

Tips for Roles of Online Facilitators

Teaching requires that you play multiple roles, and teaching online is no exception. Berge (1995) has categorized conditions for teaching successfully in the online environment into the four areas described below.

Taking on the Pedagogical Role Involves Being the Intellectual Facilitator of Class Discussion

- Have clear objectives so students feel that time spent in their online class is worthwhile.
- Be flexible to accommodate individual learners.
- Make learning relevant by developing activities that help students relate material to their personal experiences and existing knowledge.
- Design student-led activities to encourage active learning.
- Encourage student interaction, which is a valuable component of online learning.
- Stimulate student interest by using a variety of activities.
- Use questions to focus discussions and keep learning on track.
- Summarize and weave discussion threads to help students make connections.
- Be objective, keeping in mind the impact an instructor's perspective can have on student learning.

Assuming the Social Role Requires Creating a Friendly, Social, and Safe Learning Environment

- Help students feel safe and supported in class so they are likely to engage more fully in course activities and learning.
- Introduce yourself and encourage students to do the same.
- Create a virtual café, a discussion forum where students can talk about topics that are not directly course-related.
- Guard against fear by letting students know that their comments will be respected and they will not be personally attacked or ridiculed.
- Be prepared to deal with students who may breach etiquette or personally attack one another.
- Be mindful of using humor or sarcasm as they can be misinterpreted in the online environment due to lack of nonverbal communication cues.
- Praise and model quality participation by recognizing students who exhibit the type of participation you desire; likewise, privately address inappropriate or unacceptable participation.

Playing the Managerial Role Entails Attending to Organizational, Procedural, and Administrative Details

- Keep the course moving on schedule and inform students of any changes to the syllabus.
- Establish ground rules to inform students of their responsibilities.
- Give students the opportunity to respond to one another instead of filling silences in discussions.
- Handle tangents appropriately to keep discussions on track.
- Balance your participation so instructor presence is known but not overwhelming
- Request student feedback about the course.
- Change something if it's not working. For example, don't allow discussions to be derailed by procedural or technical issues.
- Communicate clearly and succinctly, clarifying and repeating information as necessary.
- Be responsive to student questions or concerns to prevent them from feeling isolated.
- Don't underestimate administrative time as online courses require preparation and management.

Serving in the Technical Role Necessitates Designing Transparent Technology That Enables Students to Focus on Course Content

- Know what technical support exists for the instructor and students.
- Expect that students will encounter technical difficulties early in the semester.
- Be prepared to provide first-line support and direct students to technical support services.
- Promote peer learning by encouraging students to ask for assistance from one another.

Reference

Berge, Z. L. (1995). Facilitating computer conferencing: Recommendations from the field. *Educational Technology*, 35(1), 22-30.