

Introduction to Online Learning Transcript

If you're watching this module, you've decided to investigate online learning as an alternative to a traditional classroom. But what will this really mean for you as a student?

Here we will introduce you to the world of online learning. We will show you how it works, debunk a few common misconceptions about online learning environments, and explore some of the differences you will encounter when taking online courses rather than in a traditional classroom.

Let's start at the beginning.

In an online course, your instruction is delivered over the Internet rather than in-person, in a traditional classroom. Seems obvious enough, right? In fact, think of the course management system (or CMS) as a virtual classroom. The CMS is where your instructor will post all of the course materials, conduct online discussions and perhaps other activities, and receive your assignments.

Additionally, it's where your instructor will expect you to read all of the course materials posted there, participate in the activities created, and use the CMS to submit your assignments. Accessing the CMS is easy. You can log in using any internet-capable device: a computer, a tablet, or even your smart phone! This means that you will be able to "go to class" whenever and wherever you'd like, as long as you have an Internet connection.

Online learning is not new, but it is quickly evolving to become a more and more powerful tool for teaching and learning. That's why we think it's important to start our discussion by debunking some of the more common myths about online learning. These misconceptions might already sound familiar, or they may surprise you.

But they have gotten in the way of some students who then found it difficult or impossible to complete their online courses successfully. We don't want you to be one of these students. This is why we've made this introductory module. We want to give you a clear idea of what you can expect from online learning and provide you with some tips that will help you not only to succeed, but to excel, in your online course.

Let's start by addressing the seven most common myths about online learning.

(Student) I've heard that the online course is way easier than taking the same course on campus. You don't have to go to class, you just have to hand in assignments and you're done. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) The workload for any particular course is the same regardless of the way it's delivered. And if you really think about it, there is more reading in online classes because you have to read all of your teacher's instructions rather than hearing them in class. In an online environment, you need to be more self-disciplined and motivated because you won't be facing the instructor every session.

The good news is that online classes will give you the flexibility to learn when you are ready to learn and at times that work with your schedule. This can be a real plus for students with busy lives. In an online class you are not limited by "class times," so you don't have to worry about conflicts with other classes you want to take, your work schedule, or other time constraints! Whether you decide to take your classes in a traditional or an online setting is up to you. One option really isn't easier than the other. It's all about finding the best fit for your life, your time, and your habits.

(Student) If I'm taking an online class, I can turn in assignments whenever I want, right? I'll just get all of the assignments from the instructor and blast through it in two weeks rather than wasting a whole semester. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) Regardless of what you think you may be able to accomplish at your own speed, most online courses are NOT self-paced. Some instructors reveal all assignments ahead of time and others may roll out course

topics and assignments incrementally. The most successful students will concentrate on their work at the pace that the teacher has laid out. Give yourself time to really focus on the course material and put your best effort into assignments. Don't try to rush through the course just to "get it done". The online learning world is not much different from traditional campus courses... The more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. The good news is: Students who successfully complete online courses have found that the organizational skills they learned and used to complete their online courses made them better students in traditional courses they took later on.

(Student) Online courses are always cheaper than taking classes on campus. Unless you're taking classes online, you're really just wasting your time and money. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) Tuition fees for online courses are typically the same as for traditional on-campus classes. But there are some "hidden" costs in taking a class on campus that you may have not considered. Let's see if you will be able to save money by taking classes online. If the cost saving calculator estimated that you will save money, and if you successfully complete the course, well done! Our job here then is to make sure that you can make that happen.

(Student) Professors randomly call on students for answers in a lecture, but in an online class I can fly under the radar. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) Don't be fooled by the illusion of anonymity in your virtual classroom. Even though you and your instructor may not be able to see one another, he or she can access reports on the quantity and quality of your course participation, and believe us, they will. They want to know how you're doing, and how they're doing, and participation will definitely be a key component of any of your classes. In fact, sometimes faculty know more about their online students than their on-campus students.

The good news is: Online learning can provide you with the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with your professors and with other students taking the same course. Conversing online can seem strange or artificial at first, but once they get used to it, most people really enjoy online discussions.

In an online course everyone has a chance to provide their input, and you have time to craft your thoughts before "speak." You're not bounded by the end of a class period or a limited discussion time. But you'll also need to commit to participating effectively and you'll need specific strategies to make this happen.

(Student) I spend a lot of time on social media and I text my friends more than I talk to them. I don't need to learn any technical skills in order to take a class online. [Buzzer sounds]

(Student) I don't really know my way around a computer, but clearly my instructor does. I'll just rely on him or her to help me figure it out during the course of the semester. My online class will teach me any of the technical skills I need to figure it out, right? [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) Online learning generally does not require extensive technical knowledge, but you have to understand the basics about your computer, the Internet, and how to use your school's course management system (CMS).

Watch the "Getting Tech-Ready" tutorial for an overview of the technology you'll be using, then be sure to seek out information or tutorials provided by your school about their CMS before starting your course. Take the time to really understand your online environment before you get too far into the semester. You won't want to wait until minutes before an assignment is due to learn which buttons you need to push in order to submit it.

(Student) Email is basically instant, and I know my teacher checks her email all of the time. So if I don't understand something or have a last-minute question about an assignment, I can email her and she should respond right away. She's definitely up at 10 PM, and it would only take her two minutes to write back with the answer. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) This is a misconception that we're sure all instructors would like to be cleared up from the outset. Most of your instructors provide a maximum email turnaround time, typically between 24-48 hours.

As a student, you need to plan ahead as much as possible, and be sure to have an alternate solution if you don't hear back from your instructor before an assignment is due. Remember, your assignments are your responsibility, not theirs. Some instructors include a "Questions About the Course" discussion thread where they encourage students to answer one another's questions. This could be immensely helpful for you, and might be a way for you

to help other students in turn. Remember what we said about building classroom relationships? Another approach would be to reach out to another member of the class and exchange private emails to support each other throughout the semester. Because you're not meeting with each other once or more times every week, it's easy to feel isolated in an online course. Try some of these tactics so you can connect with others. You will get a lot more out of your classes if you do. Building supportive online relationships and friendships requires skill and practice.

The good news is: Students who develop good communication skills, learn to be assertive, and are able to cooperate and collaborate well in a virtual environment will find these skills highly transferrable and valued in their personal and professional lives long after their course is over.

(Student) "If I didn't finish an assignment on time, I used to tell my instructor that I accidentally brought the wrong notebook to class or that my printer ran out of ink. Now I can just say that my computer crashed, that I accidentally deleted my finished assignment, or that I just sent in the wrong attachment. [Buzzer sounds] (Narrator) Probably none of these excuses will work. Remember, your instructors have not only heard every excuse in the book (probably more than once), but they are also pretty tech savvy themselves. They are, after all, teaching a college-level online course. Make sure you fully understand your instructor's expectations and that you comply with them in a timely manner, and keep an open channel of communication with them if you need help or have questions. Detailed information about your instructor's policies and expectations should be included on their course syllabus. Some instructors also provide checklists for all deadlines. If your instructor does not, it might be helpful to create your own assignment checklist. The organizational and study skills you develop for your first online course will put you on the road to success for all your future learning experiences, whether they are online or in a traditional learning environment.

So now that we've introduced you to some of the basics of online learning, let's take the next step in your quest for online success. Each lesson in this series includes a variety of instructional aids, activities, and resources that will help to prepare you as a successful online learner. And the good news is, you've already started!