Seven Rules for Teaching Online

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Seven Rules for Teaching Online

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As the world is changing because of the invention of the Internet, so is the way we approach matters in our everyday lives. People now have the option to perform operations at home that they otherwise would not have been able to utilize without the creation of the Internet. One of these options is the initiation of online teaching via distance learning programs. While still somewhat controversial, distance learning is becoming a fast-growing phenomenon. However, regardless of the negative feedback the notion of distance learning has received in the past, the fact remains that this approach to teaching is becoming increasingly popular and if teachers, as well as schools, do not discover a way to adapt to the concept, they will be excluded from the future of teaching. The people who have made and will continue to make this program a success is are, of course, the teachers. The teachers play a vital role in not only the creation of the class, but also the maintenance of the course. Online teachers have a huge responsibility; the future of online teaching lies heavily on those who teach the classes today, and hence, it is important for them to know how they can make their classes successful. Teachers teaching within Internet classes do more than transmit facts; they must become facilitators of wisdom.

I have gone through the growing pains of several developing online teaching programs and have learned, over the course of a few years, to communicate effectively with students via online teaching. My first experiences were like most first experiences as far as online teaching is concerned. For instance, I was a bit disorganized and constantly attempting to adapt to a new way of teaching. Furthermore, I was entering a newly developed online teaching program at Westwood College of Technology, so there were still quite a few glitches in the system that needed to be worked out. My experience with their ever-developing program as well as my experience teaching online for other schools has taught me basic survival skills and strategies for the online teacher. There are certain things one absolutely has to do in order to ensure the success of the class and in order to ensure one’s success as a teacher.

Based on my knowledge and experience, I feel that there are seven steps or factors that any
online instructor should follow. These will help them to not only achieve success, but to also expand their knowledge as teachers.

1. **Instructors participating in online teaching must possess a wide scope of knowledge and varied and appropriate credentials.** This knowledge can include life experience as well as “book smarts,” and should be applied as often as possible to assist and help students within the class.

   It is important for instructors to utilize their resources, which often includes using their own experiences and wisdom in order to efficiently run an online class. Instructors teaching online classes must know what the “real” world is all about because many students who take online classes do so because of something they have experienced or are experiencing in the “real” world (i.e., children, moving, work environment) and other factors that may prevent them from taking a normal “ground” class. This should not be a cause for younger instructors to get nervous, for all teachers have had worldly experiences, definitely in their own college careers, that can be utilized as a communication and understanding tool when corresponding with students. I have found that my distance study students enjoy hearing about my college experiences because it helps bridge a gap and let them know that I understand what the real world is like for them (several of them call this my “been there, done that” commentary). It is thus important for the instructor to thus use his or her knowledge about the world so that the instructor can thus relate to these students and teach on their level.

   Book smarts, of course, are also important, and this is something that any educated online teacher unquestionably should possess. Students will most often look to the teacher as the end-all be-all of any question they may have, so in order to be an effective teacher, one must be sure he or she is not providing a student with false information. Hence, even though one may know a great deal about the subject matter, one may not know a great deal about the books being used in class; familiarize yourself with the books. If one knows the material in the course’s books inside and out, one will be able to gain respect from the students because it promotes the feeling that the teacher really “knows” the subject matter being taught.

2. **The instructor must be careful when exhibiting emotions and needs to remain open while showing that he or she cares.** Furthermore, the instructor needs to remain flexible to students’ issues and concerns and should always be as sincere as possible when dealing with students.

   Any person who teaches an online course must go the extra mile to make up for the missing physical presence witnessed in an online classroom. Hence, the instructor needs to pave the way for a supportive environment. As a teacher, one should perpetually respond to student questions, check on their students at least once a day, and be as prompt as possible with grades as well as queries. By maintaining constant communication with the students, the students feel that their instructor is accessible to them and is always there for them when they have a problem. This will promote increased participation as well as an overall feeling of
confidence in the students. Confidence in the students, as all teachers know, encourages higher grades. Failure to do this can alienate the class both from each other and from the instructor and would make a very weak learning environment. All teachers need to be aware of the fact that online students are very busy people, sometimes busier than the average student, and need to be treated with respect. Being sensitive, open and flexible is not an option, it is a requirement.

