

Adaptations in Online Learning

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Abstract

College professors lack the ability to utilize non-verbal communication when instructing in the virtual environment. Various learning styles are identified. Professors pay particular attention to identified learning styles to tailor the course material for successful delivery to the students. Visual learning is the default learning style for online students and suggestions are provided which give the online student a decisive advantage in learning course material. Suggestions are provided by the author to online professors, utilizing current research, to meet online teaching challenges.

Keywords: Online learning, learning styles, online visual learning.

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Research by Psychologists and Sociologists indicates that eighty to ninety-three percent of communication is non-verbal (Macionis, 2007, p. 153). The primary difference between online and on-site classrooms is the method in which the professor and the students communicate. Online classroom communication encompasses all standard course interactions including (but not limited to) 'lecturing', grading written assignments, and facilitating/participating in 'discussion boards'. If one takes online classroom communication and subtracts non-verbal communication from the whole 100 percent (inclusive) of communication techniques, then online classrooms must use less than twenty-percent of available communication methods to foster a successful classroom.

Technology provides various communication methods. They are primarily written in form, yet there are many options to record and upload videos, audio lectures, and create web pages with interactive icons. This paper will only address written communication working in tandem with various learning styles in the online classroom environment.

Professors can pay particular attention to the various identified learning styles. This allows the professor to utilize technology to effectively harness the academic material for online classroom delivery. When the available technology is used, many professors find that the effectiveness of online learning is on-par with on-site instruction (Liebowitz, 2003, p. 83).

Online students are nearly all non-traditional (by demographic), meaning that they have families, careers, and have chosen to return to school. This demographic is termed

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the Adult Learner. Adult Learners learn by the same varied styles that all students do, yet adult learners may have a 'technology deficiency' that the younger generation has acquired through growing up in an advanced technological age. A technology deficiency can quickly be overcome through practice and has no bearing on the actual learning capacity of the Adult Learner. I believe that Adult Learners with a technology deficiency readily adapt to the provided technology with the same determination that they already possess—the determination to return to college, later in life, to obtain education and earn a degree.

There are various identified learning styles that must be given attention in order for the professor to communicate effectively in any classroom setting. The main identified learning styles are visual, auditory, kinesthetic/haptic, social/collaborative, concrete sequential, concrete random, abstract sequential, and abstract random (Ross & Shulz, 1999). This paper focuses on the visual learning style.

Many learners prefer processing information through sight and can become quickly frustrated with a professor who uses auditory lectures to deliver course material (Sarasin, 1998). Online courses have a decisive advantage of delivering course material because the student is required to adopt 'visual learning' to attend. Online course animations, hypertext, and clickable diagrams can clarify concepts that a lecturing professor cannot (Ross & Shultz, 1999, p. 125). Learners who have problems or difficulty processing auditory lectures have the advantage of having written lecture notes to refer to (Ross & Schulz, 1999, p. 126).

There is no possible method to tailor instructional material with technology to address all identified learning styles because time and technology is limited. However,

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research shows that consistency in course design, contact with course instructors, and active discussion significantly influence online learning success (Swan et al., 2000).

In my opinion, the best a professor can do is be fair and consistent when replying to emails, posting lecture notes, providing a professional written communication model to be followed, actively fostering discussion by lecturing on the discussion boards, and contacting students personally who appear to need additional assistance in utilizing the online platform or understanding the course material. Actions speak louder than words and students give their best efforts if the professor first exemplifies dedication to student success by logging on daily and posting thoughtful content.

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