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Read first, think second, ask third. This has been the theme of my classroom for as long as I can remember. I don't remember where I found this very simplistic statement, but it speaks volumes.

As a business and technology teacher for 25 years, I've evolved. From typewriters and shorthand to Moodle and Web 2.0, I and my students have evolved. Literacy, however, has always been the mainstay in my classroom just as it has been from the beginning of time in any classroom--reading first.

The crux for me came just two years ago as an epiphany. I wanted to offer our high school's first 100 percent online class. My mission was to give our students an opportunity to experience online learning . . . to put their reading and writing skills to the ultimate test . . . to help them to realize their online learning potential before graduating from high school . . . to give them a taste of what learning will be like for them when they enter the "real world" . . . to put them in complete control of their own literacy and knowledge . . . to set them on a course for life-long learning.

How I was going to go about developing and reaching my goal, at the time, I had no clue. So I reached out to my "network" and hit pay dirt when exposed to Moodle. This would be our venue; this would put me on the road to my mission; this became my passion. After nine months of learning, researching, developing, revising, alpha testing, and beta testing, my course was complete and ready for the taking. My students would be put to the ultimate test of their reading comprehension skills and fluent writing literacy. They would embark on their first online learning experience.

When the course “went live” at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, 33 students had Introduction to Business Online listed at the top of their schedules, worth ½ credit and no time slot allotted. The learning was going to take place at the discretion of the student; each would decide when and where they would come to this virtual learning environment in Moodle. Each student enrolled in this class would be in the driver’s seat with the controls well in hand. Comprehensive reading and fluent writing as their fuel for success, 30 of the 33 initially enrolled students successfully completed the class during the school year. Very, very cool.

At the same time the course “went live,” I have to admit I was overcome with a feeling of anxiety. This was a completely different educational setting for both me and the students. Although not directly face-to-face with the students, my vital role as facilitator in this online class was very important. The online course facilitator can make or break a virtual learning experience. I needed to be high-quality. I needed to direct my students to be comprehensive readers and fluid writers as we all discover and learn asynchronously. This is not a task to be taken lightly.

In the now-web world deemed as read/write, e-learning opportunities are in abundance. Kids today need and expect technology, the internet, and the world wide web to be part of their world, both in and out of school. When they hear the word “research” in their history class, their minds directly think “Google.” When they are faced with learning about something new, students today rely on their internet connection to find an answer. Kids today are connected . . . they socialize, network, stay in touch, and thrive with their technological gadgets. This all requires literacy . . .

reading and writing with purpose. Although completely simplistic and elemental, they will read first, think second, and ask third.