3. **In order to become a successful online teacher, develop your writing skills.**

Online courses require one to use written, rather than oral, communication. Hence, one needs to get comfortable with writing. This does not necessarily mean that to become an online teacher, a person must have an English degree. In actuality, teachers should spell and grammar check everything they write, as well as read over an item at least twice before sending it to a student. As a teacher, one should always, always reread the information sent to students–this cuts back on mistakes and typos and is very important. Teachers should make sure that their writing sounds clear enough so that a student could understand it and not get confused by any instruction provided.

4. **If one is going to teach online, one must feel that online teaching is equivalent to teaching on the ground.**

Any teacher who feels that “ground” teaching is better than online teaching should not become an online teacher. One must convince himself or herself that he or she feels comfortable with the online learning model. It is very important for the teacher to have confidence in online learning because if not, the lack of confidence will rub off on the students and create a stagnant learning environment. Hence, if one does not feel he or she can see online teaching as the equivalent of ground teaching, it is important to not attempt an online class, because it could devastate the students. In order to successfully do anything in life, a person must believe in the action, and this fact applies to online teaching as well.

5. **Instructors must demonstrate how critical thinking initiates learning.**

This occurs almost everyday in online learning. The use of computers generally initiates the critical thinking process and also provides students with everyday knowledge they can use because of the consistent application of the computer. The process is designed to facilitate the easy assimilation of theory into concept and application. Students are expecting to receive knowledge and abilities that are usable today. What is learned today can be taken to the work place today. This requires the ability to think critically. Hence, instructors should focus on assignments that not only integrates the computer into the everyday learning process, because students are expecting this, but also create assignments that make the student apply his or her thoughts to work place life. An example of this is an assignment I often give to my English students. As an introductory assignment, I have them write an essay about why writing skills will be important when they get into the world of work. Hence, they must think critically to compose their papers while at the same time applying their knowledge to something they feel is beneficial.
6. **Stick to teaching subjects one knows.**

This makes sense within any teaching environment, including online. If one is an English teacher, stick to teaching English, don’t decide to teach Biology. Doing this will, of course, only hurt the online learning experience because the students will pick up on the fact that their instructor does not understand the subject as well as he or she should. This can thus cause them to have negative outlooks not only within the class, thus creating a negative environment, but also about online teaching and learning in general.

7. **One should get familiar with how to teach online before attempting to do so.**

Education is always the key. In order to become a successful online teacher, read books about the subject matter. Talk to others who have had success with online teaching. Before I leave the online teachers out there, I want to suggest further reading. There are several websites out there than can help you further expand your knowledge about how to successfully teach online. One, entitled “Developing an Effective Online Course Overview” is a step-by-step analysis of how one should go about formulating and applying an online course. This site can be found at [http://www.roundworldmedia.com/cvc/](http://www.roundworldmedia.com/cvc/). Another great site is [http://www1.eduprise.com/public/resources.nsf/Category2/3a37636842e416dd8525693b004b886f?OpenDocument](http://www1.eduprise.com/public/resources.nsf/Category2/3a37636842e416dd8525693b004b886f?OpenDocument). This site actually delivers a presentation entitled “Helping Faculty Design Effective Online Courses” which discusses how one should go about teaching online. Another great article can be found at: [http://216.239.33.100/search?q=cache:lFKubwNzs14C:cw.mariancollege.edu/kschultz/Marian%2520Online/Tips%2520For%2520More%2520Effective%2520Online%2520Courses.pdf+effective+online+courses&hl=en&ie=UTF-8](http://216.239.33.100/search?q=cache:lFKubwNzs14C:cw.mariancollege.edu/kschultz/Marian%2520Online/Tips%2520For%2520More%2520Effective%2520Online%2520Courses.pdf+effective+online+courses&hl=en&ie=UTF-8). This article titled “Tips for More Effective Online Courses” also provides a great background on how to encourage students to participate in online courses. By reviewing these sites and applying the tips suggested in this article, I believe that an online teacher will be able to develop a wonderfully successful class.

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