

Preparing for an Online Course

Tips on How to Prepare for an Online Course:¹

1. First of all, create a work place that is solely devoted to the online course. This space should be organized, have the needed supplies, and be free of distractions.
2. Familiarize yourself with the online domain. How do you access the course material? Once accessed, check out all available resources. Read the syllabus thoroughly. When will the first assignment be due? What kind of assignment is it? What texts will be assigned? When are the due dates for readings?
3. Make a weekly schedule: find regular times to devote to studying; make a timeline of deadlines; set goals and strive to reach them.
4. Post a short introduction of yourself, and find a classmate to correspond with via email.
5. Always address your professor in a formal manner. Treat all postings as you would a formal hard-copy paper you would submit. Avoid informal language and inappropriate comments.
6. Make sure that contact information for technical assistance (from the university and from your computer manufacturer) is readily accessible.

What does research say about students' experiences with online courses?

1. The positives: online courses allow more convenience and flexibility for the student.² Keep in mind, however, that this freedom comes with added responsibility.
2. The negatives: students typically become frustrated with technical problems, feel isolated from the class, and find it difficult to contribute to discussion.² You may have to devote more time to an online course than a traditional course.³ To combat these issues:
 - Identify helpful resources for technical problems *before* they occur. The class's website will provide technical assistance; UNCW's technical assistant center (TAC) is available to help; and most importantly, let your professor know of the problem as soon as possible.
 - Be proactive. Post and reply to all discussions; find more information related to the discussions; and communicate with a classmate.
 - Open your mind to new ways of learning and communicating; try them; and take risks.
3. Your first online course may be the most difficult. After adjusting, you'll become more confident with the online format; you'll see more opportunities to interact with your professor and other classmates; and you'll extract more information and meaning from the material.²

¹ Fischer, Kristen. "How to Prepare for an Online Course." eHow. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Oct 2010.

² Dobbs, Rhonda R., Courtney A. Waid, and Alejandro del Carmen. "STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE COURSES: The Effect of Online Course Experience." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 10.1 (2009): 9-26.

³ Spector, Michael J. "Time demands in online instruction." *Distance Education* 26.1 (2005): 5-27.