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that they will need for MUVE learning activities later in the course. Particularly students who have obstacles to learning with new technology may require additional encouragement, redundant orientation, and face-to-face sessions with the instructor to be ready for MUVE learning.

Materials to Support Second Life® Orientation

**Student Second Life® Skills Checklist**

Students working in Second Life® must be able to download the Second Life® software, create a Second Life® account, make an avatar, and then, inworld, learn to walk, sit, teleport, use the chat room, and be able to copy a chat room
discussion into a Microsoft Word document. Additional skills such as sending a postcard may be needed for specific learning activities. One orientation goal is that students not be overwhelmed with required MUVE skills. It is very important that the technology not interfere with learning. It is important to keep required MUVE skills at a basic level.

At the beginning of orientation, the instructor tells the students how much time is allocated for Second Life® orientation. For a basic orientation and mastery of the skills listed above, two to three hours are more than sufficient. The instructor should emphasize that skills beyond those required, such as avatar appearance or clothing, are not included in the time allotted for orientation. Students should be provided with a skills checklist specific to the MUVE platform being used. The first MUVE learning activity assigned can include completion of the checklist, including a student signature to indicate confirmation of skills mastered. If a portfolio evaluation system is used for the course, a copy can be added to the course portfolio.

*Instructional Note:* It is very important that students use their real first name and a fictional second name when they create their Second Life® account. If students do not use their real first name, it can become difficult to keep track of their activity in Second Life®. This rule must be introduced early and reinforced several times. It is a good idea to identify students with the same first name and ask them to use the name you suggest. Two students named John could be JohnS and JohnB. It is very difficult for an instructor to keep track of alternative names, so some time and attention to this issue will save an instructor time and energy later on. To preserve student privacy, a student’s last name should never be used.

*The Instructor Second Life® Skills Checklist*

A comprehensive Second Life® basic skills checklist for instructors is included in Appendix 28 but should be considered only a reflection of baseline skill level, not a terminal goal. The instructor’s orientation to Second Life® is a continuous learning process of expanding and improving in skills. This is an important part of being a MUVE instructor. A student will be required to do only a few basic skills, but an instructor must be master of not only basic skills but also more advanced ones. The instructor must also be an effective resource for problem solving and be able to provide assistance for students having difficulty. Additional skills that instructors must have relate to instructional design. Instructor orientation to Second Life® teaching includes both specific skills (how to rescue a lost student) and management of processes (how to troubleshoot lag). Among the required skills for being an instructor for MUVE learning activities are the following:
Moving around the MUVE

The instructor must be a master navigator. Developing the ability to move around the MUVE easily takes some time. When an instructor is orienting students to Second Life® or leading a learning activity, students look to them as an example. If the instructor avatar moves easily around the environment and negotiates obstacles, looking comfortable and proficient, students will model this performance. If the instructor is awkward, hesitant, or having difficulty moving the avatar, student learning will be distracted and their confidence undermined. Remember, this is outside many students’ comfort zone. It is as if they have been taken to the moon to learn! The instructor’s ability to project confidence and ease will reassure them and make learning easier. Also, again, the technology must not distract from the learning! Students overly absorbed in figuring out how to sit or watching the instructor struggle to make his or her own avatar sit will have less attention and energy for learning. The technology will have undermined learning.

Locomotion skills include walking, running, and flying around complex environments. The instructor must be able to climb stairs, go up elevators, and move around trees and other objects in the environment. While you are in the MUVE, envision the kinds of problems students might have. What if a student tries to fly and get stuck in midair? How will you help him or her? As you encounter problems, think about how you would help a student in the same situation. How would you help if a student gets stuck in a tree, wall, or some other object? What if a student falls down a waterfall or cliff, or falls into a body of water? These things do happen and can significantly disrupt a learning activity. The more dexterity an instructor has in negotiating such problems, the better a learning activity’s chances for success.

The instructor should also be comfortable teleporting from one MUVE region to another and from place to place within regions. Many regions are large enough that visitors are offered means to move from one area of the region to another by teleporting. At the main landing area of the region, maps or other structures assist with teleporting to other areas of the island (“Click to teleport to the beach area,” for example).

