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Success in Online Professional Development: Tips for Learners



Tip 1: Make a realistic assessment of your skills before you start an online class.

- Are you an independent learner? Success in online classes requires that you be a self-starter, that you are motivated, and that you generally see tasks through to completion.



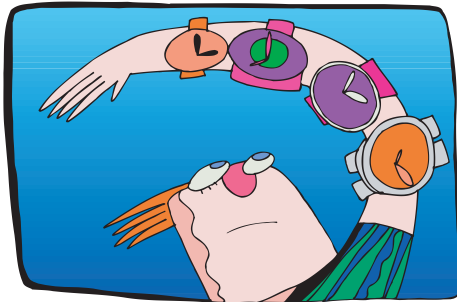
- Are you a good problem solver? Online classes present different challenges than face-to-face classes, but challenges nonetheless. What will you do if your hard-drive crashes during the course? What will you do if your ISP isn't available the day an assignment is due? How can you complete group work when you don't know anyone in the class?
- Are your computer skills up to par? You will have more enjoyment and more success if you can concentrate on the course content without worrying about how to perform the inevitable technical tasks. Take the self-assessment survey at http://www.ivytech.edu/distance/orientation/orientation_skills/tech/

Tip 2: Be well-equipped with technology tools. "To do good work, one must have good tools." This Chinese proverb sums it up well.

- Online students need an email account and a dependable Internet Service Provider (ISP).
- Consider high-speed Internet access—especially if your course will have a lot of graphics, video files, or require online interactivity such as learning games or synchronous chats.
- Be absolutely certain you have access to the required software and a reliable computer that meets the minimum requirements for the online class.

Tip 6: Practice effective help-seeking strategies.

- If you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it.
- If you are puzzled about content or an assignment, ask other students or the instructor.
- If you're in need of technical support, be prepared to give details about the problem—what you were doing, what happened and what tools you are using (computer platform and operating system, browser and version, etc.) so others can efficiently help you.



Tip 7: Time management skills are crucial. Know the deadlines and meet them.

- Keep a calendar.
- Mark due dates for major projects and assignments.
- Schedule enough time to complete your tasks and include some extra time in case you run into problems.

Tip 8: Devise a plan to backup and archive your work.

- “My computer crashed” is the digital equivalent to “My dog ate my homework!” Don't use that excuse.
- Backup and archive your work so a computer crash is merely an annoying inconvenience and not a major catastrophe.
- When you email or post an assignment, send a copy to yourself. That way you will have evidence that it was sent and when. File these until the class is over.

“Know why you are taking the course and remind yourself of your goals from time to time. Celebrate your successes. Reward yourself.”

~ Bruce Melnor
Performance Learning Systems



Resources

How Stuff Works

(<http://www.howstuffworks.com/>)

This site explains such mysteries as the Internet, media players, hardware, email, search engines, online degrees, and scads more. Visit their searchable website to learn more.

Journal of an Online Student

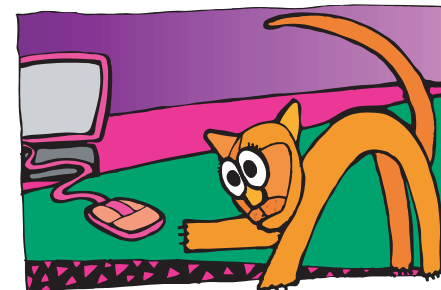
(<http://www.america-tomorrow.com/Chalmers/journal.html>)

What's it like to take online courses? That's a great question and every online student probably has a unique answer to offer. Read about Ron Chalmers' journey to a Master's in Educational Technology in his five-part journal.

Mind Tools

(<http://www.mindtools.com/>)

The Mind Tools' website offers techniques on a variety of topics including stress management, time management, project planning, creativity strategies, and many others.



Multi-state Online Professional Development Toolkit

(<http://www.sreb.org/programs/EdTech/toolkit/onlineindex.asp>)

Created by SREB, the MOPD Toolkit offers ideas for developing online courses, teaching online, and learning online. MOPD Toolkit helps states and school districts learn more about the required technologies for the online professional development initiatives and illustrations of best practices. There are also links to additional resources.

Paragon Learning Style Inventory

(http://www.oswego.edu/Acad_Dept/s_of_educ/curr/plsi/)

This self-administered tool offers “a window into learning style and cognitive preference” for ages 9 and up. The website provides information about the PLSI and explains how to take the survey.

Pink Flamingo’s Resource Lists

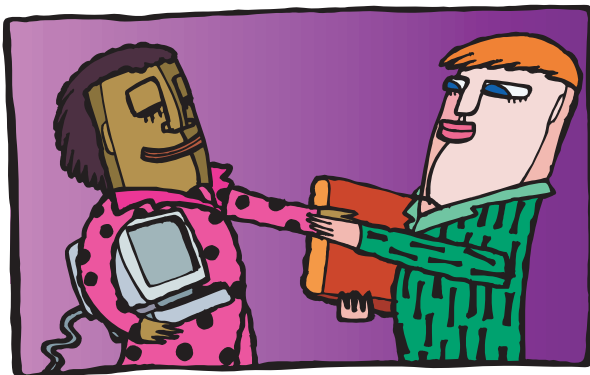
(<http://www.ibritt.com/resources/>)

This useful website offers links to dictionaries, thesauri, searches, technical information, and a variety of resources for both online students and online instructors.

Student Online Readiness Tool

(<http://www.alt.usg.edu/sort/index.html>)

Created for the University System of Georgia, this tool addresses many of the questions you should be asking yourself if you’re thinking about earning a degree online.



Helpful Habits for Online Students

Tip 3: Log in to the course early and often.

- Familiarize yourself with the course and know where you can find assignments, protocols, and resources.
- Check back frequently so you don’t miss important announcements and don’t make avoidable mistakes.

Tip 4: Establish a class routine.

- Make a study plan. Just as you make time to go to a face-to-face class, do the homework, visit the library, you must make time for an online class.
- Set up a comfortable, well-equipped, and well-lit study area.
- Set aside an interruption-free study time. Turn off your email alarm and the ringer on your phone. Make a “Do Not Disturb” sign if necessary.

Tip 5: Communicate!

- In the online environment, most of your communication will be through reading and writing.
- If it’s important to read the directions in a face-to-face class, it’s doubly important online.
- Read course materials and instructions for assignments very carefully to save yourself (and your instructor!) needless aggravation.
- Regularly read your email so others in class can get in touch with you.
- Read discussion board or forum postings by other students to fully participate in the online conversation. Be certain your own postings make meaningful contributions to discussions.
- Review netiquette rules so you represent yourself in the best way possible.

