6 Ways to Prepare Your Online Course

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Careful preparation is essential to the success of an online course "to provide a positive experience for the students and to be able to maximize your time with students so that you're not spending time on reworking things that weren't clear up front," says Ann Millacci, associate professor of education at the University of Cincinnati. In an interview with Online Classroom, she offered the following advice on preparing your course for your learners:

1 **Be clear, concise, and comprehensive.** "Everything has to be there. You can't walk in as an instructor with your yellow pad and ad lib the session like you might in the face-to-face classroom. You have to have everything laid out. It has to be very organized. And the students have to have the material as soon as the course goes online."

Logical flow of the course is important as well, and Millacci recommends having a colleague check the course for ease of navigation, clear instructions, and accurate placement of content. "You don't want students to be frustrated because things aren't where they're supposed to be."

2 **Provide a manageable amount of content.** Because online courses often operate on a compressed schedule, it's important to consider how much work is reasonable to expect of students while at the same time ensuring you're covering the necessary content.

3 **Provide a variety of learning activities.** Consider which types of activities are appropriate for the goals of the course and how you might offer different types of assignments to make the course more interesting and engaging for the students. The educational leadership program in which Millacci prepares educators to become principals includes field interviews, case studies, discussion boards, and collaborative assignments.

4 **Avoid making last-minute changes.** Making changes in an online course can have unintended consequences such as inconsistent information. This can create confusion for the students. It's best to make changes when you have time to check that the changes didn't create any problems in the accuracy or flow of the course.

5 **Provide resources to help students succeed in the online classroom.** Don't assume that your students have all the knowledge and expertise to succeed in an online course format. While it's unrealistic to teach students what they need to know about the learning environment, you can provide them with links to resources that can help.

6 **Test the course in different browsers and on different computers.** Sometimes what works on one computer doesn't work on another. Fixing any problems before the course goes live will help avoid student frustration and the need for you to scramble to help them access the course.