

Getting Tech Ready Transcript

If you're thinking about taking an online course, you already know that it will require some basic technological skills. And while you don't need to be a computer scientist to take a class online (unless maybe it's a class on computer science...) it would be good for you to have a really solid understanding of the basic technical skills you'll need to succeed. Understanding what these skills are up front will make things much easier for you as a student, which is why we've created this module. After completing it, you'll have an idea of what your online instructor might need you to know. This includes becoming familiar with: the hardware and software requirements of most online courses; the value of a fast Internet connection; how to locate and download the free plugins that your course might require; the basics of email; how to obtain tech support when you need it.

Students now are taking their online courses using a range of devices, from desktop and laptop computers to smartphones and tablets. You may choose to do your schoolwork on one or more of these gadgets. It's really about finding out which form of hardware best suits both your needs as a student and the requirements of the course. If you're going to buy a computer, select something reliable, and more importantly, make sure that you have access to a fast Internet connection. We recommend, but don't require, a broadband connection.

If your computer isn't particularly reliable, or if you don't have a computer or other internet-capable device, don't worry. There are plenty of places where you can find computer access, and oftentimes for free: for instance, your local library or a computer lab on campus. Just make sure that the device you choose to work on is dependable and that the space you choose to work in is conducive to your study habits. Slow computers and poor internet connections can significantly increase the time it takes for you to access and complete the requirements for your online course, and the last thing you want to deal with all semester is Internet, hardware, or accessibility issues. There are some basics that your device will need to be equipped with in order to interact with your school's course management system (CMS) properly. For instance, you'll want to make sure that you have an up-to-date operating system. Your computer's operating system is the software that manages the programs and functions of your computer. For the courses you take here, you will be required to have one of the following operating systems: For PC, Windows 7 or higher; For Mac, OS 10.4 or higher. Your individual course may also have its own hardware requirements. Check with your instructor or take a look at your syllabus to see if there is anything else you might need for your course.

Some of these common hardware requirements might include: A printer; A headset; Speakers; A web cam. Another factor that you'll want to keep an eye out for is whether your course or CMS requires a particular browser for viewing internet content. Some content does not display properly or particular functions may not perform adequately in certain browsers; however, if you view the same content or page in a different browser, it will look and work perfectly. So make sure that if your instructor asks you to use a particular browser when completing a certain task, you follow his or her instructions. This may seem like a pain, especially if there is a certain browser that you prefer using when online, but trust us; it's all about compatibility. It is always a good idea to have several browsers installed on your machine when possible. That way you have a few options to choose from if you run into any problems. Some popular browsers that will work with your school's CMS include: Apple's Safari; Google Chrome; Mozilla Firefox; Internet Explorer. These browsers should work fine with your school's CMS, but again, they may not all work well with particular resources or applications that your instructor may need you to access for certain assignments.

If there are any compatibility issues you need to be aware of, your instructor will let you know which browser to use for the most reliable experience. In addition to having a browser to view online content, sometimes your course will require you to install one or more of the following plugins so that you can view other media that the browser alone may not be able to handle: like animations, sound clips, PDFs, or any number of other things. Some

common plug-ins you may need to install could include: Java, Adobe Reader, Adobe Flash Player, Windows Media Player, QuickTime, Microsoft Silverlight.

These are free applications you can download from the internet, and your instructor (or even your computer) will let you know when you need a particular plug-in in order to view something. You will also definitely need an email account, if you don't already have one. Lots of schools provide free email accounts for registered students and some insist that you use this account for any school-related emails. Take a look at your school's email policy and figure this out before you sign up for any online course, because this will be one of the chief ways that you will communicate with your instructors and classmates.

Your instructor will probably state in his or her syllabus what the preferred means of communication will be for the term. And if you're not required to use a school email account, you can use one you've already set up, or set up a new one with a free email service like Gmail or Yahoo. In fact, even if you have an old email account, you may want to make a new one that reflects your status as a college student. If you were an instructor, which of these would you rather receive a student email from? jrodriguez@gmail.com or badboipunk4958@hotmail.com?

Now it's time to talk technical difficulties. Here's the bad news: during the course of your studies, you're bound to have an issue with your computer hardware or software. But let's face it. That would probably be true if you were taking a course in a traditional classroom as well. We suppose it's just another facet of the modern condition. The good news is that most technical problems are relatively easy to solve, and if you're really struggling with a technical issue, you can always count on your program's tech support team.

After all, your program is here to support you. We want you to be able to resolve your tech issues quickly so that you can get back to your online studies. Most of the issues you might encounter when taking a course online don't require a complicated fix from tech support. In fact you should be able to solve most problems yourself, and some may be so simple that they seem borderline ridiculous. Bear with us while we go through some of the most frequent issues. Some of these troubleshooting suggestions we're about to give you are really, really obvious. Like, embarrassingly so. But you'd be surprised at how often these "obvious" solutions are overlooked. Try some of these quick fixes if you experience common hardware issues. Check your computer cables and connections to make sure a cable or connection has not loosened or come unplugged. Sometimes things shift around without you noticing, and it's an easy place to start. If your computer is plugged into a surge protector (which it should be, if possible!) Make sure that the surge protector is turned on. It's often a good idea to reset the surge protector by turning it off and on, just in case this is the source of your problem.

If you are using a laptop, Netbook, notebook, or tablet, it is a good idea to check your battery status often while you work. You can generally move your mouse over (or click on) the battery icon shown on your screen and it will tell you just how much battery life is left. If the device will not turn on at all, try plugging it in and charge it for a few minutes before trying again. Some devices have a battery indicator on the outside of the device as well, usually near or on the battery itself. If your computer monitor is blank, make sure it is plugged in, connected to the computer, and turned on. Next, check the brightness control, generally located on the monitor or keyboard. If you have no sound on your computer, check the volume control for your computer to see if it is turned up high enough. Some applications (and some plug-ins) have their own volume controls as well. Make sure you check both places to resolve any sound issues. If you're using speakers, make sure they are plugged in, turned on, and properly connected to the audio port. It can be helpful to test your system's sound by plugging headphones into the audio port on your computer to see if you can hear anything that way.

If trying one of these "easy fixes" does not solve your issue, save your work and try restarting your computer. Surprisingly, this troubleshooting technique often works best! One last way to find a solution is to simply conduct an Internet search for your issue. With billions of computer and Internet users around the world, chances are that someone has had the same problem you're having, and that someone else has posted a solution. The Internet is full of these kinds of resources, from companies' official troubleshooting pages to community help forums. You'll often be able to pretty easily find the solution you're looking for. Here is some important advice: when attempting to solve a technical problem on your computer, keep track of any messages your computer displays, and the steps

you've taken in your attempt to fix it. If the problem is really complicated, you might need to explain to tech support everything you've done to try to fix it on your own. If none of these strategies work, however, don't hesitate to contact your school's tech support team. Write down their phone number (if you've lost internet connectivity, you won't be able to look it up online!), and call if you need some assistance. Remember, they're here to support you and your studies. They'll do their best to help you quickly find a solution to any issues they can. Well done!

You have successfully completed the Getting Tech Ready module and we hope you are feeling a bit more comfortable with some of the technology you will be using to take your online course! For additional information, make sure you check with the IT department at your local school. They will be able to provide you with the valuable resources and instructive guidance you need to become a tech savvy student!