

**Are you curious about what to expect from an online course? Then read these...**

## **Tips for Being a Successful Online Learner**

In general, online learners should strive to possess the following qualities:

### **Be open-minded about sharing educational experiences as part of the learning process.**

Introverts as well as extroverts find that online learning requires them to utilize their experiences. This forum for communication eliminates the visual barriers that hinder some individuals in expressing themselves. In addition, the learner is given time to reflect on the information before responding.

### **Be able to communicate through writing.**

In the virtual classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that learners feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing.

### **Be self-motivated and self-disciplined.**

With the freedom and flexibility of the online environment comes responsibility. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the flow of the process. The learner must be able to meet deadlines without constant reminders from the instructor.

### **Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.**

Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether learners are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the online arena. If a learner is experiencing difficulty on any level (either with the technology or with the course content), he/she must communicate this immediately. Otherwise, the instructor will never know what is wrong.

**Be willing and able to commit adequate time per week to the course.**

Online is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many learners say it requires more time and commitment.

**Be able to meet the minimum requirements for the program.**

The requirements for online courses are no less than that of a face-to-face course. The successful learner will view online as a convenient way to receive their education, not an easier way.

**Have access to a computer and the Internet.**

The communication medium is a computer, phone line, and modem; the learner must have access to the necessary equipment.

**Be able to think ideas through before responding.**

Meaningful and quality input into the virtual classroom is an essential part of the learning process. Time is given in the process to allow for the careful consideration of responses. The testing and challenging of ideas is encouraged; you will not always be right, just be prepared to accept a challenge.

**Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom.** If the learner feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, he/she may be more comfortable in the traditional classroom. Online learning is not necessarily for everybody. An online learner should expect to:

- Participate in the virtual classroom daily
- Respond to classmates' ideas and questions
- Be able to use the technology properly
- Be able to complete assignments on time
- Enjoy communicating in writing

The online learning process is normally accelerated and requires **commitment** on the learner's part. Staying up with the class and completing all work on time is vital. Once a learner gets behind, it is very difficult to catch up. Basically, the learner needs to want to be there, and needs to want the experience.

## More Tips for Success...

### **Participate!**

Contribute your ideas, perspective, and comments on the subject you are studying, and read about those of your classmates. Your instructor is not the only source of information in your course--you can gain great insight from your peers and they can learn from you as well.

### **Elicit the support of your family.**

Seek the support of your colleagues, family, and friends before you start out on your online adventure. This built-in support system will help you tremendously since there will be times when you will have to sit at your computer for hours at a stretch in the evenings and on weekends. It helps to surround yourself with people who understand and respect what you are trying to do.

### **Seek out a private space where you can study.**

This will help lend importance to what you are doing as well. Your own space where you can shut the door, leave papers laying around, and work in peace is necessary. If you try to share study space with the dining room or bedroom, food or sleep might take priority over studying.

### **Log on to your course every single day.**

....or a minimum of 3-5 days a week during long semesters. Once you get into the online system, you will be eager to see

who has commented on your postings and read the feedback of your instructor and peers. You will also be curious to see who has posted something new that you can comment on. If you let too many days go by without logging on to your course, you will get behind and find it very difficult to catch up

### **Take advantage of your anonymity.**

One of the biggest advantages of the online format is that you can pursue your studies without the judgments typical in a traditional classroom. Unless you are using video conferencing, no one can see you--there are no stereotypes and you don't have to be affected by raised eyebrows, rolled eyeballs, other students stealing your thunder, or people making other non-verbal reactions to your contributions. You don't have to feel intimidated or upstaged by classmates who can speak faster than you because you can take all of the time you need to think your ideas through and compose a response before posting your comments to your class.

### **Be polite and respectful.**

Just because you are anonymous, doesn't mean you should let yourself go. Remember, you are dealing with real people.. Being polite and respectful is not only common sense, it is absolutely obligatory for a productive and supportive online environment. In a positive online environment, you will feel valued by your instructor, valued by your classmates, and your own work will have greater value as well.