

Tips on Moving to Online Writing Instruction (OWI) in a Hurry

First, the [CCCC position statement for effective online writing instruction](#) is a big help for moving courses online. Below are brief descriptions of some of the most relevant principles. In short, these principles suggest that in this unique circumstance, you are not expected to be an expert online writing instructor, and now is not the time to reinvent yourself and learn all the new technologies. Instead, rely on what you are good at—teaching writing—and consider how to translate what you know and believe about effective writing instruction into an online format. If you teach writing through peer review or lectures, seek out pedagogical options that will help you be the same teacher you are now but just in an online environment. Your other main priority during this time is *access*. Make sure all your documents are accessible in multiple platforms/formats, add captions to all videos, etc.

OWI Principle 1: Instruction should be inclusive and accessible.

- In other words, whenever possible, design your courses to be as inclusive and accessible as possible to students with regard to disability, multilingualism, or socioeconomic issues. So when you create online materials such as videos or text lectures, consider how to make those documents accessible to everyone: even those with auditory or visual impairments. Consider also adaptations or alternative assignments for students who might have access issues with regard to technology. If you make your content available primarily in textual format, make sure students are able to download or edit the text for accessibility purposes. Students, for instance, may need to create large text versions of your documents or they may need to print them if they have only intermittent internet access or poor display options at home.

OWI Principle 2: Classrooms should focus on writing and not on technological orientation

- Even though you're now teaching online, you're still teaching the outcomes of the composition program, so don't feel like you have to learn all the new cool flashy technology.

OWI Principle 3: Teaching/Learning Strategies Should be Developed for the Unique Features of the Online Instructional Environment

- This means you should take into account the unique affordances and possibilities of teaching online. If you do a lot of peer review in your face-to-face classes, for instance, teaching online can allow you to expand the concept of the “classroom” to include time when you aren't actually in a room together. For example, peer review works well through assigned groups on a discussion board post. Students can respond to their post and attach their own feedback, then they download their assigned peer's document, comment, and upload it as a reply in the same thread.

OWI Principle 4: Composition theories, pedagogies, and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the online instructor

- In other words, don't reinvent the wheel. You are *still you* in your online classroom. You are not expected to reinvent yourself as a teacher. If your pedagogy relies heavily on peer review or group activities and conferencing, that's the kind of teacher you should be online as well. It's all a matter of how you adapt and translate those practices to an online

environment, not tossing out what you do in a face-to-face environment to create something new.

Other important considerations for migrating online

1. Some students may not have Internet access at home or may have spotty access. Find out their situations. Make sure they all have smart phones for access as well.
2. Plan a weekly update announcement that previews the week's outcomes, activities, and expectations and show students where this will be posted. (Announcements will be a good place.)
3. Plan when you will be online and available for "office hours" and let students know. It might be a good idea to keep your regular office hours in order to decrease the sense of disruption.
4. Consider using the [Remind phone app](#) so that you can easily push notifications and announcements to all members of the class. (Click on Higher Ed to sign up.)
5. Repeating due dates and announcements is important for students' uptake. When teaching online, provide **multiple pathways** to activities and assignments and give the same instructions in multiple places. For example, your weekly announcement should include links to each classes' activities as well as instructions. You might also post the same instructions for each discussion. You might also send the same weekly announcement via email and via Remind. The more repetition the better.
6. Be as **consistent** as possible about when and where you will post/upload things for the week/class.
7. Structure and consistency are crucial as students are figuring this out. Students will need extensive instructions to activities. Keep them very simple and concise.
8. Since your student emails are going to dramatically increase now, set some boundaries by having clear online availability (+office hours) for your students **and** yourself.
9. Some or all of your students may use their phones only for access. Check in with them about how well this is working for them and be flexible as needed.

Other Policy Issues to Consider

Synchronous vs Asynchronous

- Some classes of students may be ready and willing to meet online with you at the same time as your regularly scheduled class. However, it may be impossible for others.

Attendance

- Strict enforcement of attendance policy should not be high priority. Whatever mechanism you choose for taking attendance online during this migration should focus on being consistent, reasonable, flexible, and forgiving. You may, for example, require that students log in to Blackboard and complete a certain number of message board posts by a certain date each week to get their attendance for that week, etc. Whatever your approach is, try to come up with humane and reasonable approaches that take their living situation and internet access into account, and be prepared to adapt when necessary if many of your students aren't able to meet the initial expectations you lay out for them.

- Participation in discussion board posts and activities, etc. may be the easiest approach if working asynchronously. However, be as specific as possible about what constitutes full participation. (Do they need to do ALL the activities? Some? At least one?)
- **Be flexible whenever and wherever you can.** Students or their families may fall ill or may be dealing with any number of hardships brought on by this unique situation.

Grading

- Use your usual grading strategies. The exception: If you usually collect hard copies of papers, homework, and drafts, you will need to use the Dropbox feature in Blackboard. Email is another option, but that can get overwhelming pretty fast and it's easy to lose track of submissions.

Conferencing

- Conferencing with your students is still an effective strategy. Google Hangouts is a helpful platform for group conferences.
- Google Docs works well for sign-up sheets