Penn State Online
Guidelines for Selecting an Instructor for an Online Course

As with a course that is taught in a traditional classroom environment, the online instructor is responsible for providing an educational atmosphere where students have the opportunity to achieve academic success in accordance with University, college, and departmental policies. Teaching in an online environment, however, can be considerably different in nature than teaching face-to-face. Most importantly, course content is typically developed in advance of the course's start date. In effect, the "lecturing" has already been done! This leaves the role of the online instructor to shift focus from "the sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side."

Like instructors who teach in the face-to-face classroom, online instructors are expected to be highly knowledgeable about the subject matter for the specific course that s/he is assigned to teach, and maintain content expertise in the subject area. When selecting an online instructor, one should also consider faculty who they feel would thrive in the online classroom.

There are many aspects that contribute to one's ability to be successful in the online classroom, as shown in the following list of competencies:

- Be aware of the unique learning needs and situations of both traditional age and adult learners, providing an educational experience that is appropriate for both
- Demonstrate sensitivity to disabilities and diversities including aspects of cultural, cognitive, emotional, and physical differences
- Attend to the unique challenges of distance learning where learners are separated by time and geographic proximity and interactions are primarily asynchronous in nature
- Promote and encourage a learning environment that is safe, inviting, and mutually respectful
- Support student success by promoting active and frequent dialog and interaction among all members of the class
- Possess excellent written and verbal skills (requesting writing samples is highly recommended)
- Manage time efficiently while handling a continuous workflow that includes responding to student inquiries and providing feedback on student work in a timely manner
- Monitor each student's progress toward course goals through active tracking, providing mediation and direction as needed
- Attend to student feedback and make adjustments to teaching style and course expectations where necessary
- Effectively mediate course-related student conflicts
- Be comfortable and competent with computer-based technology, including mastery of basic computer operations and the teaching and administrative aspects of the course's learning management system

This list can be used as a guideline when considering new online instructors. As part of the hiring process, one may want to consider requesting a portfolio of an individual's work to provide evidence of the above competencies. These items could also serve well as the basis for interview questions. In addition, it may be helpful to the interviewee to see copies of any contractual agreements that would ultimately govern the position, as well as examples of the type and quality of courses that they would be expected to teach.