The instructor can also practice rescuing students who get lost. The best way to do this is to send the student an invitation to teleport to the instructor’s location. See “Tools to Use” at the end of this chapter on how to do this. The instructor must be familiar with this procedure and practice it prior to the first orientation or learning activity using a second avatar in a split screen.
Communication: The Chat Box and Transcript Skills

The course instructor must be dexterous with every form of communication available in the MUVE being used. The recommended form for Second Life® learning activities is the chat function. The instructor must develop the habit of copying the chat box contents into a Word file at the end of every student activity, so that a record of each activity can be kept. If confidentiality is a concern, the Word “Find and Replace” function can be used to replace each student with a numerical identifier or other designation. For some learning activities, students benefit from being able to review discussions from other small groups. If such discussions are intended for distribution to the entire class, such redesignation of names in the transcript is recommended.

Instructional Note: It is a good idea for an instructor to copy the transcript at the end of every MUVE learning activity in which the instructor is present, even if a student has been assigned to do so. Loss of a transcript because someone forgot to copy it can be a disaster. Ensuring there is a backup copy of the transcript is good insurance. This also can reinforce the instructor habit of copying transcripts every time, as instructor loss of a transcript (for example, an exam transcript) can be equally disastrous. Once the last participant has left a chat and logged off, the dialogue from the chat box is cleared of all but a few entries. For some learning activities, it would be necessary for students to repeat the learning activity if a transcript were to be lost.

Second Life® Instant Messaging

When using Second Life®, the instant message (IM) function is important for the infrequent situations in which it is necessary or desirable to communicate with a student during a learning activity privately and directly. This could be the case in the event of inappropriate behavior, for example. Also, if a student is lost, sending him or her an IM to check in may be the only way to communicate with that person if he or she is more than thirty (inworld) feet from the group or lost in another region. Messages using the IM function do not appear in the chat box transcript and are not logged, so there is no documentation of their contents. For this reason, use of the chat as exclusively as possible is preferred.

At the start of orientation and in their first learning activity, students need to be reminded to use the chat function to communicate, not the IM function. A mix of the two for a learning activity does not work, as not all students can see IM entries. Also, the IM messaging is not included in the activity transcript.
Instant messaging can result in confusion and an incomplete activity transcript. It must be reinforced repeatedly that only the chat box is used for the learning activity.

**Controlling the Second Life® Environment**

If utilizing Second Life®, the instructor should be aware of a few issues related to specific Second Life® environments. It is important that the instructor be able to deal with issues related to regional lighting, lag, privacy issues, and environmental factors that can interfere with learning. Regional lighting and lag will be addressed in the following section. Privacy issues and environmental factors that can interfere with learning will be explored in Chapter 19.

**Regional Lighting: Changing the Time of Day to Be Conducive to Learning**

Second Life® is on a day to night cycle lasting four hours, with three hours of daylight and one of night. This means that it is possible for a user to log into Second Life® during daylight (bright light), early morning or evening (muted light), or even at night (dark with only moon and artificial light). Night lighting is not appropriate for most learning activities, so it is important to know how to adjust a region’s lighting to a time of day that best accommodates student learning.

**Tools to Use: How to Adjust Regional Lighting**

To change the time of day depicted, look at the upper left edge of the Second Life® viewer, where you will see a series of words for drop-down menus. Click on “World” and, at the bottom of the drop-down menu, select “Sun.” The menu that appears offers a selection of times of day. The selection “noontime” offers the most light and is in most cases the best for a MUVE learning. However, for a learning activity whose goals include fostering interaction and intimacy, such as a getting to know your discussion group at the beginning of a semester, evening light or sunset may create an ambiance that will support this goal.

