

# Getting into teaching

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## Why do you want to teach?

- You have professional experience.
- You want to share it.
- You find that working with young writers and editors is rewarding.

## Things to think about:

- **Temperament:** You need to be patient, lively and prepared to explain the same concept several different ways, several times. This can include teaching software as well as skills and concepts.
- **Time:** Teaching is time-consuming outside of classroom hours. It's not just grading: You need to prepare lessons and exercises, and respond to student email. Know your limits: Balancing a full-time job, family and a class with heavy grading – or two classes – is tough.
- **Money:** You're not going to get rich doing this, but working as an adjunct can be a nice supplement to a full-time professional job. Teaching full-time at a reputable university won't leave you poor and can lead to consulting work and other income.

## How to get started as an adjunct:

- Understand the task. An adjunct is a part-time teacher who is not a graduate student teaching assistant. Often adjuncts are professionals in the field. They are paid by course and typically do not receive benefits such as health care, unlike full-time faculty.
- Determine what colleges, universities and community colleges are in your area.
- Determine what they offer in terms of journalism/communications/writing courses.
- What can you offer them? Think about what you'd *like to* teach, and what you *can* teach (these two categories will probably not overlap entirely).
- Express an interest in teaching via Twitter and your LinkedIn account. Have a digital presence.
- Be flexible at first. If you accept a course you're only lukewarm about and teach well, you're likely to get re-hired. As you build a reputation, you may get better courses.
- Who do you know? Can you talk to acquaintances connected to colleges and let them know you're interested in adjunct work?
- Nightside schedules often allow for more flexibility for teaching.

## Preparing a course:

- **Writing a syllabus:** Many departments have specific rules about what must be included on a syllabus, such as grading scales and policies on attendance, academic dishonesty and accommodations. Make sure you include that, as well as any expectations you have of the your students. You may also want to include a schedule for the term.
- **Gathering materials:** Real-life examples are always good, and, thanks to the Internet, are easy to come by. You'll have colleagues (at the university and/or through ACES) who have exercises and examples they're willing to share – use them as a resource!

- **Choosing a textbook(s):** You may be given a specific textbook to use, or you may be able to choose your own materials. Often, a collection of shorter books and online materials can be more flexible (and less expensive for students).
- **Creating exercises:** Keep in mind when creating exercises that students like to have a clear idea of what they're supposed to do, so every exercise should include directions.

### **What to expect in the classroom:**

- Teaching is performance: You need to be engaging and entertaining as well as knowledgeable.
- Don't assume that because students are "digital natives" that they know everything about software or apps. This may include teaching them basic InDesign and WordPress skills.
- Learn about the students on the first day of class. Where are they from? Career goals?
- Use current news events as teaching tools – they're great fodder for discussions on verification, ethics, kinds of language, etc. Don't assume that students know what's going on in the world.

### **Finding a full-time position:**

- Lecturers vs. tenure track: There's a big difference.
- Degrees: Do I need a Ph.D.? A master's?
- Experience: How much and what kind of professional experience is required?

### **The tenure process:**

- Teaching: Variety and level of courses taught
- Service: Committees, advising, etc.
- Creative activity/research: Usually publications in peer-reviewed journals, but not always.

### **What to expect in academic bureaucracy:**

- Academics from outside your curriculum area will more than likely pass judgment on you for tenure and promotion. Their academic viewpoint will be peer-reviewed publication research as the sole criteria for tenure and promotion. The degree to which you will have to deal with this outside viewpoint will vary with the institution.
- The debate over professional experience vs. publication research credit for mass communication professors has been ongoing for decades. If you are aiming for a tenure-track position, research each institution thoroughly for specific tenure and promotion guidelines.
- If you are aiming for a lecturer/adjunct position, all bets are off as far as academic research is concerned. The emphasis is on teaching effectiveness and (perhaps) service such as advising student organizations, judging contests, etc.

### **Tips for success:**

- Be prepared for a lot of prep work with new classes, even if you're given a syllabus.
- Be ready to update your syllabus and assignments each semester. Our field is moving quickly.
- Let your professional experience work for you – you know so much more than any book. Students appreciate real-world advice, especially as it pertains to finding and keeping a job.
- Make friends with the department administrative assistant. This is the person who will help you through red tape and glitches.
- Have fun – teaching is rewarding on multiple levels!

