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9 Tips for Planning to Teach Online

February 21, 2017 | By Barbara Carder
Teaching Effectiveness

Whether you are teaching in the classroom or online, **planning is a key component to your success**. But teaching online can present some unique challenges and opportunities, and good planning is critical to a successful learning environment for your students. I've been teaching in the online environment for 15 years and really enjoy the flexibility it provides. I enjoy meeting folks from near and far, interacting with them, and helping to guide their educational efforts.

Here are 9 tips to assist with planning as you teach online:

1. **PLAN to provide yourself with an environment conducive to excellent teaching.** This includes a workspace with good lighting, a comfortable chair, plenty of desk space to spread out your materials, and free from any distractions or noise.
2. **PLAN to be totally prepared for each online session.** Be well-versed on the material you will be covering. Review the instructor materials well in advance of each session. On the day of each session, log in well before the session start time to check your Internet connection, load your PowerPoint, and be ready to greet each student as they arrive in the session.
3. **PLAN to keep students engaged throughout the course.** Ask students to complete an "Introductions" assignment so they can provide some information about themselves to you and to their classmates. To get the course off to a good start, hold an online meeting the first week to meet your students. Use an icebreaker activity to begin. An easy icebreaker is to ask students to type in the chat window up to 3 websites that they visit regularly - which can start a lively discussion!
4. **PLAN to engage students in online meetings held subsequent weeks also by beginning with a quick icebreaker.** Ask students to review the learning outcomes for that week and type in the chat window which outcome they feel is most relevant to them and why. Another engaging icebreaker is to ask students to go to <http://bighugelabs.com/deck.php> to create a trading card of themselves and post it to a Discussion board.
5. **PLAN to be immersed in online discussions.** Most discussion assignments ask students to read and post and then reply to the postings made by their classmates. Stay engaged with students by responding to discussion boards consistently and continually throughout the assignment. At the end of the discussion, post a "wrap up" comment.
6. **PLAN to provide feedback with the goal of improving student learning.** Remind students of how they are doing compared with the learning outcome for the assignment. When we provide timely feedback that is focused on the correlating learning outcome, we are providing the information our students need to improve.
7. **PLAN for how you will request student feedback.** Ask for student feedback at least once during the course. Use a format that is easy and quick for students to reply with your request, such as an email with three questions about how they are doing with the reading material, assignments, and managing their time. This shows you care about how your students are progressing and value their opinions on the course materials.

8. **PLAN to encourage students throughout the course.** Remind them to stay engaged, complete the reading assigned, and contact you for assistance as soon as it is needed. Also, remind students about the support available in your various campus departments, such as the library, advising, etc.
9. **PLAN to reach out for assistance.** Ask other online educators for advice to gain the value of their experience. Research what professional development opportunities are available at your own institution, and take advantage of those to continually learn and improve.

Enjoy teaching online!

About the Author

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Barbara Carder holds a Master of Science in Marketing & Communication and a Bachelor of Science in Applied Communication, both from Franklin University.