*Instructional Note:* If participants arrive in Second Life® at night, each must change the regional lighting on his or her own Second Life® viewer. This should be addressed in the orientation for students, as the instructor simply changing the lighting on his or her own viewer will not change the settings for individual students. If an instructor is present for a learning activity and notices it is night, it is good practice to guide the students present with the steps necessary to adjust the lighting conditions.
Managing Lag

The instructor must be prepared to manage lag. Lag is defined as a delay that sometimes occurs in some MUVE processes. Lag in a MUVE can manifest as visual images that take a long time to rez, or appear, particularly when an avatar teleports and arrives at a new location. The avatar itself may not appear immediately, taking longer than usual to rez. A particularly troublesome form of lag is the delay in the appearance of clothing as an avatar rezzes! This can be disturbing to the users, as what they see first is their unclothed avatar. At no time do these avatars appear naked to others in the environment. Instead, they appear as a semiformed cloud, only a shadow of the avatar form.

Lag can also appear as a delay in movements or actions for things in the MUVE, such as slower movement of a car or boat. A delay in communication is one of the most troublesome consequences of lag. This is usually experienced as a delay between the time words are typed into the chat box and when they appear to other participants. These words won’t appear in the conversation on time, in an appropriate sequence. Rather, they pop into the conversation so late that they can seem inappropriate. A more detailed discussion on lag will take place in Chapter 19.

Creating an Avatar and Avatar Appearance Modification

A critical instructor skill for designing MUVE learning activities is the creation and use of avatars. Although students usually use only the premade avatars (unless they choose to modify their avatar’s appearance on their own time), the instructor must be expert at the creation and adaptation of avatars for use in MUVE learning activities.

The Instructor Avatar

Instructors should begin by being thoughtful about the creation of their own avatar. Inworld, instructors must be professional role models. This applies to how they behave and treat others, but also in their appearance. Instructors can intentionally present an appearance similar to what they would wear in First World to class or on campus. An instructor can alternatively present an appearance that strategically supports the goals for MUVE learning. For example, I am a professor at the University of Hawai‘i. The dress code in Hawai‘i is quite casual, and organizational relationships, both in the workplace and in the academic setting, are more relaxed than is the case in other parts of the United States. Because I did not want the informality of a digital representation of myself to potentiate this cultural informality, I designed my avatar to be formal
and businesslike in appearance. My avatar wears a black suit, a white shirt and tie, and, sometimes, a lab coat. My title, Professor Codier, floats over my head. These visual cues reinforce professional relationships, the role of instructor, and a degree of formality to offset my digital appearance.

**Use of Multiple Avatars**

Complex learning activities may require a group to interview a patient or have a discussion with a physician or social worker. To that end, a second avatar can be constructed. Naming of the avatars for use in learning activities was reviewed in Chapter 9. It is a good idea to ensure that the names are gender neutral (UHPatient, not UHPatient Mrs. Jones). This way, from week to week, the avatar’s ethnicity, age, and gender can be changed as needed. It is better for students in rounds to meet each time with a patient whose name is “Patient” rather than “Mrs. Jones” who presents with a different disease each week! It is also a good idea to begin an avatar password file so you do not forget the names of additional avatars’ logons and passwords.

**Modifying an Avatar’s Age, Gender, and Ethnicity**

Creating an avatar (a patient, for example) for use in a learning activity, whose appearance contextualizes and enriches the learning activity, is a crucial element of designing avatars for a MUVE learning activity. Intentional illustration of risk factors or high-risk groups for a particular disease can support case presentations of specific diseases. Selection of gender and ethnicity can be accomplished by changing the avatar’s body. In Second Life®, this is accomplished by clicking on the “people” icon at the top of the column of icons on the left-hand side of the Second Life® viewer. Clicking on this icon will present a selection of avatar bodies to select from. Most of the avatars are twenty to forty years of age in appearance. To create the appearance of an old or very young avatar, additional changes need to be made by modifying the avatar’s body or by having the avatar “wear” an older or younger “skin.”

**Changing the Avatar’s Body Shape**

Modification of the avatar body is a great way to make the avatar better illustrate the disease he or she is presenting to the class. In Second Life®, alterations in body shape can be made by right clicking on the avatar and selecting “Modify shape.” Using the drop-down screens that appear, parts of the body can be thickened (to make swollen ankles for a patient with congestive heart failure [CHF], for example). To make a patient appear cushingoid, you can
make his or her trunk and abdomen thick, shorten and thicken the neck, and make legs and arms long and thin. An avatar can be adapted to look emaciated, obese, and so on. This takes some trial, error, and creativity! Once the changes are made, they can be saved. By saving changes to an avatar’s body in their inventory (for example, clothes can be saved), the instructor can create a whole library of avatar appearances (a CHF patient, a patient with systemic lupus). To make an avatar look older, shrink the size of the shoulders, lengthen the neck, make the head taller and more narrow, and so forth.

