

Instructor Role Adjustment

1 What is it?

Whether in traditional classrooms or online environments, instructors are encouraged to shift their roles to become directors of learning experiences. It's a change from being "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side" (Stavredes, 2011, p. 152). The word *facilitator* rather than *instructor* describes the new role better. Therefore, the main job shifts from delivering content to supporting knowledge-sharing activities that assist learners to construct knowledge.

2 Why is it important?

Most of the time, online learners have to digest course content by themselves because there are no face-to-face sessions. Even though some instructors might use synchronous sessions to support their courses, it is not usually expected that students and instructors work at the same time. As expected, content input is not enough for learners to achieve the desired outcomes in their courses. Therefore, they need a *facilitator* who stimulates knowledge construction through collaboration and discussion.

3 How to do it?

A *facilitator* should support students in these aspects (Stavredes, 2011, p. 164-165):

- **Encourage participation:** Offer opportunities for learners to share information about themselves. It is recommended that you share a personal introduction about yourself. Address learners by their names to establish rapport.
- **Encourage knowledge construction and critical thinking:** Use the Socratic method to ask questions that do not lead to a single answer. This can help learners to understand the content better, strengthen their arguments, and summarize their points. Stavredes (2011)

proposes that instructors use different types of interactions with their learners:

- Asking learners for elaboration/clarification of their ideas.
- Giving concrete examples to encourage participation.
- Asking learners to take alternative perspectives on the issues discussed or make them reconcile points of view.
- Asking learners to summarize key-points about an issue.
- Asking learners to state the implications of their arguments, as well as the assumptions and inferences they are making.
- **Monitor progress:** Interact with learners who are behind the course goals to help them overcome issues. Monitor the frequency of posts weekly during the initial weeks of the course. Monitoring may decrease over time.
- **Communicate feedback on performance:** Provide feedback in a timely manner and consider using rubrics or checklists to communicate grade criteria. ([See Sample Discussion Board Rubric LDT](#))
- **Encourage self-directedness:** Have in mind learners' levels of self-direction. Less self-directed learners might require more frequent feedback on their performance than more autonomous learners.

Richardson et al. (2015) identified 5 *Instructor* roles based on the instructor's teaching presence in online courses.

- **Advocating:** An *advocator* supports students by encouraging them during their assignments and giving them tips for success.
- **Facilitating:** A *facilitator* has an active voice in the course to direct online discussions by asking the right questions at the right times. A facilitator asks students to consider specific topics and take diverse points of view.

- **Sense Making:** A *sense-maker* provides scaffolding to students by clarifying topics, providing examples, and giving summative and formative feedback.
- **Organizing:** An *organizer* gives structure to the course by setting clear deadlines, policies, guidelines, expectations, and resources for students.
- **Maintaining:** A *maintainer* directs learners on course navigation to find elements within the course platform. A maintainer also explains the preferred technology platforms for course communication and addresses technology concerns (providing external contacts for assistance).
- **Manage course communications:** Save common FAQs and make email templates to reuse. Reduce email by setting clear time policies, i.e. post general questions/answers to discussion boards to avoid repeated questions. (See [Course Management and Learner Guidance](#).)
- **Balance/distribute the types of assignments** that require detailed instructor's feedback to ensure the timeliness and avoid significant overload, especially in high enrollment courses.
- **Organize/structure your work environment:** Set ahead where to download assignments for grading, file naming conventions, a pattern for folders (week vs. modules), etc.

Shifts in Designing and Teaching

Generally the biggest change you will encounter when you move to teach online is the shift in balance of course design to be front-loaded. Dr. Tom Beaudoin advises to “put your all into preparation on the front end” (Take My Advice, 2017). Instead of creating all the details of your course as you progress and/or making modifications to historical materials, the majority of that work will now occur prior to the beginning of the start of your course. When this occurs it may also seem that the teaching load has lessened as the course begins, as many of the course design elements are already in place. However, many first time online instructors will also need to learn new strategies for knowing how often you need to be “in” the course and when it is time to be offline.

Tips and Tricks

- Use [time management strategies](#) (Lehmann & Chamberlin, 2018) to optimize your work and students' learning experience:
- **Establish a schedule:** Identify weekly commitments from the beginning of the course and block times for your online course.

4 Additional Resources

- [Take My Advice by Jean Dimeo, Inside Higher Ed:](#) Instructors offer guidance to faculty new to online teaching
- [Time Management Strategies for Online Instructors](#) by the University of Wisconsin - Stout
- [Myths and perceptions about time management when teaching online by COFA Online at the University of New South Wales](#)

5 References

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