

# So, you're thinking about taking an online class?

This short tutorial is designed to help you to make a good decision about if online learning is right for you.

## Let's dispel a few myths

Some students think online classes are easy, self-paced, or don't require much work. Not so!

- ⇒ Online courses are *not* easier than courses in a classroom.
- ⇒ Online courses are *not* self-paced
- ⇒ Online courses are usually highly structured
- ⇒ Online courses *do not take less time* than courses in a classroom.
- ⇒ Online courses require college-level reading and writing abilities.
- ⇒ Online courses are not for everyone
- ⇒ Online courses require computer and keyboarding skills.

## Face to Face vs. Online Classes: Similarities and Differences

To be successful in an online class, it's helpful to understand what you're getting yourself into! There are wonderful advantages to online classes, such as flexibility to work on your class at your convenience. You don't come to campus daily, but you should be working online daily, instead. You have decreased requirements for meeting with your classmates and instructor in person, but you have increased requirements to communicate online using discussion, chat, or email. Some more of the differences between a face-to-face and an online class are important to note:

Similarities	Differences
Regular assignments	Online classes use almost exclusively <i>visual</i> presentation of material (more and more courses are beginning to use audio files, but for the most part information is imparted visually – you have to read it either off the computer screen or out of your textbook).
Specific due dates – courses are not self-paced	Questions to your instructor are not answered instantaneously online like they are in a classroom. Usually you have to wait up to 24 hours for an email response to questions.
Participation helpful for classroom classes	Participation is absolutely essential for online classes. Almost all online classes require regular posting to a discussion forum.
Pace	While the pace of an online class is similar to classes in a classroom, it's tougher to catch up in an online class if you get behind.

## Responsibilities

In an online class you're not only responsible for the course material, but for troubleshooting computer problems and getting technical help when you need it.

## What's your learning style?

Online classes tend to cater most to students who learn *visually*. Also, students who are highly self-motivated and self-disciplined do best. Consider your learning style:

- ⇒ Can you follow a schedule?
- ⇒ Do you stay on task without direct supervision?
- ⇒ Do you like to work independently?
- ⇒ Will you schedule a regular time to work on your online course?
- ⇒ Do you have at least 15 hours per week to work on your online class?
- ⇒ Do you feel your learning is your own responsibility?
- ⇒ Can you prioritize your workload?
- ⇒ Are you good at assessing your own progress?
- ⇒ Do you avoid procrastinating?
- ⇒ Are you good at reading a textbook and pulling information from it?
- ⇒ Are you a strong writer and comfortable with typing?
- ⇒ Do you enjoy learning new computer or technology skills?
- ⇒ Will a class with many communication options, but without spoken presentations work for you?
- ⇒ Are you okay with not hearing from your instructor daily?
- ⇒ Will you contact your instructor when you have questions or are overwhelmed?
- ⇒ Do you have reliable access to a computer and to the Internet?

If you hesitated to say “yes” any of the above questions, then your learning style may not be compatible with an online class. For comprehensive information about how to make the most of your learning style, go to: <http://www.metamath.com/lswb/dvclearn.htm>

## Predictors of Success

There are some predictors of success in an online class. While not universal, they can help you to determine if an online class is appropriate for you. Successful online students tend to:

- ⇒ Be self-motivated
- ⇒ Be confident and competent in using a computer
- ⇒ Have a strong GPA
- ⇒ Have strong time management skills
- ⇒ Be strong readers and writers
- ⇒ Work independently and be able to solve problems

## Succeeding in an Online Class:

To increase your chances of success, you need to:

- ⇒ Attend the orientation session on campus, if one is offered.
- ⇒ Have strong time management skills, and develop a schedule of when and where you will do your work.
- ⇒ Be confident in your abilities to learn how to use the technology
- ⇒ Read everything carefully and at least twice
- ⇒ Use all of the resources available to you to do well in the class, including using the Loft Writing Center tutors, forming a study group, or working with a private tutor. Become familiar with the services available to you in the NSCC Library.
- ⇒ Ask questions if confused. A good place to start is with the classroom discussion board, your classmates, and your instructor.
- ⇒ Have the equipment (computer and Internet) you need ready on the first day of class. Have a back-up plan for both in case of a computer crash or power failure.

