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## Google This: Online Research

August 10th, 2009

Research-driven writing is the heart of higher education, and the explosive growth of internet-based communication has moved the process online. Gone are the days when collegiate students hid in libraries' stacks trying to unearth the appropriate published document or unpublished manuscript. They're Googling instead!



The challenge isn't the access. It's the results. Individuals can waste hours, days and weeks doing online searches, only to find thousands of useless site links without the desired contents—and the class assignments are past due. Frustration can grow at the lack of available help: research and university librarians often know less about virtual research than their traditional, physical alternatives.

The most efficient way to conduct online research is through *narrow Boolean (word string) searches*. 'Strings' link words together to form concepts and phrases, and the closer they are to the way search engines operate, the better. 'Narrowness' refers to specificity, essential to avoid overly-broad hits. For example, a search for 'consumer media usage' is too vague. What kind of consumers and where? By contrast, 'U. S. preteen consumer media usage' limits the search to a specific market segment, in a specific country. The searcher will find fewer links, but they will be more on-target and valuable.

Searches for publications need equivalent specificity. If you're familiar with any of the online bookstores, then you know that inputting an author's name and topic is far more productive than the name or topic alone. The more targeted your search information is, the more usable the results will be.

August 10th, 2009 by Nora Carrol | Posted in [Adult Education](#), [Continuing Education](#), [Higher Education](#), [Online Education](#), [Tips](#) | (0)

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## Peer Coaching: Mentoring New Online Faculty

August 26th, 2009



*mentoring-in-action-by-s-ridgway2*

New faculty members can get the most productive start via coaching. In the online educational environment, the challenges encompass both traditional concerns like topical coverage, and process issues like 'communicating virtually'. Mentors who serve as coaches should have expertise in both.

Traditional and nontraditional institutions alike screen prospective faculty for their academic credentials and relevant professional experience. However, when teaching online, instructors typically have to manage tasks that have different structure/dynamics than their classroom counterparts, and motivate learners whom

they do not meet or see.

If you plan to serve as a mentor for new online faculty, the best strategy is to develop a preliminary relationship with your 'mentee' well before the respective term or course begins. Both of you should agree on the approach for mentoring, which is likely to include advice on: 1, the use of announcements, instructor files and imbedded course information to inform students of course/learning expectations; 2, the importance of the task list in guiding required readings, supplemental research and writing; 3, the distinctions between online forums (discussions), research-based papers, and collaborative activities such as group projects; 4, the procedures for taking secured-access online exams; 5, the processes for filing grades and responding to grade appeals. Many institutions offer boot-camp preparation for new faculty. While useful, it is also intensive and prone to creating 'information overload' on the part of attendees. Nothing replaces the effectiveness of the experienced peer-mentor!

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## Taking the Task to Task: Developing Scenarios for Adult Students

August 30th, 2009



colleen-murrays-scenario-planning-talk4

Adult learners expect to integrate workplace experience into formal study, and one way for faculty to meet that expectation is to use scenarios as the basis for discussions, projects, papers and even exams.

Scenarios are fictional situations that parallel reality by presenting situations or problems that could actually occur, applying academic topics (ex: consumer behavior) to practical outcomes. Like their workplace counterparts, scenarios typically are incomplete with multiple options for problem-solving, triggering the need for students to use deductive and/or inductive critical thinking. As situations exist in every endeavor and

industry, scenario-based tasks can be used in just about every discipline, and at undergraduate or graduate level. They are adaptable to classroom and online learning environments.

While very effective in motivating adults to learn, scenarios do have process and outcome challenges. They can easily lose focus or topical specificity, and bypass stated course or program learning objectives. It's best for faculty—or course developers—to remember the principles of instructional design, regardless of task model: 1, build on existing (baseline) knowledge; 2, state task-specific learning objectives; 3, avoid topical overlap or gaps between tasks; and 4, have measurable (quantifiable) learning outcomes.

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## Revise! Adapting Courses For Web Delivery

September 1st, 2009

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Many university and collegiate faculty are engaged in course revision that entails not just 'content' but method of delivery. The most common revision is adapting classroom content for the web—online learning is the fastest-growing segment of post-secondary education.

