

Ask Errol!

Errol Craig Sull

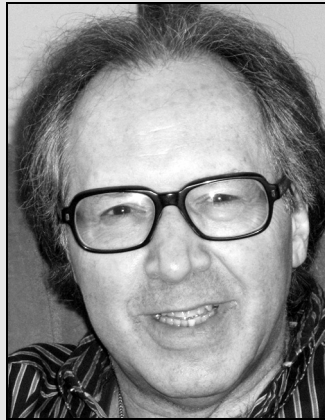
We continue into 2022 with distance learning remaining strong. COVID introduced many to online learning, adding to the large population of folks already doing this. One result is more queries, increased confusion, added complexities. My inbox has been flooded with teaching professionals asking for help with a variety of issues, and the questions for this issue's column reflect a large number of each. Keep writing, and I'll always do my best

to respond. Please send your queries to me at erroldistancelearning@gmail.com. I hope you find these useful.

THE BEST APPROACH TO CREATING ONLINE COURSE RESOURCES

One item I noticed in some of your columns, Errol, is you reference creating resources for students called "minipebbles." You've described these as helpful short informational sheets to give students info on various components of what you teach, writing, and study skills. I teach chemistry courses online at a small Midwestern college, and although our courses come preloaded with helpful resources for my students I always come across areas where I know more information is needed. There are additional sources and information I offer, but I was wondering if there is a certain approach I should take with these extra resources?

No course can come completely stocked with every resource a student might need, although there are some schools where they believe this is being done. It is simply impossible! A combination of student questions and confusion, instructor knowledge of the subject, and the directions/ requirements for assignments will always result in some extra resources being needed in a course. My minipebbles came out of two observations: (1) As mentioned, pieces of info to



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help students were missing; (2) I felt I could do a better job in explaining various items than appeared in a course. Based on my experience—and the overwhelming success of minipebbles—I give you these suggestions: (1) Decide what is absolutely necessary for added resources; this is based on continuing student confusion with an assignment and/or component of a subject. (Just one or two students needing more info probably does not warrant a classwide piece of extra resource.) (2) When creating the resource be sure it has a focus on the item or items students need; (3) Never make the resource too long—you don't want to overwhelm students. Also, be careful of vocabulary: the more conversational the better; (4) A key to having students use the resource: a clever introductory paragraph; (5) Post an announcement telling students of the new resource, and send it to students as an email attachment. (If possible, also post it in class for students to constantly use.) (6) Always revisit the resource for possible tweaks. These steps work for me, and they should work for you!

HOW TO WRITE FOR PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS

Well, Errol, I must say several of your columns have proven quite helpful to my colleagues and me! I believe we are better online educators as a result, so thanks. As for the major focus of this note, I've been teaching criminal justice for 10 years, and prior to that I was a police officer for several years. This combination of experience has allowed me to give students real-world insight, as well as solid teaching strategies. Now, I want to take this to the next level: writing for academic journals. I've done some research, and think I have down the basics, but as you write for Distance Learning I thought you might have some "secret" tips. Thanks!

First, I appreciate the nice words! It's always satisfying to know my efforts have done what I intend: to enhance other professionals' online teaching efforts. As for your question, I don't know how much research you've done on publishing, so if I repeat something you already know I do apologize. These are the basic steps you should follow: (1) Understand your knowledge and strengths in criminal justice—in what areas do you excel, such as teaching, a subcategory of criminal justice, et cetera; this is where you want your efforts to go. (2) Know what professional journals are available in your field, what they seek, their guidelines, et cetera. These two websites are pretty comprehensive:

- <https://library.uco.edu/c.php?g=359306&p=6912157>
- <https://library.plymouth.edu/CriminalJustice/journals>

(3) Find an area in your field that is underexplored or find a new twist/approach on one already covered quite a bit. This is important: no matter how good the writing same old-same old does not impress editors. (4) Once the article is finished be sure to have someone in your department read it for content and writing (and this would preferably be someone who has published): that objective pair of eyes will catch oversights and errors your subjective eyes won't. (5) Be sure to meet the submission deadline! (6) Having a piece rejected is common; don't be disheartened. Use any editor's comments as a guide to improve for future submissions. Let me know how you do!

