

# Careers in Instructional Design

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	1
Common Job Duties	2
Common Required Skills	2
How Graduate Skills Translate	2
Possible Job Titles	3
Steps You Can Take to Prepare	3
Finding Job Postings	4
Applying for Positions	4
Interviewing for Positions	4
Resources for Further Study	5

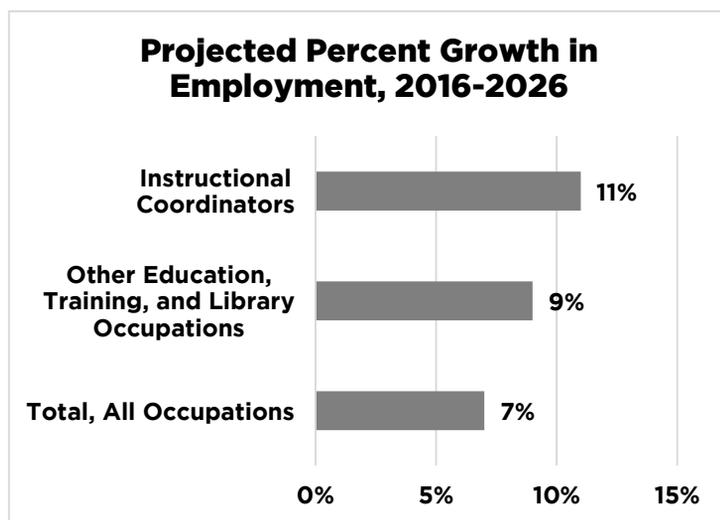


**UCHICAGO GRAD**

Helping you navigate your graduate and postdoctoral career

## OVERVIEW

Instructional designers specialize in educational curriculum design and implementation. They are pedagogical specialists informed by theories of learning, teaching, and assessment who work in a variety of academic, nonprofit, and commercial settings. They might work with faculty members to create online versions of college courses, or they may consult with leading companies to develop employee training materials. Many of the best instructional designers started their careers as teachers, so if you enjoy teaching and curriculum design, this may be a career for you.



According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment outlook for instructional designers is strong, with an 11 percent increase in positions expected between 2016 and 2026. The median annual wage was \$63,750 in 2017. UChicago graduate students and postdocs will also be glad to know that many hiring managers prefer instructional designers with graduate degrees.



## COMMON JOB DUTIES

- Develop and coordinate the implementation of curricula
- Assess student needs and discuss the implementation of appropriate pedagogical strategies with teachers or clients
- Review and recommend textbooks, guides, and other educational materials
- Recommend teaching techniques and the use of various technologies
- Plan, organize, and conduct client or employee trainings
- Analyze student data and test scores to assess learning
- Train teachers and other instructional staff in new content or programs
- Mentor or coach teachers to improve their skills

*Adapted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics “[What Instructional Coordinators Do](#),” 2017.*

## COMMON REQUIRED SKILLS

- Teaching skills, especially the ability to design and execute curricula
- Strong curiosity and an ability to quickly learn new things
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Strong project management skills
- Strong problem solving skills
- Some visual design skills
- Ability to work independently as well as collaboratively with others
- Knack for building relationships with teachers or clients
- Knowledge of or willingness to learn course development applications & tools (e.g. Lectora Inspire, Articulate Storyline)
- Working knowledge of WebEx or other tools used for synchronous learning
- Familiarity with MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint

## HOW DO GRADUATE SKILLS TRANSLATE TO INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN?

Instructional design is a great fit for advanced-degree candidates, especially Ph.D. candidates with teaching experience. Your background in course design, syllabus development, and instructional technology puts you on solid footing toward this career.

The best-positioned candidates have a broad range of teaching experiences and pedagogical practices. They have used technology in the classroom, and they are familiar with blended teaching environments and course management tools such as Canvas or Blackboard. They are also good at analyzing student needs, clarifying learning goals, and selecting appropriate learning tools or methods.

Beyond teaching, advanced-degree candidates bring several other useful skills and habits of mind to instructional design. As a result of having to throw yourself into new subjects and quickly get up to speed, you are likely good at learning new things. This will be an asset when working with clients or professors to design learning materials for subjects in which you are a novice. Because you’ve managed complex research projects, you have experience with problem solving, communication, and project management.



UChicago advanced-degree candidates will not be the only applicants competing for instructional design positions, of course. Job seekers with M.A. and Ph.D. degrees directly in the field of instructional design are a natural fit, as are job seekers with degrees in education, composition and rhetoric, and other pedagogy-focused courses of study. UChicago applicants with research degrees will need to articulate exactly how you have built your own pedagogical practice outside the bounds of your narrow field. You'll also need to have a compelling reason (a "pull" factor) that explains why you are moving from being a burgeoning academic to being an instructional designer.

