Table of Contents

1. **How online courses are different than face-to-face courses**

   a. [The syllabus as your contract](#)
   b. [Attendance](#)
   c. [Late work](#)
   d. [Online courses require students to be self-motivated & self-disciplined](#)
   e. [Online courses require different skills for success](#)

2. **Skills required for success and resources to test and build those skills**

   a. [Reading comprehension](#)
   b. [Typing speed](#)
   c. [Technology utilization](#)
   d. [Problem solving](#)
   e. [Time management](#)
   f. [Organization/self-regulation](#)
   g. [Overcoming procrastination](#)
   h. [Netiquette](#)

3. **[Online student support services](#)**

How are online courses different than face-to-face courses?

The Syllabus as Your Contract

In all classes, the syllabus is your contract!

One of the first things to locate in an online course is the syllabus. This will tell you a lot about the course structure, workload and the instructor's course expectations. Sometimes, it will even give you some insight into your instructor's personality.

While syllabi vary from course to course, this is where you can expect to find contact information for your professor, his or her physical location and office hours. You might also find his or her virtual connection spaces, like a Twitter handle or LinkedIn contact, along with virtual office hours for calls and video conferencing.

Just like in a face-to-face class, the syllabus will contain required course materials. For online courses, this might include specific software and hardware you will need for optimal course interaction. The syllabus is where you will find grading scales and the instructor's policies on things, such as attendance, late work, and references to the University's policies on student conduct.

Attendance

Attendance in an online course? Yes. While much of the draw for online courses is the students' ability to work at his or her own pace, online instructors still have expectations for how often a student "shows up". Because of financial aid regulations, attendance in online classes is measured through quality interactions between the student and the material, the student and other students, and the student and the professor. Instructors have the ability to view not only a student's response to posted course material, but also the length of time a student spent in the Learning Management System. Sometimes professors require synchronous meetings at various times throughout the course. Synchronous meetings can happen through different spaces and tools housed in the LMS (e.g., Blackboard), or even just by videoconferencing or phone calls.

Late Work

Given the fluidity of the online setting, the late work policy will be an important syllabus component to locate early on. You need to determine what day of the week begins a new class week because some semesters begin on a Tuesday. Does your professor run the course from Tuesday to Monday, with all work due by 11:59 pm on Monday night? There may be different due dates on Discussion Boards for initial post and the response posts to classmates. Coursework due dates might be based on units, with work due in two-week cycles. Your course syllabus will explain when things are due. The syllabus is your contract with your professor and includes his or her promises of a quality course experience and expectations of you as a student.

How are online courses different than face-to-face courses?

Online courses require students to be self-motivated & self-disciplined

Would you classify yourself as a "self-starter"? Are you great at setting goals for yourself? Do you find satisfaction in completing tasks? Do you dislike being micro-managed? Then you are a prime candidate for taking online courses.

Professors in well-designed online courses create structure and a framework for the course, establish course expectations and use a variety of communication tools. That being said, online Professors do not have the benefit of holding class in a physical space at a set time with your captive attention. As a student, you are always in charge of how much or how little you take away from a course, and this is even more true in the online setting. With the convenience of anytime learning comes the responsibility to make the time for learning.

The onus is on you as an online student to organize your time and structure your physical learning environment in a way that allows you to successfully complete all the course requirements and learning objectives. It is up to you to plan out the time you will need to learn new material, to study previous material, to complete the group and individual assignments the course requires, and to schedule those events for a time of day when you are most able to give your best effort to the tasks at hand. You will have to be self-aware enough to recognize what environment you work best in and to create an environment that helps you accomplish your course tasks; whether that means sitting outside in the sunshine or closing yourself off in a quiet room that is free from distractions.

Online courses require different skills for success

If you have ever studied communication, you may have run across the Albert Mehrabian's statistics about how messages are transmitted to a receiver. The statistics state that 7% of communication is received through the message (or the words), 38% comes to us from voice and tonality, while 55% of the message is transmitted through body language. Think about what this means as an online learner. You have to successfully receive the message your instructor and classmates are trying to convey in order to meet your learning goals, and you have to find ways to receive the learning message using the mode of delivery that usually only equates for 7% of how you would get a message in a face-to-face interaction. While well-designed online courses do utilize technology (e.g. video) to help bridge this gap, the online learner also has to build that bridge with personal learning skills that are different than the skills used in face-to-face courses.

Skills Required for Success and Resources to Test and Build Those Skills

Learners should take inventory of certain skills and attempt to sharpen those skills to set themselves up for success in an online course. Skills that are needed to be successful in online courses include the following:

Reading Comprehension

While online courses will include technology and multi-media components, a large part of the fundamental learning comes from textbooks (printed or online), academic journal articles, and various other text-based materials. Students need to have the skills to comprehend and synthesize the reading materials in the course.

As you explore your skill level in this area, the company that offers course placement testing for colleges and universities also offers practice tests using materials from their previous year's tests. Brush up on or test your reading comprehension skills using materials from Accuplacer: https://www.mometrix.com/academy/accuplacer-reading-practice-test/

Typing Speed

Face-to-face courses require learners to type things like papers and reflections. In online courses, the majority of the learning interactions take place through typing. If you are not a fast typist, or at least an average typist, this could add hours to your workload.

