

Online Teaching Persona

1 What is it?

A teaching persona is the sense of self that an instructor presents to and establishes with students (Richardson & Alsup, 2015). Your teaching persona is essentially who you are, what your beliefs are personally and professionally, and how you present (project) yourself in the online classroom. Some instructors new to online teaching are concerned about transferring their personal teacher attributes to this new environment, translating their classroom management techniques, or even how to communicate or be “social” in an online course. This is all tied to your teaching persona.

2 Why is it important?

When moving to an online classroom a shift in your teaching persona may occur as you realign your beliefs about teaching and learning in a different environment. For example, with a move from face-to-face to online teaching some instructors also make a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning and/or from passive to active learning, in addition to dealing with new understandings of time management, the use of visual materials and cues, and online communication and presence. Your online teaching persona will in at least some way differ than your traditional teaching persona (Richardson and Alsup, 2015). ([See Instructor Role Adjustment](#)).

Moreover, teaching persona is important because it gives both the student and the instructor a sense of connectedness in and to each other and a course. One of the benchmarks of effective online education is instructor to student interaction. Establishing a teaching persona or a representation of instructor self, aids in developing this interaction.

3 How to do it?

An instructor’s teaching persona is a unique representation of self, making it difficult to prescribe a fixed “How to” list. Consequently, when trying to develop your online teaching persona consider the following seven areas:

- **Teaching and Humanism:** Teaching face-to-face is strongly linked to developing interpersonal relationships. However, when you are teaching online, developing and building this relationship is more about written discourse and closely following the evolution of your students' thinking over time. Remember, while developing rapport with your online students may look and feel different it is just as possible and as important.
- **Unique Identity:** You should utilize technology tools that capitalize on your unique identity. For instance, if you prefer written discourse then encourage students by sending emails and posting comments on discussion boards. If you prefer face-to-face interaction, set up synchronous virtual office hours using video conferencing tools.
- **Time Management:** There is a perception of a much higher workload for teaching online courses. This can certainly be true when you begin to teach online or are teaching a new course online. However, it is also important to be cognizant of your course design and how many assignments you have - to balance your workload and that of your students. Moving from face-to-face to online does not mean you need to increase assignments to ensure student participation! (Hopefully you have some control over content). You should also be aware that questions will come at any time: day, night, or weekend, so, consider establishing a daily or weekly routine for managing your class and let your students know what that looks like. ([See Course Management and Guidance](#)). ([See Instructor Role Adjustment](#)).



- **Projecting Presence:** You should look for timely, consistent ways to project your presence - as an expert, as a facilitator, and as a mentor - in the course. Weekly announcements, video recaps of course content, or discussion board posts are all effective ways to project your presence. ([See Social Presence](#)).
- **Communicate Effectively:** The asynchronous nature of online instructions means that there is less immediate two-way communication. So be consistent and timely with responses. Also, remember that some things such as humor and sarcasm do not often translate well into asynchronous communication.
- **Course Control:** Tailor instructional material and course content to your persona; if you are teaching a course developed by another tailor the course as much as the program/institution will allow. Maybe you cannot modify instructional materials, but you can most likely provide additional resources, individualize your announcements (last weekend my family went swimming...), and share your own experiences via feedback and discussions (when I am working with colleagues on a project as large as the one you are describing we find that the use of XX software for project mgmt is very helpful).
- **Role of Mentors:** Seek a mentor(s) from within your department/college/university who has experience with online instruction. Having someone you trust with whom you can share the successes and failures of teaching online is an indispensable resource.

Tips and Tricks

- Your actions, thoughts, and commentary, in short, all your interactions with students work together to form your persona.
- Use the Announcement and Discussion Board forums in your LMS, even consider how you provide Feedback as a way to project your persona. Look for training opportunities to

improve your online instruction or knowledge of educational technology tools.

4 Tools

- **Video Conferencing tools.** Use these tools to host synchronous virtual office hours for students. It also allows you to “be yourself” more so than you might be when communicating via text. Common tools include [WebEx](#), [Zoom](#), [Skype](#), which offer free trials or limited free access options.
- **Video Tools.** You can use video and screencasts to share your lectures, provide feedback, or create weekly check-in videos. Common tools include [SnagIt](#), [Camtasia](#), [Screencast-O-Matic](#), and [QuickTime](#).

5 Additional Resources

- [Six Myths About a Teaching Persona](#)
- [Developing a Teaching Persona](#)
- [Crafting a Teaching Persona](#)

6 References

Richardson, J. C. & Alsup, J. (2015). From the classroom to the keyboard: How seven teachers created their online teacher identities. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed learning*, 16(1), 142-167. Available online at: <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1814>