## POSSIBLE JOB TITLES

- Instructional Designer or Coordinator
- Curriculum Developer
- Educational Support Coordinator
- Educational Technology Specialist
- Assistant Director, Educational Technology
- Corporate Trainer
- Training and Development Specialist
- Academic Technology Specialist
- Assistant Director of eLearning Development
- Distance Learning Specialist
- Learning Director
- Educational Technologist
- Curriculum Specialist

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS CAREER

- Teach often and in different formats. Experiment with adult education by teaching a course at the Graham School, or experiment with online education by applying to teach an online course at another university.
- Take advantage of the pedagogical training offered by the Chicago Center for Teaching. Consider becoming a CCT Teaching Fellow to gain experience educating other teachers.
- Attend Canvas training and other sessions offered by Academic Technology Solutions.
- Develop an online teaching portfolio.
- Schedule informational interviews with professionals working in the field.
- Attend a conference for instructional design professionals, or read online about trends in the field (see the list of associations and resources at the end of this guide).
- Take an online course to experience instructional design from a student's vantage point.



## FINDING JOB POSTINGS

- [Instructional Technology and Design Page](#) at HigherEdJobs.com
- [Job Board](#) at the Association for Educational Communications and Technology
- [Job Board](#) at the Association for Talent Development
- [Job Board](#) at the Int. Soc. for Technology in Education
- [Job Board](#) at InstructionalDesign.org
- [Job Board](#) at ELearningIndustry.com
- Using the “possible job titles” on the previous page as keywords, search common industry job sites, such as [Glassdoor](#), [Indeed](#), [Monster](#), and [LinkedIn](#)

## APPLYING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN POSITIONS

You’ll need a resume and cover letter to apply to instructional design positions, and these documents should prioritize your teaching experience over your research experience (unless your research is directly relevant to education or e-learning). Using the job advertisement as a guide, discuss your experience with college-level teaching and syllabus design in terms that would be familiar to the hiring manager. For instance, you might refer to your classes as “modules” if that word appears often in the job advertisement. You may also wish to emphasize any previous experiences with teamwork or administration. Above all, identify yourself as a generalist, rather than a specialist in one academic subject.

For some instructional design positions, you may also need to provide work samples. You can find examples of online instructional design portfolios via [this e-Learning article](#). These portfolios differ from the digital teaching portfolios that you might develop for the academic job market. Instructional design portfolios often use case studies to demonstrate your design process, laying out a learning challenge, the solution that you developed, and the results of your intervention.

## INTERVIEWING FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN POSITIONS

Interviews for instructional design (ID) positions typically involve behavioral questions:

- Tell me about yourself. Have you worked as anything other than an ID?
- What is your design process?
- What kinds of deliverables have you produced?
- Tell me about a recent project.
- How will you ensure that you can work effectively with subject matter experts?
- What experience do you have in a collaborative environment?
- How do you measure the success of your course design?



- How do you measure the success of your course design?
- Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge during an e-Learning project?
- How proficient are you with tools such as Captivate, Blackboard, Flash, and Breeze?
- How does your design address different learning abilities and styles?
- How do you stay informed about innovations in the field?

Adapted from “[Top 12 Interview Questions to Ask Instructional Designers](#),” “[How to Get Prepared for E-Learning Job Interview Questions](#),” and “[Tips on Interviewing Instructional Designers](#).”

## Resources for Further Study

### Professional Associations

- Association for Educational Communications and Technology (<https://www.aect.org/>)
- Online Learning Consortium (<https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/>)
- Association for Talent Development (<https://www.td.org/>)
- International Society for Technology in Education (<https://www.iste.org/>)
- The eLearning Guild (<https://www.elearningguild.com/>)
- United States Distance Learning Association (<https://usdla.org/>)
- International Society for Performance Improvement (<https://www.ispi.org/>)
- EDUCAUSE (<https://www.educause.edu/>)
- HASTAC: Humanities, Arts, Science, and Tech. Alliance and Collab. (<https://www.hastac.org/>)

### Personal Narratives

- Versatile Ph.D. provides narratives and job documents from academics who pursued careers in instructional design. Log into [GRAD Gargoyle](#) and click “Versatile Ph.D.” in the quick links. Then click the “E-Learning and Instructional Design” tab within the Ph.D. Career Finder.

### Campus Connections

- Chicago Center for Teaching (<https://teaching.uchicago.edu>)
- Academic Technology Solutions (<https://academictech.uchicago.edu/>)

### Publications

- *Training Magazine: The Source for Professional Development* (<https://trainingmag.com/>)
- *The American Journal of Distance Education* (<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hajd20>)
- Kathryn E. Linder, *The Blended Online Course Design Workbook*, 2016.
- Marjorie Vai & Kristen Sosulski, *Essentials of Online Course Design: A Standards-Based Guide*, 2015.
- William J. Rothwell and Bud Bencoter, *Mastering the Instructional Design Process: A Systematic Approach*, 2015.
- Julie Dirksen, *Design for How People Learn* (2nd Edition), 2015.
- Robert A. Reiser & John V. Dempsey, *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology* (4th Edition), 2017.

