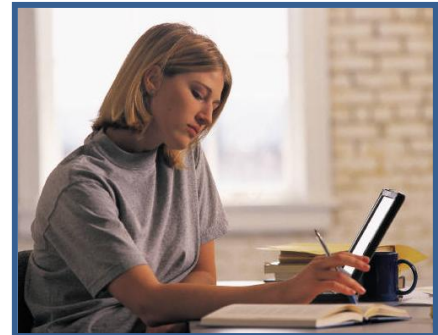# *Are You a Good Candidate for Online Teaching?*
Questions and Answers for Self-Assessment

Are you considering teaching online? If so, you may have some concerns about the online classroom environment. The following self-assessement questions and answers will help you evaluate whether or not you are a good candidate for teaching online.

Is online instruction different from teaching in the classroom?

There are several differences between teaching online and face-to-face:

- Online teachers rarely see their students. They communicate through their college's learning management system (LMS) using tools such as email, discussions, chat rooms, and assignment feedback. As a result, they are required to use various approaches to connect with students, evaluate their academic progress, and respond effectively to their needs. *(South Regional Education Board)* Online teachers must be able to convey their ideas in writing and pay attention to the subtle nuances of written words.

- Teachers and students can work at any time and in any place. Students have access to their courses 24/7 or every day and all hours of the day. This flexibility is a plus but also creates extra requirements for both students and teachers. Students must have excellent time-management skills, and teachers must be aware that many students are working weekends and may have time sensitive questions.

- Online teachers need different strategies to make sure that each student participates in course activities and the class creates an online community. This means not only teacher-to-student communication, but also student-to-student communication. Effective online communication skills are essential.

Can anyone teach online?

One of the first issues to be considered is determining the characteristics of an effective online teacher. These include the ability to:

- have access to a computer and the Internet, and be able to sit in front of your computer for at least an hour or two every day (most online teachers put in many more hours),
- have the ability to interact with your students without seeing them in the classroom,
- be very comfortable with the tools/system that you will be using to teach online (Learning Management System, computers, etc.)
- enjoy one-on-one interaction, as opposed to lecturing or group presentations,
- have a positive attitude toward distance education,

- have the ability to try new ideas and be creative, and
- feel very comfortable with typing your thoughts and critiques.

What skills does an online teacher need?

There are three main areas of skills that an online teacher should possess: technical skills, facilitation skills, and managerial skills:

1. Technical skills include:

   - writing, typing and word processing skills,
   - electronic presentation skills,
   - web navigation and search skills,
   - file management skills,
   - computer-related storage devices (disks, CDs, USB drives, zip disks, DVDs, etc.), and
   - knowledge of your school's course management system - be proficient using the basic elements of online courses: email, uploading files, threaded discussions, test/quiz functions, electronic grade book.

2. Facilitation skills include:

   - engaging the student in the learning process, particularly at the beginning,
   - appropriate questioning, listening and feedback skills,
   - the ability to provide direction and support,
   - skills in managing online discussions
   - the ability to build online teams,
   - ability to promote active learning,
   - accommodating students with different learning styles,
   - utilizing appropriate learning theories,
   - a capacity for relationship building, and
   - motivational skills.

3. Managerial skills include:

   - knowing how to manage collaborative groups,
   - having excellent time management,
   - managing course material to be presented for different learning styles,
   - managing online student disputes,
   - being able to coordinate and involve students in activities,
   - knowing institutional procedures and policies for implementing an online course, and
   - knowledge of basic legal issues such as digital copyright, FERPA and ADA in the online environment

What are the benefits of teaching online?

The benefits of teaching online include:

- the flexibility of when and where you teach,
- more individual communication with your students,
- the challenge of trying something innovative,
- the variety of online materials available, and
- For some teachers, it may be a safer and less anxiety-producing teaching environment

In addition, teachers may be interested in learning to teach online because they feel that it will increase their career opportunities. *(Kearsley)*

What are some problems online teachers may encounter?

Some teachers decide that the online environment is not for them. Their reasons may include:

- online teaching is not what they expected or not what they are interested in,
- the workload in an online class is too demanding for them and/or they lack the time management skills needed for online teaching,
- they are overwhelmed by technical problems with their computer or Internet connection
- they are not encouraged to teach online by their superiors, colleagues, or family,
- it is too difficult and/or time consuming to keep up with technology, and
- the compensation is not enough for the time and effort it takes to facilitate an online course.

Is teaching online more work than teaching in the classroom?

Online teaching may take more time than traditional classroom instruction. Some of the reasons include:

- providing student feedback can be an open-ended task,
- it is a 24/7 learning environment,
- keeping up with technology and technical problems requires time and effort and can become frustrating, and
- teachers may need to learn new strategies to manage their workload.

Burnout may be a concern because of the extra workload. Consider carefully how much time you have to invest before deciding to become an online teacher.

What questions should I ask myself before deciding to teach online?

Before you decide you want to teach online, carefully consider these questions:

Will I miss having face-to-face interaction with my students?
Do I have the computer skills necessary to teach an online course?
Am I willing to learn new teaching strategies?
Do I have excellent time management skills?
Do I have a quiet place where there is a computer to work on my class work?
Am I a good group facilitator?
Am I willing to give prompt feedback to students who are in a 24/7 class?
Am I willing to invest the extra time that it takes to teach an online course?

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