

Book Review

The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips

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Publisher's Description: *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* provides an overview of theory-based techniques for online teaching or for a technology-enhanced course, including course management, social presence, community building, and debriefing. Based on traditional pedagogical theory, this resource integrates the latest research in cognitive processing and learning outcomes. From a practical approach, this guidebook presents instructional strategies in a four-phase timeline, suitable for any online or blended course. Faculty with little knowledge of educational theory and those well-versed in pedagogy will find this book a key to developing their practical online teaching skills.

The advent of digital classrooms and online learning has transformed the educational ecosphere. The exponential growth in information has augmented the importance of technology in classrooms. Teachers across the globe are experiencing this driving force and are exploring diverse ways of harnessing the potential of online teaching.

The book brilliantly deals with this most fascinating yet challenging issue of online learning, and gives an orientation to its various facets. Rightly presented as a survival guide with simple and practical pedagogical tips for online teaching, the book showcases an array of strategies to structure an online course, design the pedagogy and also formulate an assessment plan.

The book reinforces the significance of pedagogical theories in establishing the framework on which online teaching practices are orchestrated. "Innovative communication technologies often drive pedagogical change," and the book highlights this transit from face-to-face instruction to online.

The pedagogical practices for online teaching are useful to learners with different learning styles and ability levels. As mentioned by the authors, "Tips comprising the heart of this book were crafted to meet the needs of actual faculty from veteran classroom instructors to novice teachers." The suggestions could be incorporated in fortifying one's own teaching practice or to support the extended academic community.

The book noticeably demonstrates its intent as a forerunner of active and ongoing support for online faculty to ensure an effective and efficient teaching- learning experience. The authors highlight the challenges faced because of the exponential growth in information and the blistering speed at which the environment is becoming technologically immersive.

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A primary theme of the text is that an effective teacher will be equally effective in all formats of teaching, be it face-to-face or online, but this evolution is neither mechanical nor sudden. Therefore, an orientation to the process of online teaching and to the content is critical.

The first chapter of the book gives a holistic perspective on the macro picture of learning and effectively illustrates the distinction between a face-to-face and an online course plan. It also sets the context for the subsequent chapters. The chapter is focused on creating and continuously improving online courses and there is a constant emphasis on the unique style and orientation needed for an online course plan. The component dealing with “How are online courses unique?” sets the foundation for various facets of online teaching, which stand out as very important references for constructing the course. The authors illustrate a variety of inputs on the importance of a real-time learning environment to create well-designed asynchronous interactions, thus leading to improvement of the teaching-learning experience. Further, the uniqueness of the online course plan exemplifies the role of a learner in the process as being more dynamic and purposeful and conspicuously engaged in the creation of knowledge.

Chapter two of the book is structured around the theoretical foundations of pedagogy and its significance for practitioners. It appropriately draws attention to the evolving educational scenario where traditional teaching practices no longer suffice the purpose of meeting learning objectives. The authors introduce the readers to ten core learning principles – the foundation on which the online course plan is designed. These core principles act as guidelines in designing and managing the online teaching environment. They reinforce the role of faculty as mentors, directing the learning experience with emphasis on learning processes to ensure the different learning outcomes. The insights from this section of the book reiterate the role of a learner as the pivot point around which all processes are activated. It significantly points out the aspect of varied experiences accumulated over a period of time and resulting in new learning. The context around which the learning event takes place is critical and there is an adequate emphasis on the advantages of the dynamic digital learning space to ensure richness of perspective and effective learning outcomes. The theoretical foundations expounded in the book act as important references to develop metacognitive abilities. The authors constantly reinforce the need to develop high order thinking skills of deep understanding and lifelong learning, so noteworthy in today’s learning context.

Chapter 3 begins with familiarizing the readers with the practical aspect of online teaching. It draws attention to the importance of preparation, presence, and participation in both the synchronous and asynchronous scenario. The best practices highlighted in this section provide an end-to-end course-plan structure, putting emphasis on customized and personalized learning.

The second part of the book, comprising eight chapters, extends the discussion on useful strategies for online teaching. From setting the right foot forward in course beginnings, through an appropriate selection of tools, to avant-garde pedagogical suggestions, to essential course pieces, and defining quality standards, the discussion leads to interesting cognitive revelations around the “zone of proximal development.” Additional precepts are shared to hone the talent of interested faculty members with focus on framing the right kind of questions, rubrics for evaluation, discussion forums, and posting to create an immersive learning experience. The tips provide immediate and relevant references to create a stimulating course and handle intensive engagements.

The themes and tools projected by the authors are useful in developing good practices for learning. These practices act as useful guidelines in ensuring engagement and progress of

learners. It critically examines the array of offerings in the digital space and emphasizes the importance of right tool selection based on the requirement of the learners. The ultimate goal of any teaching process is to ensure meaningful learning and stimulate intellectual curiosity of the students; this book characterizes this very aspect of learning. Another important aspect of technology customization that is brought out in the book is the necessity of a learner-centric knowledge management system (CMS). According to the authors, the CMS should support deep learning processes and promote collaborative learning experiences. Community building to improve teaching processes is also a focus area where the authors share best practices for online course design and delivery.

Interesting and readily available tools are shared for the benefit of online teachers. These include simple tools for collaboration and communication as well as more refined applications. The authors continuously advocate the need to reinforce the cognitive presence in the classroom through intelligently crafted discussion sessions and projects. Peer collaboration is strongly encouraged through conversations and assessment interventions. Self-development of teachers is an area where the tips induce reflective practices and a sense of accountability amongst teachers. The progression of the chapters is done in a very coherent manner and the reader surfaces with new ideas with every chapter.

Phase 3 of the book focuses on leveraging the power of questions and inculcating inquiry as a reflective practice. These are indeed essential prerequisites for today's millennial generation who are so used to obtaining responses to their queries through a simple Google search. The authors insist on the new and emerging role of the teachers in linking students' new information and concepts with previous knowledge through the art of questioning. As the authors take us to the tips for the "late middle," the emphasis now shifts to integrating knowledge in anticipating and solving problems. Feedback is an important indicator to take stock of the course objectives and to understand the progression of the course to realign it with the learners' knowledge. Tips on feedback strategies that deal with the prospect of improving learning outcomes are illustrated effectively. The suggestions on creating a feedback mechanism that is personal, formative, timely, and efficient are very pragmatic.

Concept mapping for authentic problem solving, collaborative project discussions, and tips to conduct them are hugely relevant in today's learning space, where team building and synergy are the key success differentiators. The book delineates the need to energize learners and maintain a flow to ensure that students are neither underwhelmed nor intimidated in mapping the content. Social networking sites, which are more common as personal interaction forums, are presented in the book as useful cognitive tools in co-constructing knowledge and building a learning community.

Phase 4 of the book gives the modus operandi to embellish and present the neatly designed final product and is directed toward making a learner independent and self-initiated. Finally, the book explores future problem areas that might interfere with the smooth conduct of the course.

Suggestions pertaining to other formats of online learning like mobile platforms, could have added further value to the practical advice section. Some inputs on technology as a liberating mechanism for learners could be added in further editions. The book is a useful reference for teachers who are beginning their online teaching journey. It is equally useful for teachers who have attained a certain degree of proficiency in this area. The challenge of teaching in an unfamiliar territory is gradually erased and replaced with excitement about designing the

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course plan. The uniqueness with which the book focuses on leveraging technology to provide differentiated instruction in creating an inimitable learning experience is noteworthy.