A simple way to test your typing speed is to open a book or a form of written text, set your timer, type what you read without stopping for one minute. Use the word count feature to show you how many words you type per minute. The number of red underlined words divided by the total words turned into a percentage will give you your error percentage. Subtract that number from 100, and you'll have your typing accuracy.

For example:
- I typed 35 words in one minute.
- I had 5 red underlined words.
- I divide 5 by 35 equals to get .1428. To turn that into a percent, I multiply .1428 by 100 to get 14%. This is my error percentage.
- I subtract 100 from 14 to get 86 for my typing accuracy.

Therefore, I can say that I type 35 words per minute with 86% accuracy. These numbers will give you a good idea of how skilled you are at typing. 38-40 words per minute is considered average. Most professors will create the course workload with an average typist in mind.

If you find yourself below the average typing speed, and would like to brush up on this skill, there are many free typing programs that you can find on the Internet, like https://www.keybr.com/.

Skills Required for Success and Resources to Test and Build Those Skills

Technology Utilization:

Online courses rely on technology to transmit learning and ideas. While knowing how to navigate a learning management system will take you a long way in accessing content, most courses utilize technology above and beyond the tools found in any one system. Online learners need to be comfortable utilizing the technology hardware and software required for the course. As a Ferris State University student, you have access to Hoonuit through MyFSU → Student Tab → Academic Support. This training site has a wide variety of technology tool tutorials and resources that students can reference if they need help.

Hoonuit is a repository of training videos that explain how to use a variety of technology such as Skype, Microsoft tool, Prezi presentations, Adobe tools, CAD, WordPress blogs and much more. Hoonuit also has tutorial videos on how to cite sources in MLA or APA, how not to plagiarize, how to create a poster presentation, and even how to use your Texas Instruments calculator!

Problem Solving:

With technology use, there are likely to be technology issues. Online learners need to be able to locate resources to counteract the issues that are bound to happen. Getting frustrated and not completing course assignments is not a good solution. Online learners have to be problem solvers and sometimes get creative about the solutions they implement in order to fulfill course obligations. It is important to know when to problem solve and when to contact the Ferris State University eLearning team with questions about the LMS or the Technology Assistance Center (TAC) with technology access related questions.

Time Management:

Although students often appreciate the flexibility of online courses, it's important to understand that online courses require student commitment and effective time management. Procrastination is something everyone fights, and it is not a friend to online learners. If you are serious about learning online, you will need to have the resources and ability to plan, schedule, and adhere to a schedule to not only participate in the course, but also to do the required course assignments.

Some best practices for time management are to look ahead, make a plan that you will stick to, and develop a habit of checking your course daily. At the beginning of the semester, you should carefully review the course requirements and deadlines. Write out all the deadlines on the calendar, along with the times you plan to check your course and read over the materials. You should also add time to your calendar for working on projects well in advance of the deadlines so if something unexpected comes up you still have plenty of time to get your coursework done. Most people find that planning coursework out for the whole semester helps when managing other work and social obligations.

Skills Required for Success and Resources to Test and Build Those Skills

Different people find different means of time management to be effective based on personal preference. You will need to take time to consider what tools are going to be best for you. Here are a few good options:

- **Calendar:** Use a digital or electronic calendar associated with your school email account. This can be synchronized to your smartphone, so your calendar is always available for you to view. It also allows you to set reminders, so your mobile device can alert you when events and deadlines are approaching.

- **App:** There are plenty of apps available to help you manage and organize your time. Depending on what you need help with, you might consider using a combination of the following services. Trello can be used for project management, including adding lists, due dates, and reminders sent to you based on project due dates. You can even add other people to Trello tasks, which is great for group work. Some tools for monitoring and blocking technology-based distractions include the browser extension, StayFocusd, or the similarly handy phone app, Anti-Social. If you are just looking for apps to help you organize your life into tasks that you can have the satisfaction of checking off your to-do list, consider using Remember the Milk, 2Do, or Finish

- **Paper-based Planner**: Just because your course is completely online, doesn't mean you can't go low-tech or no-tech when you are organizing your life. For some people, nothing solidifies a commitment in their brain like putting pen to paper and writing it down. A good planner is one that has plenty of room for you to track assignments and commitments week by week, as this is how most courses are organized.

Organization/Self-regulation:

Since the work for online courses is done mostly…online…it requires a different set of organizational skills. Not only do you need to organize your time, but you also need to organize your course materials and your electronic coursework. You will need to adhere to the file naming conventions that your professor requests. You will need to back up your work and have a system for being able to find it if a submission doesn't go through or you need to reference it later. All of your communications will need to be saved and structured in a way that you can refer back to them if you need. As an online learner, you need to be able to assess how your organizational methods are working for you so that you can adjust as needed.
Here are some organization tips:

1. Unclutter your work area. Clear your work surface of anything that might distract you from what needs to be done. Staying tidy takes a fraction of the time you will waste if distracted.

