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Clear and Appropriate Assignments

By Sandy Gauvin

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As a teacher of students with learning disabilities, I found that one of the most difficult things for many of my students was understanding and completing homework assignments.

Here are 10 tips to help students be successful in completing their homework for you:

- 1) Make sure your students and their parents understand the homework policy.
- 2) Assign work that the students can do. If your student has a learning disability in written language, chances are you won't get the 10-page written report you assigned. Perhaps he could tape the information or present it in a different way, such as through the use of pictures or a skit.
- 3) Make sure the student understands the assignment and has written it down correctly. That may mean you'll have to spend a little extra time with the student to show him examples of what you want and to answer any questions he might have. Often, this involves an element of trust, especially as the child gets older. He needs to be able to go to you and know that he will get help, not rejection.
- 4) Don't overload the student with homework. Remember, it takes these students longer to complete the assignment in the first place. So, it might be a good idea to cut the number of multiplication problems you assign him in half. Or, perhaps you would reduce the amount of reading you want him to do in his reading book for the night.
- 5) Relate new learning and homework with real life. If the child understands how she can use this information in her life, it means more to her and she will learn it much more easily.
- 6) Have the student begin the homework in class so you can check to see if he is doing it correctly before he goes home.
- 7) Remind the student of due dates periodically. They may have it written down, but many students with learning disabilities have trouble with organization and may not have it as a current assignment.

Clear and Appropriate Assignments

8) Allow students to work together on homework. This can help the child get reinforcement of the information from his peers, and it can also help promote social skills.

9) Establish a routine at the beginning of the year about homework assignments. Be consistent and fair about reinforcing that routine.

10) Allow the student to tell you at the beginning of class time if he was not able to complete his assignment. There are valid reasons for not completing an assignment. Perhaps the student just needs more reinforcement in that skill.

Ensuring that the student can understand and complete assignments goes a long way toward boosting

his self-esteem. He feels good because 1) he was capable of completing the assignment, as did the other kids, 2) he knows he has pleased the teacher, 3) he has pleased himself, and 4) he has that much more information in his brain. Increased self-esteem will encourage him to take risks with searching for new answers and contributing to class discussion. And that will earn him more respect from his peers, as well as from himself. He will be a happy, successful student.

For more plain talk about learning disabilities, please visit us at www.ldperspectives.com.

Sandy Gauvin is a retired educator who has seen learning disabilities from many perspectives – as the parent of a daughter with learning disabilities, as the teacher of children with learning disabilities, and as an advocate for others who have diagnosed and unrecognized learning disabilities. Sandy shares her wisdom and her resources at www.LDPerspectives.com.

3 Tips For Being A Successful Distance Learning Instructor

By Kris Bickell

Are you looking to teach an online course for the first time? Or have you already taught online but are looking for some tips to help you become more effective?

The world of online learning is expanding at a rapid pace.

More courses are being offered and more students are enrolling every semester. And while teaching an online course can be done while sitting at your computer in your pajamas, being an effective online instructor requires a good deal of practice and preparation.

Of course, teaching online does take away the face to face involvement with students. Nothing can take the place of seeing a student smile after finally understanding a difficult concept.

But online teaching can be even more rewarding than on-campus teaching, when done well.

What makes an effective online instructor?

Clear and Appropriate Assignments

While good teaching involves a large number of qualities and techniques, effective online teaching centers on three main points:

1) You must be clear about your expectations!

Since students are not sitting right in front of you, it is extremely important to be very clear. Since you cannot see the students, you cannot see them sitting with a puzzled look while nodding their head in agreement.

How do you know if you are clear enough?

- Ask the students.
- Carefully evaluate the quality of the work, and how close the finished product matches the instructions.
- Have a colleague read your material before the course begins.

If student evaluations are distributed at the end of the semester, you can use the feedback to help you improve your course and teaching techniques - but keep in mind that by then you can no longer help the students learn what you want them to learn!

2) You must communicate frequently...and effectively!

Most students will expect you to be sitting at your computer whenever they send you a question by email. Of course, that is not practical, nor is it reasonable. So it is a good idea to give students a time frame in which you will respond, with 24–48 hours being typical.

And it's not enough to just communicate frequently. You must also communicate effectively. While some students (especially new online students) will want you to "take them by the hand" through each step, if you already have clearly written instructions, you can direct them to the instructions.

Keep in mind that most students are not asking you questions to bother you - usually, they just want to make sure they are doing what you want them to do. So be understanding, even when you get questions that make you shake your head.

If you get the same questions frequently, it is a good idea to save the questions - and your responses - to create a "frequently asked questions" section.

3) You must let your personality shine through!

If students just wanted to read a book, they wouldn't need you to read it for them. So, when teaching online, avoid taking the "easy way out" by simply posting a few readings and having students answer the questions:

- Add a little of your personality to your assignments and communications (but be careful when using humor, as it is difficult to convey online).
- Give real life examples that you have learned from being the subject matter "expert".
- Create interesting and interactive assignments to help students really learn the material.

Clear and Appropriate Assignments

Good teaching, like being good at anything, takes practice.

If you are clear...if you stay in close contact with your students...and if you create an interesting learning experience, you will be the online instructor that students want to learn from!

Kris Bickell is the director of distance learning at a small private University in Connecticut, and an experienced online instructor. He is also the owner of Hi-Speed-Internet.com, which offers tips to help you improve your computer speed.



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