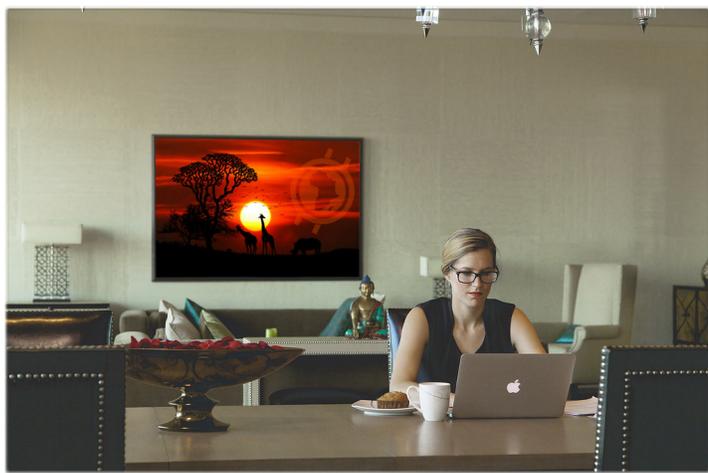


Online Instructional Strategies for Adult Learners



About

Institutions of higher education are increasing their online offerings, and many instructors who have taught only in the traditional, face-to-face environment have made the transition to online instruction with little training or guidance. To help bridge this gap, many academics are researching the most effective strategies to ensure student learning in the online classroom.

1

WHAT

Online education is a varied field. It relies on technology and can be delivered in different ways: it can be synchronous or asynchronous as well as self-paced or lockstep. Class size can vary from regular or medium (70-125 students) to giant MOOC courses. Each type of delivery leads to its own set of obstacles, but the main challenge posed to all online education is an inherent distance between learners and instructors. Research on instructional strategies for each delivery method can assist educators.

2

WHO

Instructional designers are best poised to take a broader approach by assessing learner needs, developing goals and objectives, selecting appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating effectiveness. **Online instructors** have many roles, including course designer, subject matter expert, facilitator, and mentor. To overcome the challenges of teaching online, instructors should have the following competencies: technical ability, an understanding of how students learn, course design knowledge, and assessment proficiency. For each role/competency, an instructor must consider which strategies are most appropriate.

3a

HOW: Learner-to-Learner

Strategies and tools are required to overcome the sense of isolation many students experience from one another:

- ▶ Ice breaker activities
- ▶ Collaborative learning projects
- ▶ Discussion forums/chat areas
- ▶ Video conferencing
- ▶ Social media applications

3b

HOW: Learner-to-Instructor

Strategies for instructors include ways to develop rapport with students:

- ▶ Create video introductions.
- ▶ Use emails and announcements to remind students of due dates.
- ▶ Interact within discussion boards.
- ▶ Provide immediate feedback.

3c

HOW: Learner-to-Content

Strategies for promoting understanding of a topic can be implanted in course design:

- ▶ Incorporate relevant and realistic content.
- ▶ Consider student workload, background, demographics, and learning styles.
- ▶ Provide clear instructions and organization.
- ▶ Ensure accessibility.

4

WHY

Engagement is key in creating effective learning experiences for online students. There are different terms for engagement, including social presence and empathy. The point is that instructors and instructional designers need to consider how students can connect with each other and their instructors. The effects of good engagement include greater academic success, motivation, and satisfaction. All effective online instruction strategies facilitate engagement, whether to peers, instructors, or learning content.

RESOURCES

Delivery: A researcher from Northern Illinois University demonstrated strategies preferred in a self-paced environment. Specific strategies are available for both larger-sized classes and the even larger MOOC's.

Strategies for Instructors: When looking for specific instructional strategies, researchers from the University of Florida and the University of North Carolina Charlotte provided the unique perspective of "award winning faculty." A joint study from the University of North Carolina Charlotte and University of Wyoming revealed which engagement strategies students preferred. Strategies to increase instructor and social presence were explored by faculty from Purdue University.

Strategies for Instructional Designers: Research has also been conducted to provide specific strategies for Instructional designers that help increase student satisfaction as well as ways to increase empathy for learners.

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