The process is not easy. Learning and communication dynamics are drastically different when both faculty and students are online. For example, asynchronous forums replace in-person discussion, but they are not in real time. Live chats are synchronous (real time), but participants may be scattered globally, causing attendance to tank, and requiring the use of chat archives. Task submissions are also online, and feedback/grades from faculty appear in secured grade books, triggering the need for students to submit questions or grade appeals via e-mail, not in person.

The best way for first-time course adapters to tackle 'teaching online' is to remember that the web is a visual medium, with the ability to add sound (audio) and animation (video). Most web courses combine explanatory text (syllabi, task lists, guidelines, announcements and faculty commentaries), with delayed-time discussions, real time chats, and scheduled papers, projects and exams. Use of text alone is deadly, and if your institution's web course format does not permit streaming of audio or video, then integration of still graphics is essential to maintain participant interest. Discussion forums and chats should emphasize interaction through activities as well as topics.

How creative one gets depends partly on whether the web course format uses off-the-shelf software like Blackboard, integrates real time chatting enabled by tools like GoToMeeting, or has developed a proprietary system. It's worth visiting the licensed software sites, as they all offer free tours which highlight features as well as capabilities.

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# I Say, An Essay! Tips on Writing Them Successfully

August 14th, 2009

Research-based writing is the heart of post-secondary learning, from undergraduate to post-graduate. The goals are to develop or enhance investigative, thinking and expressive skills. While the move from physical to virtual resources has triggered some upheaval in research, the writing process itself has changed little.



Essay-style writing is formal, and typically expository (explanatory) or problem-solving. In either case, it's wise to begin with an outline. Outlining allows the writer to organize and prioritize thoughts; determine the scope and depth of the writing; position the source citations that must support use of published or unpublished research; and identify any gaps that need closure before writing begins.

With few exceptions, structured content is preferable to the unstructured alternative. Why? Because ongoing narrative tends to jump topics and wander off-topic. That may be tolerable in conversation, but writing isn't talking, and academic papers and projects are graded on focus and clarity as much as on research and writing style. 'Structure' begins with either an abstract or introduction that sets the stage and establishes context. A situational recap or problem statement comes next, followed by the heart of the content—the writer's analysis/assessment and discourse on the relevant subject matter, supported by source citations as needed in any one of three accepted citation formats: APA, MLA or Chicago. The final section contains a conclusion, recommendations or both.

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## Seek and Ye May Find: Financial Aid For Adult Learners

August 24th, 2009

Collegiate students 26 years and older are considered 'adults' to institutions of higher education, and 'nontraditional' to providers of financial support. The categories create both hazards and opportunities for finding and acquiring financial assistance.



money-by-jenn-jenn

The most prevalent source of aid for adults is the workplace: employer-provided tuition reimbursement crosses industries, sectors and levels of employee status. However, it also has several restrictions, among them the need to tie the courses taken to workplace skill-set needs or defined career paths. Reimbursement by definition is paid after the fact, and almost all employers require that students provide proof of earning at least a 'B' in the given course before payment is made. There are often limits as to the number or timeframe of courses that can be covered through reimbursement, and in a recession, tuition reimbursement is among the first benefits to be cut. The combination of post-activity payment and economic vulnerability creates considerable risk.

There are several alternatives for undergraduate adult enrollees. Rumors to the contrary, many traditional financial aid and scholarship programs at local, state and federal level do not have age-driven cutoffs. There is support specific to distance learning (online and correspondence), active and veteran military members and their families. At graduate/professional stage, grants can and do fund specific research and dissertation-development activities. The providers are usually foundations.

The two 'process' challenges are 1, finding the right kind of support, and 2, getting a commitment from the funder well in advance of your course's or program's starting date. Too many students get locked out of classes because financial aid has not been confirmed, and end up having to withdraw, pay partial fees and reenroll. The best way to begin is by using any of several portals that provide links to financial aid for adults. One of the most comprehensive is [www.finaid.org/otheraid/nontraditional.phtml](http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/nontraditional.phtml).

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