Remember the goal is that the appearance of the avatar should offer visual cues that support the learning activity narrative! This takes some practice.

**Changing an Avatar’s Age**

Changing an avatar’s age is one of the important changes to make in Second Life® avatars, which nearly all appear to be in their twenties. Some “skins” (these are like masks that can be added on to an avatar body) are available that can make the avatar look older or younger. Narrowing the shoulders, thinning the hair, and elongating the neck can all make the avatar look older. For children, a “child skin” is the easiest way to portray an avatar child.

**Changing an Avatar’s Clothing**

If the clothing an avatar is wearing does not work well for the purposes of a learning activity, clothing can be added to the avatar’s inventory (the suitcase icon along the left-hand side of the Second Life® viewer). Many locations in Second Life® offer free clothing, including the orientation island where avatars are born. Newly acquired clothing can be worn immediately or saved for future use in the inventory under the heading for clothing. Some alterations in the body itself (rashes, amputations, bleeding wounds) are also possible, as are the addition of assistive devices (wheelchairs). These items can also be saved in the inventory for future use.

**Reporting Grieving**

Sadly, there are Second Life® residents who find being disruptive to others a source of entertainment. Second Life® is a public place that is not policed. Inappropriate behavior, called “grieving,” has consequences for the perpetrator if individual users take responsibility for reporting poor behavior. Instructors must be familiar with how to report grieving. Reporting grieving is not included in the basic Second Life® skills list, and in general, the instructor should take responsibility for creating the grieving report. I have found that a report from
an instructor from a learning activity that was disrupted is taken very seri-
ously, not only by the Second Life® managers but also by the owners of the
region where the griefing episode took place. Students should be taught about
griefing, and they should be asked to make a note of the time and location of
any griefing as well as the name of any avatar that disrupts a learning activity
or bothers them in any way. This can be taken directly from the learning activ-
ity transcript, which is a good record of the griefing event. Managing griefing
will be discussed in Chapter 19.

Skills for Maintaining Privacy in Public Space

The instructor must develop skills to support MUVE learning privacy in what
must be considered a public space. Methods for maintaining privacy in a public
space require constant adaptation. Such skills include identifying MUVE regions
that both provide appropriate context for the learning activity (a hospital, a class-
room, a clinic) and at the same time enforce both student patient information
privacy. This important issue will be discussed in depth in Chapter 19.

Setting Limits

It is important that instructors reinforce with students that they are responsible
for only basic MUVE skills and that they are not required to modify their
appearance, change clothes, and so on. Students may choose to do so, but this
should be considered “on their own time.” The MUVE worlds are fun, divert-
ing, and interesting, and it is easy to get a little carried away. I confess I spent the
better part of a weekend early on in my MUVE teaching trying to make my ava-
tar’s hair move as the avatar walked! It is important to set limits on the fascinat-
ing parts of the MUVE world that, while interesting and diverting, are not nec-
essary for learning activities.

Tools to Use: How to Send an Invitation to Teleport
to Your Location (Student Rescue)

Occasionally, a student gets lost, teleports incorrectly, or otherwise becomes
separated from the learning activity group. To accomplish a rescue the in-
tstructor can:

1. Using the search window in the Second Life® viewer, search for the
student’s inworld name.

2. When the name appears, the window will include an option that
states, “Offer teleport.”
3. Click on this option.

4. In the student’s viewer, an invitation to teleport to the instructor’s location will appear.

5. When the student clicks on the teleport invitation, he or she will immediately be teleported back to the instructor’s location.

Reader’s Roadmap: Where Are We?

This chapter used orientation to Second Life® as an exemplar for issues related to any MUVE orientation. The next chapters, Chapters 16 and 17, will focus on the design, planning, and implementation of a MUVE learning activity.