



Tips for Being Successful While Earning Your Online Degree



Studying online is an excellent way to propel your career, to change careers or to deepen your skills. If you are opting for an online degree you may already be working, or have family commitments. Flexibility is one of the great things about an online degree, but that doesn't mean it is not a real commitment and lots of work!

So how can you ensure success while studying online?

Technical Preparation

Ensure that when you log in for your first online class or discussion, that you have already downloaded any required software and that you have the passwords you need to access course materials. Also check that you are receiving emails to your new university email address. Navigate as much as you can so that you don't waste precious course time ironing out any potential technical kinks.

Human Contact

Your Instructors

Make a connection with each course instructor. By opening up a dialogue you are showing not just your level of dedication, you are also creating a more organic way to understand course expectations. Remember that your course instructor is here to impart subject matter expertise and guidance -- do your best to find the answers to non-course related questions through other university resources, whether online or through applicable administrative offices.

Course Mates

Reach out to fellow online classmates to introduce yourself. You will form an important support network as you go through online courses together. Find an accountability partner, or a new friend to study with -- making real connections is good not just for the success of your studies and projects, it will also help you get the most out of networking in an online environment.

The Art of the Schedule

If you are like the majority of online course takers, you are juggling multiple responsibilities alongside your degree. This is where the art of the schedule comes in. This section is the largest part of this document because it encompasses all the major components of your life when undertaking an online degree. Once you get your schedule in place, you will be well prepared for meeting your course requirements and taking care of any unforeseen course challenges.

Your Course Schedule

Your course instructor will lay out your course expectations and you may even be provided with assignment due dates at the beginning of the course. If this is the case, take advantage and add each deadline to your online calendar -- and use gentle reminder alerts. Also on your online calendar should be any online course sessions that may have real-time components (if applicable), and blocks of time devoted to study, research and assignment completion. You might even consider obtaining free online project management software to help you manage your assignments.

Your Personal and/or Professional Schedule

Write down exactly your responsibilities and how you are going to meet them. How does your course schedule fit in with other responsibilities you may have such as work, family and community? Be realistic. Most of us can handle extreme weeks here and there but you are planning for success over an extended period. Do you have support networks in place to help you manage the reality of your schedule? Have you notified your professors about any weeks where you may not be able to complete all of the assignments and sought guidance? Do you need extra help with certain courses and have you found the time you need to accomplish what you need to do? When you look at your course and personal/professional schedule, are you signed up for the right number of credit hours? Set yourself up for success and optimize the amount of work you are undertaking relative to your goals and responsibilities. This is how you do your best work.

Remember to Schedule Self-care Time

Your brain is about to take on a serious workout so help yourself by integrating regular exercise and self-care into your schedule. Reduced stress, improved cognitive performance and general mental well-being are well-documented results of exercise. Know yourself and how much time you need to give to decompressing and relaxation -- dedicating time for self-care and exercise can be one of the most critical choices for successfully accomplishing your online degree.

Set Your Schedule in Advance

Secure your schedule for the upcoming semester before it starts so that you are rolling into a smooth routine and you are ready for the workload that is coming your way. With effective time management you will feel in control of your online degree and you will have the head space to learn more effectively and to complete your coursework efficiently. You'll also have the time and space to be inspired!

Organization

In addition to having an organized calendar, make sure you have all the materials you need to organize your work. Prepare course folders and create a filing system. Have a dedicated space for your coursework or, if space is tight, a dedicated filing box for any handouts or paper materials you may need to reference. In an ideal world you have a dedicated office space to conduct your coursework and to keep books and materials.

Ask yourself: how do YOU work best? Where do you achieve your highest levels of focus? Some people thrive studying in busy coffee shops while others need the silence of the library. Where can you spread out and get deep into your subject matter? Organize your space to facilitate your personal preferences for successful study.

We wish you the best with your online course. With self-determination and the right level of preparation, communication and organization, you will have the framework in place to be successful in your online degree.