2. Work on one assignment or project at a time without distractions.

3. Use one system to track all reminders, notes, tasks, tests, assignments and even social events. An effective system can help reduce stress.

4. Create a master list that prioritizes and updates every pending assignment or project; use whatever method holds your attention.
5. Avoid interruptions that can rob you of time and momentum. When a project or assignment requires special attention, escape to a quiet area to work more effectively.
6. Delegate tasks when you can in order to avoid being overwhelmed.
7. Reduce clutter and makes organization easier using the "OHIO" Rule. "Only Handle It Once"
8. Stop collecting so much stuff - the more you have, the more time you need to manage it.
9. Know your personal limits and say no when you need to.
10. Take a few minutes at the end of each day to clear your work area and plan for the next day.

Overcoming Procrastination

The enemy of time management is procrastination. When you start to feel the urge to procrastinate, think about the following tips:

- Don't wait until you are "in the mood". There is no perfect time, so stop waiting for it.
- Be realistic and don't aim for perfection. Write down the basic information needed for the task. Plan to revise and fine-tune it later.
- Schedule regular down time for recreation, exercise, and socializing with friends.
- Keep reminding yourself that you CAN do it! You've done it before successfully and you can again. Think of strategies that worked before when you were successful and use them now.
- Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep. Most adults function best on 7-8 hours of sleep nightly. Getting less than 6.5 hours nightly impairs your memory and ability to concentrate.
- If an assignment doesn't seem relevant to you, remember your life goals. They can provide motivation and help us to prioritize.

Netiquette:

While the online environment can feel like an isolated space, the truth is, it is still a community of learners, and real people are sitting behind screens learning right along with you. In order to do well in the online environment, learners need to remember that the words they type are being read by a diverse audience who are also seeking to have a successful learning experience. It is extremely important that online learners have the ability to create and sustain an environment that is conducive to learning. This means that learners must be able to show courtesy for others, even if they can't see them.

As you evaluate whether you have the necessary skills to take an online course, don't forget to consider the important issue of how you present yourself online and how you interact with and treat others in the online environment. Some specific things to consider are scholarliness, respect, professionalism and politeness.

(Adapted from https://teachonline.asu.edu/2016/04/teaching-good-netiquette)

1. ***Be scholarly.*** Students should use proper language, grammar, and spelling. They should be explanatory, justify their opinions, and credit the ideas of others by citing or linking to scholarly resources. Students should avoid misinforming others when they may not know the answer to something. When students are discussing something, they are unsure about or supplying a guess, they should clearly state that.

2. ***Be respectful.*** The privacy of others must be respected; students should avoid sharing personal or professional information about classmates. Students should respect diversity and opinions that differ from their own. Communication should be tactful, with disagreements based on scholarly ideas or research evidence.

3. ***Be professional.*** Everyone should strive to look their best online.[2]Truthfulness, accuracy, and running a final spell check are appropriate expectations for university students. Writing in a legible font and limiting the use of emoticons is considered professional behavior. Profanity and participation in hostile interactions, known as flaming, is unprofessional as well as disruptive.

4. ***Be polite.*** Students should be addressing professors and instructors by the appropriate title or requested name. Students should also address each other by name and be mindful of their written tone. Students should interact online politely, just as they would be expected to do in a physical classroom environment. Sarcasm rudeness and writing in all capital letters (shouting) should be avoided.

Online Student Support Services

As a student taking online Ferris State University Courses, you are allowed the same support services available to students taking courses on campus. One of the most important things a student can do to be successful, regardless of the format of the course, is to recognize when they need help in a course and then seek out the appropriate assistance.

Library Services: A full range of online library services are available through FLITE (Ferris Library for Information, Technology, and Education). Visit the distance education library for more information. Common services include providing electronic copies of books and articles, guidance on best research practices, and providing books through Interlibrary Loan. https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/library/distanceed/homepage.html

MATH Tutoring: Online tutoring is available for MATH 110, MATH 115 and MATH 127. Contact the Academic Literacies Center to request information on availability of sessions. https://ferris.edu/HTMLS/colleges/university/ASC/index.htm

The Writing Center: If you need any kind of writing support, from brainstorming ideas and getting started on a paper to proofreading and checking citations, the writing center has staff available to help you. The center can be found in FLITE 122. Here are their hours of operation: https://ferris.edu/arts-sciences/departments/languages-and-literature/writing-center/hours.htm.

Synchronous online writing consultations are available to students taking fully online programs or students enrolled in a statewide program, but not to other online courses at this point. If you are wondering if your program qualifies for this service or you would like to make an appointment, look for details here: https://ferris.edu/arts-sciences/departments/languages-and-literature/writing-center/online-tutoring.htm

The Ferris eLearning Team : is available for all students experiencing issues or needing LMS (e.g., Blackboard) support. Bookmark their page so you can contact them if needed: http://ferris.edu/eLearning

Technology Assistance Center (TAC): is available for all of your other technology related support needs. For a list of issues the TAC can help with, along with their contact information, please check out this website: https://ferris.edu/it