

What Makes A Successful Online Student?

The general rules:

- **Written communication abilities:** In an online course, almost all communication is written. Therefore, you need to be comfortable with written materials and directions. It is also essential that you feel comfortable expressing your thoughts and opinions in writing.
- **Self-motivation and self-discipline:** Success in online courses requires commitment and discipline. Because you will not be sitting in a classroom on a regular basis, you must be self-directed and conscientious about completing assignments. Good time management is an important factor in your success as an online student.
- **Willingness to contribute:** As an online student, you should be willing to actively participate in your class. Active participation means interacting with your instructor and classmates regularly. You should feel comfortable using email, discussion groups, and chat rooms to communicate with your classmates.
- **Expectations for the course:** Do not expect that an online course will be easier than a face-to-face course. Requirements for online courses are no less rigorous than those of any other course and may even require more time and commitment. You should view your online course as a convenient way to receive your education, but not an easier way.
- **Computer Skills:** A basic level of computer skills will enhance your learning and help you complete your course successfully. You should have a working knowledge of the following computer skills to be successful in an online environment:
 - create, save, copy, move and manage files and directories on a computer
 - run applications on a computer when needed for a course
 - use a browser, e.g. Netscape or Internet Explorer, including navigational tools such as the "Back" button, bookmarks/favorites, etc.
 - use a search engine to conduct research on the Internet
 - send and receive email
 - send and receive a file attachment from email
 - paste text into an email message (e.g. from a Word processor)
 - describe any problems accurately to technical support (e.g. write down error messages)

In addition to these skills, you may also need to:

- customize your browser
- download software
- install software
- register for email and discussion forums

- complete forms online

Software and hardware help sheets can be found in the documentation section of the University's Technology Web site at www.technology.pitt.edu/documentation.html.

- **Confidence in Online Learning:** Online courses are not for everyone. You have to believe that high quality learning can take place without a traditional classroom. If you feel that face-to-face interaction is a prerequisite to learning, you may not feel comfortable in the online classroom.
- **Commitment:** Online learning requires your commitment. Keeping up with the class and completing all work on time is essential. Once you get behind in an online course, it is very difficult to catch up.

Once you start...

- **Course materials:** Purchase your textbooks and study guides as soon as possible.
- **Learning Space:** Find a learning space that is free from distractions. You might consider your office (before or after hours and on your lunch hour), a public library, or a separate room at home.
- **Syllabus:** Check the PittOnline website to view your syllabus. The syllabus contains all the information you need to progress through a course, including the course description, objectives, course requirements, assignments and testing, uses of media and technology, an assignment calendar, and contact information.
- **Course Design:** When reading the syllabus, familiarize yourself with the course design to see if you can be a successful learner in that specific content area.
- **Technical requirements:** Before your course begins, make sure you have access to the tools necessary to complete the assignments. You will need a computer with adequate hard disk space, as well as a modem and an internet connection.
- **Time management:** You will not have regularly scheduled classes as in a face-to-face course, but expect to spend as much time working in your online courses as in face-to-face courses (minimum 10 hours per week). The following are a few suggestions:
 - Set aside sufficient time in your personal schedule to do the work of the course or you will be frustrated.
 - Set up and stick to a study schedule.
 - Note all due dates.
 - Set interim goals and deadlines for yourself.

Without reminders from other students and a classroom instructor, it is easy to fall behind. Procrastination may put you too far behind to successfully complete the course.

- **Study schedule:** Identify a study time for yourself when you are fresh, attentive, and free of distraction. Think of the study time as "reserved time" and stick to it regularly. If you miss too many study times, you should change your schedule.
- **Stay in touch:** Log on to your course Web site often (preferably at least once a day) for e-mails, discussion topics, and instructor announcements. Find out who has commented on your postings and read the feedback of your instructor and classmates. If you do not log on to your course discussion group often, you will fall behind and find it very difficult to catch up. Also, contact your instructor regularly (and before the due dates), especially when you have questions about the course. Be very clear in your online communication since you do not have the benefit of face-to-face contact with your professor and classmates.
- **Assignments:** Your courses will have different forms of assignments. Read all your textbook and other assigned readings on time. Take notes while you are completing the readings. Also finish the other requirements (e.g., discussion) on time. Do not substitute one assignment for the other. Pay attention to assignment instructions and be sure that you understand what is being asked when submitting assignments. Type your written assignments on a word processor before importing them into Blackboard. Plan ahead to avoid submitting your work at the last minute.
- **Participation:** Make sure that you are actively participating in the course. Initiate discussions. Always contribute your ideas and comments on the subject you are studying, and read about those of your classmates. You can gain great insight from your classmates and they can learn from you as well. Also, think ideas through before responding. Meaningful and quality input within the online classroom is an essential part of the learning process.
- **Study buddies:** Much like in a face-to-face course, students who work with another student or students succeed better in online courses. You may ask your instructor for help in identifying others who may want to work with you.
- **Seek Assistance:** Utilize tutoring and other resources offered by the University if you feel you need additional assistance in mastering course content.
- **Attitude:** Be polite and respectful while you participate in the course. Being polite and respectful is required for a productive and supportive online environment. Learn and follow guidelines for netiquette. Do not forget that even in an online environment you are dealing with real people. In a positive online environment, you will feel valued by your instructor and classmates.
- **Your progress:** During the semester, re-read the course objectives and standards often to see how you are progressing with them. If you think you are falling behind, then adjust your study schedule accordingly. Ask your instructor at various points in the quarter about your progress and if you need help, pointing out any areas that you think are difficult or unclear.

- **Tests/Quizzes:** Before you take a test/quiz, make sure you understand the information covered in the course assignments that will be the basis for a particular assessment. Review your results and learn from your mistakes.
- **Application:** Try to apply and use what you learn in your online course as you learn it, so that you will remember it more easily later. Attempt to make connections between what you learn and what you do or will do in your job. Real-world application helps you internalize what you learn. Your classmates may also benefit from hearing about your real-world experiences.
- **Computer or Internet problems:** Be patient when you have computer or Internet issues. Contact the University Help Desk (http://technology.pitt.edu/tech_help.html#callhelp or 412 624-HELP) for technical help. If web pages are slow or down, take a break and come back later.

REFERENCES:

“How to Succeed in Distance Learning Courses” Terra Community College
<<http://www.terra.edu/academics/distanceguidelines.asp> >

“Online Study Skills Help” University of Wales, Bangor
<<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/studyskills/skills/onlineskills.htm> >

“Starting Out as an Online Student” Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology <<http://www.siastr.sk.ca/virtualcampus/studentinfo/starting/> >

“Study Tips for Distance Learning Courses” St. Charles Community College
<<http://www.stchas.edu/distance/studytips.shtml> >

“Tips and Strategies for the Successful Online Student” by Randy Accetta, February 15, 2001. <<http://www.computerschools.com/interviews/elearning/> >

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

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