

10 TIPS FOR NEW ONLINE INSTRUCTORS



~ Written in partnership with Diana Abath

- 1. Decide what you want.** How many courses can you realistically teach well? How many courses would you need to teach to make a livable salary? Does class size or population matter? Do you prefer teaching asynchronous or synchronous courses? Do you want to work for an academic, private, or public educational institution? Perhaps you'd prefer a combination of different institutions and course structures. Do your research!
- 2. Understand the business side.** Make sure you've read and understand the teaching contract. This is crucial as contracts are legally binding documents. Before signing, ask for clarity if you have questions.
- 3. Discuss any concerns.** It's natural to have mixed feelings about venturing into the unknown. This exciting new opportunity isn't without its challenges, especially with little or no experience teaching "online." Before your first class, talk with your administrator, a seasoned instructor, and/or a friend about any concerns or fears.
- 4. Get organized.** Allocate "office hours" for course engagement, student appointments, and administrative discussions with your employer. Create a designated area for your teaching; keep everything pertaining to your courses there. Make sure your computer, Internet service, and phone are all reliable and in working order.
- 5. Read your handbooks!** It is professionally/ethically vital to read and understand the instructor and student handbooks provided to you before jumping into your course. They offer a "lay of the land" for instructor and student responsibilities as well as important institutional policies, organizational practices, and teaching philosophy. Understanding expectations minimizes uncertainty for you and your students.
- 6. Learn the environment.** Become familiar with the basics of the learning management system (LMS) and know who provides technical support. Take a tour or audit the course you'll be instructing to gain a sense of the instructional style, participant engagement, and course activities/expectations.
- 7. Take pre-service training.** Ask your administrator if instructor training is available. Hands-on experience is the best teacher and a great confidence booster! It offers you a chance to actually navigate through and interact with the system, understand and use its features, identify strengths and weaknesses (and yours in using it), and clarify questions with a knowledgeable trainer. Free courses are also available that help you know what to expect, need to do, and how you begin instructing.
- 8. Seek a faculty or instructor mentor.** It can be very helpful to have someone to coach, guide, and provide feedback for you through your first online course. Some institutions offer faculty and/or peer instructor-mentoring programs; others incorporate them in pre-service training or directly assign a one-on-one. If unavailable, find an outside mentor knowledgeable in the LMS you'll be working in, asking your administrator beforehand to ensure this is permissible.
- 9. Be prepared for your course(s).** It doesn't matter whether this is the first or millionth time you've taught the subject—get prepared! Don't peruse; read thoroughly so you understand the syllabus and resources, especially if you didn't develop them. Make sure you've ordered or requested the required text(s) in sufficient time and check to ensure all aspects of the LMS are set-up and functioning correctly. Plan for back-up materials in case resource links aren't functioning as it may take time for the administrative team to find a solution.
- 10. Support your students.** Keep in mind that many of your students will also be new to online learning. Some are mature students returning to school after a long hiatus. They may be great in their careers but don't know how to write a term paper, upload an assignment into a dropbox, or post appropriately in discussion forums. All of this can bruise their self-esteem. Your greatest asset as an online instructor is being an empathic facilitator of learning. Let your students know that, although the course may take some time and effort, you care about them and will help them succeed!

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