

Taking Your First Online Course? Here's Some Advice

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Many students that are new to [online learning](#) find the transition to be difficult. Switching from an onsite environment to a virtual one is a big adjustment. Communication is electronic rather than face-to-face, written messages replace the spoken

word, and there's no human presence - no one to hear, see and stand next to. Your only gateway to the course is through an e-device. It's like landing and then living on another planet.

As with other things, we take the benefits of onsite learning for granted until they're gone. Aside from connecting to live websites such as Google Hangouts, [virtual learning](#) provides no real physical connection to people. Your e-device is the only way to communicate with classmates and the instructor. In light of that, here are some suggestions on how to adjust to this strange and new world of virtual reality.

Explore the [learning management software \(LMS\)](#) (aka Course Management System or CMS) and note the different tabs, tools and topics. Use the course guide to learn where things are and how to navigate the site. That will provide some familiarity with the course and form a foundation to build on.

As with any course, **carefully [read and study your textbook](#) and course notes**. Topics, exercises and questions for class activities, discussions and tests are drawn from that material.

Complete *all* of the coursework. If you don't, there will be no wiggle room left in your GPA to accommodate mishaps such as failing a midterm or not completing an assignment. And don't blow off completing your homework or studying course material to watch TV or to party with friends.

Set a [schedule](#) and create a calendar to stay on track. You're on your own and if you miss a deadline, it will cost you - dearly.

Use mobile devices and [productivity apps](#) to save time. Everyone has down time while on the go so spend it studying and then you can relax at home. Manage your schedule and stay focused.

Remember your [netiquette](#). Be professional, kind and courteous. In fact, part of your grade may be based on this soft skill.



Meet with peers at a coffee shop or on Google Hangouts to interact and study. It's easy to feel isolated and distant from colleagues in a virtual setting so connect with them. Parse out tasks and responsibilities, work together and hold each other accountable. And remember to vet your teammates before [forming a group](#) to avoid issues later on.

[Study](#) carefully for quizzes and exams. Speed-read course material first to get an overview and then carefully re-read it. [Memorize](#) key words and concepts, review the textbook chapter summaries and then answer associated questions.

Read the course material efficiently and effectively. Click here for the details:<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/reading-more-efficiently-effectively-tom-moyer?articleId=6114909945335996417>

Follow your circadian rhythm. When are you [most effective and productive](#)? Do you learn information better with shorter study periods or longer ones? Find out and adjust your schedule.

Work-product is everything. Proof your writing with apps like the Word editing tools and [Grammarly](#). Use the [Flesch-Kincaid](#) Readability Assessment tool to adjust your writing style to match the reading level of your audience.

Focus on understanding core concepts and terms and remember that your [reading](#) and writing skills are crucial. Post well-written and thoughtful comments and arguments. Writing is everything in the virtual world and the quality and persuasiveness of your words and arguments are crucial.



Talk to your instructor *and* classmates. Learning isn't just about you and your professor! It's about collaborating and interacting with peers and sharing your expertise and knowledge.

Focus on course topics. Be respectful of the instructor and your peers and center your attention on the topics at hand.

Don't use the course module to publically correct or shame anyone. Discuss issues privately and politely with classmates and protect your reputation. If there's an issue that can't be resolved, take it to the instructor.

Be available to your instructor and teammates. You're working together so promptly respond to their messages and phone calls and ask them to do the same for you.

Have questions? **Ask.** – Never assume because if you're wrong, you'll get burned.

Some students look for a casual course that they can coast through. The problem is that clashes with the work-ethic of most students who take their studies seriously. Conscientious students don't have the time or energy to tolerate a slacker. So here are some tips for students who just want to goof-off.

Looking for an easy "A"? – That's how [some students](#) view online learning. They fill a seat in an onsite class and ask a random question now and then just to get by, so why not use the same strategy online? Because it won't work! In the virtual world, grades are based on analytics drawn from the LMS along with instructor comments that gauge and measure student work product, performance and professionalism.



The instructor knows when a student is [gaming](#) the system. If certain “mistakes” occur more than once, like "accidently” posting the wrong assignment (to buy more time) or taking a test and having your PC crash (to get a sneak preview), it’s a giveaway. The student will lose the respect and trust of the instructor.

It's easy to gauge student effort. A [LMS](#) tracks details such as time spent on course modules, dates and times work was submitted, and the quantity of comments and number of interactions with others.

Instructors examine that data and use a grading rubric to calculate scores. So if a student parks their PC on a course module to build time, or they claim they submitted an assignment when they didn't, it will be obvious. Software never lies and neither should students.

Plagiarizing or not citing your sources. This is common and either violation will bring a strong response from the instructor. It's like lying to your boss which could get you fired plus it's insulting to your professor. There are apps like [Grammarly](#) and Google Advanced Search to spot this kind of behavior and sooner or later violators get caught. Besides, experienced teachers can easily distinguish between a student's writing style and plagiarized material.

Don't argue with the instructor and don't badmouth them. Make your point and stop. If you [disagree](#) with their decision, politely appeal it to the department chair. Besides, word may get back to the instructor if a student is complaining to others.

The words that you post are forever so think before you write.

Instructors have seen it all from students bringing infants to class to dodge a test, to semi-weekly car problems on the way to class, to getting ill every other week. So if an issue arises, make sure it's a real one and be honest about it.



These are a just a few tips to help improve your online course experience and grade. Good luck with your course!