## Time Management

One of the most common issues students need to deal with when they take an online class is time management. Taking a class online is not less time consuming than taking a class in a classroom. *Don't take a class online because you think it will save you time!* If you have a busy life, you will need to plan your study time carefully. Falling behind can mean never catching up again. If you take an online class:

- ⇒ Don't start your online course late. Have all of the proper tools you need prior to starting class (such as your computer, a reliable internet connection, and your textbooks). It is your responsibility to provide and maintain the tools you need.
- ⇒ Allow enough study time: Online courses require more study time than equivalent classroom courses. Allow at least three hours of study time for each credit per week. So, if you're taking a 5-credit course, plan on the class taking you at least 15 hours per week. As a guideline, you should plan on 3 hours per day, 5 days per week.
- ⇒ Do not take time off from the course: The pace of online courses picks up quickly and it can be impossible to catch up after any significant absence.
- ⇒ Don't procrastinate! Work on your assignments a little bit at a time to make the task less overwhelming.
- ⇒ Form a study group with others in your class.

## Personal Time Survey

To help you determine if you have enough time in your schedule to take an online class, fill in Column A, below

Activity	Column A	B	C
Number of hours of sleep you average per night		x 7 =	
Number of personal grooming hours per day (include showering, shaving, applying make-up, fixing your hair, dressing, etc.)		x 7 =	
Number of hours used in the preparation and eating of meals per day (include any time spent eating in restaurants)		x 7 =	
Total hours of travel time on weekdays (time spent commuting)		x 5 =	
Total hours travel time on Saturdays		=	
Total hours travel time on Sundays		=	
Number of hours per week in a classroom		=	
Number of hours per day doing household work such as grocery shopping, picking up dry-cleaning, cleaning the house, and doing laundry		x 7 =	
Number of hours per week spent at work (at your job)		=	
Number of house per day spent socializing (going on dates, going to the movies, playing video games, talking on the phone, surfing the internet for fun)		x 7 =	
Number of hours per day spent playing with your children or spent with significant other		x 7 =	
Number of hours per week spent exercising		=	

Add up the totals in Column C: \_\_\_\_\_

Subtract the above number from 168: \_\_\_\_\_

The remaining hours are the hours you have allowed yourself to study! If you don't have at least 15 hour per week left available to study for this class, then an online class may not be for you.

## Online Assignments – What you might be asked to do

Unlike in a classroom, where you can quickly get answers to the questions you may have about an assignment, online you'll need to rely more on yourself to figure out what you're supposed to do to complete the various online assignments you may encounter. In online classes you will be asked to read, write, discuss, and interact with your classmates and instructor just like in a classroom.

## How to Use the Technology, in general

To be successful using the computer technology necessary for an online class, you'll need to be familiar with:

- ⇒ Minimum computer requirements for online classes  
<http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/techreq.htm>
- ⇒ The specifications of your particular computer set up (such as which version of Windows you are using)
- ⇒ Firewalls
- ⇒ Using a browser
- ⇒ Using a word-processor
- ⇒ Saving files, finding files, attaching files, and opening files
- ⇒ Email
- ⇒ Troubleshooting and seeking technical support from your service providers
- ⇒ For information about these technology considerations, go to:  
[http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/technicalhelp\\_index.htm](http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/technicalhelp_index.htm)

## Where to Go for Help

People who succeed in online classes know how to find answers. They understand that when they have a question they need to tell somebody and seek help. If you encounter any of the frustrations, or if you have a question, DON'T PANIC. Ask for help! (Information on how to seek help will be provided once you've registered.)

## Take a Look at a Sample Online Course

To help you make a decision, you may want to take a few minutes and browse a sample online course. Explore and see if it looks like something you may want to try!

<http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/sample.htm>

## So, are you ready to register?

If you've determined online learning is right for you, let's get started!

<http://www.virtualcollege.org/start/register.htm>