

You're registered for an online class. Now what do you do?

Welcome to online learning at NSCC. The information here will help you to make the most of your time online! This short tutorial is designed to help you to be more successful in your online learning experience.

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 the 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.

Tips for Success in an Online Class

- ⇒ Attend the orientation session on campus, if one is offered. For more information about orientation sessions, go to:
<http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/orient.htm>
- ⇒ Be self-motivated

- ⇒ Have strong time management skills, including setting a schedule for both a time and place to work on your online class. For great information about study skills, go to: <http://www.northseattle.edu/services/counseling/selfhelp.htm>
- ⇒ Establish a supportive study environment
- ⇒ 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. Information about tutoring at NSCC can be found at: <http://www.northseattle.edu/services/tutor/>
- ⇒ Become familiar with the services available to you in the NSCC Library. They have wonderful fully-online research tools that make doing research for your online class much faster and easier. For information, go to: <http://dept.sccd.ctc.edu/nslib/> A wonderful interactive tutorial on online research is at: <http://seattlecentral.edu/library/passport>
- ⇒ Ask questions if confused. A good place to start is with your fellow classmates and your instructor.

Time Management Tips

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. Consider these ideas and methods to planning your study time:

- ⇒ 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). The Distance Learning office staff are available to assist with some technical support, but 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.
- ⇒ Use *one* calendar to plan your entire life, and carry it with you. Put down your study schedule, due dates, work schedule, and social events. If you use only one calendar you're more likely to stay on top of things.
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Allow time for getting to know your peers: Online interaction greatly enhances the quality of learning, but it also adds to the amount of time you spend online.

- ⇒ Regularly review course materials and due dates: You will have due dates for your assignments and will probably need to log some time in the class daily – know the due dates/expectations so you don't get behind.
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Improve your study skills so you make the most of each study-devoted hour. For great information about study skills, go to:
<http://www.northseattle.edu/services/counseling/selfhelp.htm>

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 hours 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 you may need to make adjustments to your schedule.

Getting the Information You Need for Your Online Class

Once you have logged in to your online class, there are certain things to look for that are universal to almost all online classes. Find these and read them carefully! These will answer many of your questions about what you need to do in your particular class. Consider printing out hard copies of some of the documents, such as the syllabus or class calendar, for easy reference later.

- ⇒ Syllabus and Policies
- ⇒ Class Calendar (List of Due Dates)
- ⇒ Lecture Notes and Handouts
- ⇒ Textbooks and Study Guides
- ⇒ Discussion Groups or Chat Groups

Online Assignments – Figuring Out What You’re Supposed 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. First, let’s look at how to . . .

Read an Assignment: Read the assignment carefully at least twice. Then, look for key words that will help you to understand what to do, such as: *analyze, synthesize, summarize, evaluate, compile, describe*. As you complete your assignment, make sure you’re doing what the assignment asks you to do! Also, when you’re reading the assignment, look for information about how the assignment is going to be assessed (graded). How is your instructor going to determine that you’ve completed the assignment? What is the instructor looking for? Often, a list of grading criteria or samples are provided. Look that over and make sure you do what the instructor is expecting.

Prepare an Assignment to be Turned in: Once you understand what an assignment is asking you to do, set aside enough time to complete it. Work offline to avoid losing your work if you’re disconnected. You may need to do some research. If so, check out the resources available at the NSCC Library: <http://dept.sccd.ctc.edu/nslib/> Or, you can use the online research tutorial at: <http://seattlecentral.edu/library/passport> After you’ve prepared a draft of your assignment, consider having a peer in the class review it. Or, go to the Loft Writing Center or Math Lab on campus to have a tutor review it. (Information on free tutoring on campus can be found at: <http://www.northseattle.edu/services/tutor/>) Finally, prepare your assignment to be turned in. This may include saving it in a file format that your instructor has requested. Certain assignments have particular text formatting requirements as well (such as research papers and lab reports). Check your class syllabus for information about how your instructor wants the assignments formatted. For information about how to format all kinds of assignments, go to: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Complete Group Projects: Often online classes will require a group project. Working with a group online has some particular challenges; however, it's doable if you plan ahead:

- ⇒ Make sure you have a personal email address for all members of the group – in case you are not able to access your class website for some reason
- ⇒ Start early and plan carefully by assigning specific duties or tasks to each group member. It should be clear who is doing what.
- ⇒ Set mini-deadlines for yourselves so that you don't run out of time.
- ⇒ Be a good group member! Be responsible.
- ⇒ Communicate often and be respectful.

