How to Succeed as an Online Student

Adapted from About.com (Stephen Gatlin, President and CEO of Gatlin Education Services)

Online classes are much different than the traditional classroom. There are certain traits that a student must fulfill in order to succeed in any class, but there are some traits that are specific to online students. Here are a few ideas that we think will help you succeed in an online course.

Manage your time wisely

Without the presence of the actual physical classroom, there usually is no set time for you to sit down and deal with your online content. So, the first thing you should do is figure out a time when you can sit down and focus on your class work. This time will vary between individuals. Some people work well late at night and some do not – so choose a time that works for you. You should probably set a time that is fairly regular so that you don't end up putting off your work until the last minute. Set it like an appointment you have each day that you can't change. This will force you to sit down and do your work without interruption – a key to being successful.

Do not overload yourself

You most likely decided to take an online class because it fits into your schedule better than a traditional class does. This allows you increased flexibility with your class and the time you work on it. However, be aware of how much you are scheduling for yourself. Make sure that you have enough time for each of your obligations and that you can continue to do them all well. You do not want to take too many classes and let your work in each of them suffer as a result. Take only what you can handle during that time period (summer, fall, etc.)

Find a distraction free place

When you want to work on your online class work, find a place that you work best in. If that means having absolute silence when you work then that is what you will need. If that means you are okay with some background noise, then that is fine too. You need to find the best learning environment you can with preferably the least amount of distraction.

Questions are encouraged

If you are unable to figure out the answer to a question, feel free to ask the professor. This can be done in a number of ways. You can either email the professor, use the Sakai forums (if your professor set them up), a chat room (if the professor set that up), or you can even hunt for the answer yourself on the internet. You may also inquire the answer of other students; perhaps by use of the chat room or message board (if the professor has these things set up).

Take it seriously

Just because a course is online does not mean it is less difficult than a traditional class. In fact, it may be even harder due to the lack of face-to-face time. This means that the standard rules of traditional classrooms still apply. Take every assignment seriously; regardless of its size or importance. Do not hand in things late. Do not procrastinate. Keep up to date with the syllabus. Not knowing the syllabus is not an excuse to hand in things late or not hand them in at all. Take advantage of Messiah's online library sources. The Murray Library has access to many online databases that are full of articles and information. Also, whenever preparing data for submission online, **always** write your information in a word processor on your computer, save it, then copy and paste it into the submission box online. This way, in case the submission fails, you still have your data backed up.

You get what you put in

As it is with pretty much anything you do in life, you get out of something what you put into it. If you put little effort or work into an online course, odds are that you will get little or nothing out of it. So, give the class your best effort so that you, your classmates, and professor may benefit the most.