

Successful Student Characteristics in the Distance Learning Environment

Besides understanding the equipment and technology in an Internet or online course, you'll want to assess whether or not you have what it takes to be a good online learner. Review this information before registering for an online course at Auburn University.

Advice for Taking Internet Courses

Online courses are not for everyone. If you want to be on campus attending classes in a traditional classroom setting, you may not be happy with an online class. The level of social interaction can be very high in the virtual classroom, but it is not the same as being on an actual college campus.

Independent Learning

Since you won't be in a classroom with your professor and classmates, you will need to be capable of independent learning. Your instructor will provide you with a syllabus, course documents, required readings, and other course content areas, guiding you through your learning experience. The instructor will be available via email, phone and online chat sessions to answer questions, in addition to evaluating, critiquing and responding to your work.

Since the class doesn't meet in a physical space at a set time, you, the student, will have to learn independently. You will be responsible for keeping up with the assigned readings and turning in assignments according to the timeline on the syllabus and/or course schedule. Remember, you won't have a faculty member reminding you of this in class.

Active Participant

In the traditional classroom, there are typically two kinds of students: those who participate and those who don't. Quite often, there are one or two students who tend to ask all the questions while everyone else passively listens and absorbs the information presented.

In online learning, students simply can't sit in the back of their virtual class and not participate. Your questions, thoughts, ideas and opinions are important for the learning process of everyone in the class, and for yourself. Without interaction, there can be no learning in the online environment. The instructor can grade your assignments, but you need to ask the questions.

Taking courses online requires students to use different and specialized skills. To be successful as an online student, you should:

1. **Have access to a computer and access to the Internet.**

If you don't have access to these tools at home or at your place of work, you may be able to use the equipment at your local library. Check with your

instructor to find out if you need any special software for the course, such as a DVD player or microphone.

2. Be willing to share your educational experiences as part of the learning process.

The online environment is open and friendly, and you will benefit from communicating and sharing your experiences with your fellow students. Because this forum for communication eliminates the visual barriers that hinder some individuals from expressing themselves, it can work well for both introverts and extroverts. In addition, you have time to reflect on the information before responding, which is often easier than having to respond in a traditional, in-person discussion group.

3. Be comfortable and proficient at written communication.

Because nearly all communication is written in the virtual classroom, you will be writing profusely, quickly and often. If you have limited writing abilities or are uncomfortable expressing yourself in writing, work on improving these skills before or as part of your online experience.

4. Be self-motivated and self-disciplined.

Because there is freedom and flexibility in the online environment that doesn't exist to such a great extent in a traditional classroom, you need to be particularly responsible and self-disciplined. The online process requires a commitment. Schedule regular study and log-in times for your online courses.

5. Be willing to let your instructor know about problems.

Instructors who teach online courses can't see if you are having problems, such as confusion, frustration, boredom, or absence. If you are experiencing difficulties on any level-either with course content or the technology, communicate this to your instructor immediately. If you don't, your instructor will never know what kinds of problems you may be experiencing.

6. Be prepared to spend as much time per week as the course requires - usually 12 to 15 hours per week per course.

Online courses are not easier than traditional classroom courses. You may find that they require more time, commitment, and discipline.

7. Be able to meet the requirements.

Your online program will have the same requirements as any quality educational program. If you want to succeed in your online program, you must view it as a more convenient way to receive your education, not an easier way.

8. Be able to apply critical thinking and decision making skills to the learning process.

The online learning process will require you to make decisions based on facts as well as experience. You must be able to use critical thought to assimilate information and make effective decisions.

Tips for Success in an Online Course

- Check your e-mail frequently.
- Keep in contact with your instructor.
- Allow a reasonable amount of time for instructor response.
- Advise the instructor promptly of any changes in your e-mail address and/or telephone numbers.
- Interact with your classmates as much as possible.
- Keep up with weekly assignments.
- When in doubt, ask questions.
- Be open to this new method of instruction and have fun.