Take Quizzes and Tests: You may have to take a quiz or test for your online class. Quizzes are usually given online via the class website. Just follow the instructions your instructor provides. Make sure you know how much time you have to complete the quiz and whether or not you are allowed to take it more than once. For tests/exams, you may be asked to take the exam online (just like a quiz), but often instructors will have the major exams proctored in person. If your exam must be proctored, you'll need to come to the NSCC campus, or other college or library, and have a proctor supervise you while you take the exam. Instructors do this so that they are sure that you are the one taking the exam and not somebody else; therefore, be prepared to show some identification.

Online Communications: A Word on “Netiquette”

- ⇒ **DON'T YELL**: Writing messages or posts in all capital letters is seen as yelling.
- ⇒ Email or posts are not private. Don't write anything for your online class that you wouldn't want the world (including your instructor) to see.
- ⇒ Use humor and sarcasm carefully. Online the reader can't see your body language or hear the tone of your voice to know you're joking; therefore, humor (especially sarcastic comments) can be easily misinterpreted. Reread all messages before you send/post them – make sure the tone is appropriate.

What would you do if . . .

While taking an online class you may experience some frustrating situations that you will have to figure out how to resolve:

- ⇒ You didn't understand how to upload your homework, post to the discussion group, or open a file?
- ⇒ You can't find the information you're looking for on the course webpage?
- ⇒ There are dead web links on the course page?
- ⇒ You are having trouble using your email?
- ⇒ The server goes off-line and you aren't able to access the course?
- ⇒ You have been waiting a long time for an instructor to respond to your email?
- ⇒ Feel misunderstood by your peers or instructor in a discussion post?
- ⇒ You are frustrated with the online interactions with other students?

- ⇒ You are falling behind in the course?
- ⇒ Aren't able to understand the directions given for an assignment?
- ⇒ Are overwhelmed with the course information or the amount of information you're expected to understand?

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 mentioned on the previous screen, or if you have a question, DON'T PANIC. Use the below strategies to help you resolve the situation:

- ⇒ Class webpage – read everything over again to see if you can find the answer
- ⇒ Group members – post your question to your discussion group and see if a classmate can help you
- ⇒ Instructor – email your instructor asking for help or clarification. If your instructor holds office hours on campus, consider going to meet him or her in person to ask questions
- ⇒ Loft Writing Center on the NSCC Campus (or online at: <http://www.northseattle.edu/services/loft/>) – the Loft tutors can help you interpret an assignment and/or help you write it
- ⇒ NSCC Librarians – the librarians at the NSCC Library are very knowledgeable and may be able to help you find an answer you're looking for. Consider contacting them! <http://dept.sccd.ctc.edu/nslib/>
- ⇒ If you're having trouble using your course software or website, or are having computer troubles, there is great troubleshooting information and tutorials at: http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/technicalhelp_index.htm
- ⇒ Many of the Frequently Asked Questions distance learning students have are addressed at: <http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/faq1.htm>
- ⇒ If you're on campus, consider going to the Distance Learning office and having a real-live person walk you through the problem. Their contact information can be found at: <http://www.virtualcollege.org>
- ⇒ Internet resources – sometimes you can find the answer to a broad question online, such as “How do I document my research in this paper?” Try using the internet to find the answer.

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
<http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/techreq.htm>
- ⇒ Firewalls
- ⇒ Using a browser
- ⇒ Using a word-processor

- ⇒ Saving files
- ⇒ Email

For information about these technology considerations, go to:

<http://www.virtualcollege.org/>

How to Use Specific Courseware

At NSCC our distance learning courses use one of the below types of courseware:

- ⇒ WebCT
- ⇒ Blackboard
- ⇒ FirstClass

If you're having trouble using your course software or website, or are having computer troubles, there is great troubleshooting information and tutorials at:

http://www.virtualcollege.org/resource/technicalhelp_index.htm

How to Get Started

Now that you've heard about how to be successful in an online class, you need to go to the Distance Learning Office at NSCC and read the comprehensive website that will help you get started with your online class. Go to: <http://www.virtualcollege.org> In addition, print off and complete the following checklist before your class begins!

- Check the technical requirements for your course and be sure the computer your plan to use meets the requirements:
http://virtualcollege.org/resource/technicalhelp_index.htm
- Buy your class textbooks: <http://northscc1.bkstore.com/bkstore/content>
- Attend an orientation session, if offered:
<http://virtualcollege.org/resource/orient.htm>
- Go to your online classroom and read the Syllabus carefully. Note all deadlines and due dates.
- Spend some time exploring your course so you can navigate around it easily.
- Seek help if confused!

Good luck!