

Tips for Taking Online Classes

Student Success Workshop

Types of Distance Learning

- o Distance learning occurs outside of the traditional classroom setting. These classes may take place over the internet (i.e. WebCT) or you may utilize a stored media format (i.e. video tape). In either instance, you are responsible for the material you are learning.
- o Online learning provides greater flexibility, but also requires good time management skills and self-motivation for successful completion. Taking an online class requires just as much time and effort (sometimes more) than taking a class in the traditional classroom setting.

Technology Considerations

- o Before deciding to take an online class, students should be comfortable using a computer for completing their assignments, doing research on the internet, and conducting synchronous communication (participating in a live chat) and asynchronous communication (posting comments to a discussion board).
- o Although owning a personal computer is not mandatory, it is a good idea. If a student does not own his/her own computer, it is advantageous to have access to one several times per week.
- o High-speed access is not necessary, but the faster the connection speed, the faster material will download, and the less you will have to wait to continue with your assignment.





Students should have the following word processing skills:

- Create and save a document in different formats
- Copy-and-paste or cut-and-paste from one source to another
- Change size, style and color of font
- Set margins and page orientation
- Use spelling, grammar and thesaurus functions
- Add page numbers, headers and footers in a document
- Create and/or import tables
- Use a printer

**Students must have an email address
and have the following email skills:**

- Send and receive emails with attachments.
- Forward and reply to emails (There is a difference!).
- Create an email group and send messages to it.

Online students should have the following discussion skills:

- Post messages to a discussion board.**
- Post messages with attachments to a discussion board.**
- Log onto and participate in a synchronous chat room.**

Online students should have the following Internet skills:

- Visit sites by use of hyperlink or URL**
- Move forward and backward through sites**
- Create and use bookmarks or "favorites"**
- Use a search engine**
- Download files from the Web**

Is Distance Learning right for You?

Distance learning may not suit every student's needs, expectations, or learning style. Not everyone enjoys a distance learning format. To determine if distance learning would work for you, answer the following questions to yourself:

1. Do you like to work independently?
2. Are you comfortable working at a computer?
3. Are you motivated to keep yourself up to date on assignments and projects?
4. Do you need the convenience of an adjustable schedule?
5. Are you comfortable asking for clarification and continuing to ask when you need more information?
6. Are you comfortable working primarily with a text-based medium?
7. Would you be comfortable phoning or faxing your instructor if you had problems with anything in the course?

Is Distance Learning right for you?

- o If you answered "yes" to most of those questions, then you should do well in the distance learning environment. If you hesitated, be certain to keep in touch with your progress.
- o Many students find that they are not cut out for distance learning. They do not work well independently, they may constantly find themselves falling behind, or they just feel lost without the traditional experience of a classroom.
- o Just because distance learning is not for you, *does not mean that you are a bad student!* It may be that your individual learning style is not conducive to distance learning.

Tips as you are getting started . . .

- o Buy your books right away and, if possible, start reading before your class begins.
- o Before your course begins, you should be notified of all pertinent information concerning logging into the website, etc. Be sure to log in and look around immediately. If you delay at all, you can easily start to procrastinate and feel behind before you even start.
- o E-mail the teacher and introduce yourself. This will let you feel more a part of a class.
- o Most likely, you'll be participating in moderated online discussions via a message board. They usually require that you make one post, and then respond to one or more other posts. Be SURE to make your initial post at the beginning of the week, so others (including the instructor) can respond to you. You'll learn from the feedback and, again, you'll feel more apart of a class. Once that week is up, no one ever goes back to that thread.

Tips as you are getting started . . .

- o Plan on spending anywhere from 8-15 hours a week on your course, depending on the program.
- o Apply what you are learning into your classroom right away! This way, you can discuss concerns with your instructor for feedback.
- o Find a quiet study area. Study in a quiet area without distractions. Turn off telephones, cell phones, pagers, and televisions (unless studying televised educational programming). If using your computer while connected online, turn off email and IM programs. If you don't have a quiet place to study at home, consider a public library.
- o Do not fall into the pit of procrastination. Even students with the best intentions may lose inspiration and motivation at some time during the semester.

Now that you have begun your class . . .

Remember that reading is key. You won't have all those non-verbal cues that you get in the physical classroom and neither will your instructor. Also, your instructor's role will be less like the distributor of information, and much more like a guide or resource for you in exploring an area of knowledge. Almost all your information will come in the form of words. The teaching style used in online courses may be different from the traditional college model. Taking a class online means you won't be sitting quietly in the classroom; participation is even more essential.

Effective communication is critical to success. Communication is even more important in the online environment because your instructor can't see your frown, or hear the question in your voice. Here, you'll be responsible for initiating more contact, for being persistent and vocal when you don't understand something. Your instructor wants to help – be sure to contact your instructor with any questions. Express your confusion, your concern, and be direct!

Participate. In the online environment, it's not enough to show up, **you** are responsible for your learning. The student must discover the information by doing his/her own research. Your comments and participation in chats (online discussions) are needed to feel your presence and add to the information, the shared learning, and the sense of community in each class.

Now that you have begun your class . . .

- **Be persistent.** If you run into any difficulties, don't wait! Contact the instructor immediately. Most problems are easily solved, but you need to voice your concerns when you need help.
- **Ask questions.** For many, taking online courses is a new frontier. There are no dumb questions, and even if you think your solution is obvious, please share it! Someone in the class will appreciate it.
- **Think before you push the Send button.** Did you say just what you meant? How will the person on the other end read the words? While you can't anticipate all reactions, do read over what you've written before you send it.
- **Be patient.** As much as your instructor will try to be prompt in answering questions, please do not expect instantaneous responses to your queries.
- **Plagiarism, cheating and other violations** of unethical student behavior are serious actions in a learning community.
- **If distance learning feels too distant,** the best medicine is to go online and see if other classmates are online at that time. Many courses have chat rooms where you can chat with others who are online at the same time. Many courses will form groups for projects, however, if this is not the case, try to make a friend in the class.

Information retrieved from:

- o <http://dl.austincc.edu/students/Step2DistanceLearning.htm>
- o <http://www.coolmath.com/continuing-ed/tips4onlinestudents.html>
- o <http://distance-ed.math.tamu.edu/tipsforonline.htm>
- o <http://www.shucpsonline.org/Succeed.htm>