How to be Successful in Online Learning

Congratulations! You have committed to your online program and as you may know, online learning is a growing method of achieving a degree. Online or distance learning is an invaluable alternative for busy professionals to advance their training and/or degree level or switch career paths. In recent years, the student profile has expanded to include younger and older students alike. The traditional, on-ground College or University is here to stay; however, the virtual classroom option is an integral part of today’s learning experience.

The online classroom does require a different skill set than the traditional on-ground class. Please be sure to seriously consider these tips and skills which have helped many online students be successful.

**Personal Skills Needed:**

- **Written Communication:** In an online class, the majority of the communication is written. This requires a comfort level with written materials and directions in order to be able to freely express your thoughts and opinions in writing.

- **Proper Expectations for the Course:** Expect your online course to be just as rigorous as any face-to-face course and may possibly require more time and commitment. Taking courses online is more convenient for your schedule in that you do not have to come to a classroom at a specific time, but not an easier way to get a degree.

- **Self-motivation and self-discipline:** Your online course makes it possible for you to attend class when you choose which gives you much more flexibility, but also much more responsibility. To be successful in your online courses you must have a good sense of commitment and self-discipline to keep up with the course and complete assignments on time. Time management is essential.

- **Open to Communicating about Yourself:** You will need to be willing to actively and openly participate in your online courses. This means interacting with classmates and your instructor through discussion groups, email, chat rooms and web conferencing. The online class gives you a certain anonymity that the face-to-face class does not, and because you are using written communication, many feel they are able to give their opinion in a less competitive atmosphere.

- **Computer Skills:** In order to be able to complete your course successfully, you will need a basic level of computer knowledge. You should have a working ability with the following skills:
  - create, save, copy, move and manage files and; directories on a computer
  - run applications on a computer when needed for a course
The following skills may also be needed:
- customize your browser
- download software
- install software
- register for email and discussion forums, webinars
- complete online forms

Additional information for Tech requirements will be found in the Rules of the Road section of this orientation.

- **Belief in Online Learning:** The debate concerning where one will get a quality education between a face-to-face or online class continues. You need to be a champion of distance learning and truly believe that a high quality education can be achieved in an online environment without having to be physically in a classroom. When you share the benefits of online learning you will strengthen your own validation of your program.
- **Get Your Books:** Go to the [CU Bookstore](https://www.creighton.edu/bluetrain/) online, to purchase your course materials.

**The Course Begins, Now What?**

- **Log In:** Your first step is to log in to check that your NetId works and to find resources you will need, such as [N.E.S.T.](https://www.creighton.edu/doit.creighton.edu/) a 24/7 self-service web site for registration, student records, financial aid information, etc.
- **Check that Syllabus:** The syllabus in your course will contain all the information you need to successfully complete your class, including the course description, the outcomes, course requirements, assignments and testing, any media and technology use, and contact information.
- **Set up a Workspace:** Find a space that is distraction free and private where you can study. This is your own studying space where you can close the door, leave your books and papers, and work undisturbed. Using the kitchen or bedroom can lead to food.
and/or sleep distractions. If there isn’t a room just for you, find a place or container to store your materials and set parameters with others that this is your study time, please no interruptions.

- **Time Management:** This is a very important part of your online experience. You won’t have that face-to-face class to attend two to three days a week. You should commit to a **minimum** of 10 hours per week for each course, depending upon your program requirements. You should plan to spend as much time, if not more, for your online course as you would for a face-to-face course. Add that to juggling family and work, you will need some of the following time management tips.
  - You have read the syllabus with all the assignments and due dates. Set aside enough time to do the course work. Try to divide the time up throughout the week so you do not try to accomplish everything in two days.
  - Log in to your course every day. You may not have an assignment every day, but checking in and reading any new posts will keep you connected to the course, the instructor and the other students in your learning community.
  - Set up and stick to a study schedule. This should be the time that you will only work on your course. Avoid distractions such as email, social networks, and phone and family activities. If you find you are missing the study time too much, look in to a better study time without all the distractions.
  - Create a calendar of all due dates. This can be in an app on your phone like “Evernote” that will send you reminders or as basic as a dry erase or post it calendar that you hang on the wall in your study area.
  - Find a way to balance family, work and studying. The calendar with your due dates could also include your family’s schedules.

- **Participate:** Once you have logged in and introduced yourself to your instructor and classmates, you will want to actively participate in your course. Give your ideas about topics you are reading and discussing. Read your classmates posts. They may give you a new perspective that will help you learn more and develop your critical thinking skills when preparing your response to the discussions.

- **Attitude:** You do have a certain amount of anonymity which does make it easier to have your voice heard in discussions, but remember to be polite and respectful. Your classmates prefer a productive and supportive environment in which to learn just as you do. Read the netiquette policy in this orientation to learn and use the guidelines for behavior online. Remember your classmates are people with feelings and goals to do well in the course as well.

- **Assignments:** You will have various forms of assignments in your courses. Read the directions carefully and speak up if you do not understand them. Send an email to your instructor or contact others in your course or cohort to see if they are experiencing any difficulties with the assignment. Make sure all assignments are completed on time (use the assignment calendar mentioned above) as well as other requirements (e.g.
discussions). If you need to do research be sure to use the Creighton Libraries http://clic.creighton.edu/. The online student writing center can help with writing assignments http://succeed.creighton.edu/node/209. Take notes as you read your assignments and be sure to do all assignments on your word processor and then post them to Blueline2. Download and back-up articles, information and assignments from your courses in organized files. You will be happy you took the time to do this from the beginning and not have to agonize over the search for assignments that could be technologically misplaced a year or so post course.

- **Know multi-media:** Your online classes will use various interactive features such as forums, video conferencing, message boards, Google tools, and podcasts. Knowing how to use these will be essential to your success. If you need assistance with any of these tools, use the technology resources listed in this orientation.

- **Computer or Internet Issues:** Be patient when you have computer or internet problems. Contact the university’s Student Service Center http://doit.creighton.edu/. They will try to help you with any difficulties you have, but remember they can only take care of issues with the university’s hardware/software. They should be able to inform you if it is an issue on your side, but they cannot fix your computer. If the internet is crawling or there is an LMS issue, now would be a good time to take a break or read from a book or a downloaded article.

Just remember to stay active in your course, stay on top of your assignments and try not to allow yourself to get behind with your assignments. Enjoy your success with your online courses.

**REFERENCES:**


“Tips for Online Success” Illinois Online Network http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/tips.asp

“What Makes a Successful Online Student?” Illinois Online Network http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/StudentProfile.asp