BEST PRACTICES FOR CALLING STUDENTS

I "bought" into the habit of calling students only recently, and I find it very helpful in giving more detailed information on our subject (math), as well as getting to know

the students somewhat better. This latter has proven helpful in better understanding why a student is remiss in turning in an assignment, has not participated in a discussion forum, has poor grades, et cetera. I remember reading in one of your previous columns, Errol, that you are a big fan of chatting with students. Is there anything you can offer that might make my phone calls more productive?

Thanks for letting me know you read my columns; that's always nice to know :) And you are correct: I am a champion of phone calls to students; these can accomplish so much! Here are some tips and tricks that work for me: (1) Let students know you will be calling, and include your area code (some students might not answer a strange area code, thinking it a bill collector or scammer); (2) Look up the student's area code to find anything unusual, interesting, or noteworthy in the geographic area of the code: this info is a great icebreaker when first talking with a student; (2) Begin with an introduction, of course, but also letting the student know

you are interested in the student doing well in the course, and thus why the personal reach-out; (3) Always begin with some positive about the student's performance in the class (or if the student has been fully uninvolved mention how much you'd like to see the student in action); (4) Ask the student to rate his or her performance thus far in the course, then follow up with a "Why?" no matter if doing well or not so good; (5) Get into anything specific you'd like to cover; (6) Remind the student that everything in the course is connected to/helps in the professional job setting (and ask the student for an example from the student's major or job); (7) End with a positive, enthusiastic note, letting the student know you are always available for assistance. Following these steps will make that phone call one that is high quality and quite productive!

Remember! Baking powder helps a cake to rise, a guide keeps people on the trail, a bookmark locates the next words to be read—without added input life can often not be as easy as it could be.

Distance Education

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and International
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COLUMNS

- ▲ Ends and Means
- ▲ Try This
- ▲ Ask, Errol
- ▲ And Finally...

ARTICLES

- ▲ Problem-Solving Style and Distance Learning: Research and Practice
- ▲ Educating the Professional Millennial Student: What Is the Perfect "Blend"?
- ▲ Compass Learning: A New Alternative to Credit Retrieval
- ▲ Using Web 2.0 Tools for Feedback in the Classroom
- ▲ A Closer Look at Distance Learning in the Kansas City, Missouri School District
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- ▲ One of a Kind: A Hybrid Doctorate in Physical Therapy
- ▲ Go Ahead... Be Social: Using Social Media to Enhance the Twenty-First Century Classroom

Get Your Copy Today—Information Age Publishing

While the ad is cool, it is also a little eerie. The developers are all sitting around the same table within a few feet of each other and then they put their headsets on.

Vendors are crafty. They are particularly good at manufacturing uses for their products and excellent at promoting what they sell.

This is the point for distance educators—if a modern technology is important, then we need to see how the technology promotes learning and facilitates teaching. Instructional technology experts broadly, and distance educators specifically, should be studying VR to determine its educational applications.

The adoption and diffusion cycle for innovations, according to Rogers (2003) is:

1. Knowledge;
2. Persuasion;
3. Decision;
4. Implementation; AND
5. Confirmation.

For VR technology, the field of distance education is in the knowledge stage of the innovation-decision process. The field is trying to learn about VR—how it works and what it is.

Some in the field are also trying to determine the relative advantages of VR technology.

Relative advantage means determining to what degree does an innovation allow doing things better than the idea it supersedes?

For educators, there is another hurdle to overcome—the hurdle is called the Clark Phenomenon. The Clark Phenomenon is named after research scientist Richard Clark. It is a well-established principle that instructional technologies are “mere vehicles that do not influence achievement any more than the grocery truck influences nutrition.” Stated another way, what does VR educationally influence and how important is that influence.

So, we must get our Meta headsets, learn how they work, use them, and become comfortable with them (both physically, and educationally). They are hard to put on if you wear glasses.

Modern technologies, if adopted for distance education, should be carefully evaluated to determine if, and how much, they contribute to teaching and learning.

And finally, as Thoreau said, “Beware of enterprises that require new clothes.” For now, let’s play the VR game “Puzzling Places!” It is really neat!

REFERENCE

Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.) Free Press.