

Myths, Facts, and Tips for Online Learning Success

The following are common myths that surround online learning. It can be beneficial to understand what many students may think when they register for an online course and how to help them be best prepared.

#1- It won't take much of my time

Fact: Online courses generally require just as much time, if not more, as a campus based class. Students should expect to spend **2-3 hours per credit, per week**, for each of their online courses. That means that up to 12 hours may be needed each week for one 4 credit class. The challenge is also that this requires a different commitment of time as it is not scheduled or required, and will take more planning and time management on the student's part.

#2- Internet access is all I need

Fact: Simply having internet access will not be sufficient for being an effective online learner. In addition to a strong internet connection, students should have a dedicated computer that meets the minimum system requirements, as well as has updated software. Students who plan to complete an online course at a library computer, or with a friend/family member's computer often run into trouble completing assignments and exams on time.

Tips: Students can check a list of system requirements, as well as run a real time check on their machine at the following Ecampus website. <http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/forms/browsercheck/> Remember that students can also download the MS Office 365 software suite at no cost.

#3- Fits easily into my schedule

Fact: Online courses are more flexible, but there are weekly deadlines as well as assignment due dates and exam dates that will vary by course and are required for students to adhere to. It is critical that students set aside dedicated time for their coursework; in fact this may be the best strategy students can use to see the most impact on their success.

Tips: Set up a work space that makes study time "official", and set a course schedule for each week to include "class time" as well as time for reading and assignments. Write this schedule down somewhere and also makes sure you fully understand the syllabus and the requirements for the course. The term-at-a-glance calendar is a tremendous help to get this started, and can be found at The Learning Corner with a number of other helpful tools. <http://success.oregonstate.edu/learning-corner>

#4- Easier than my other classes

Fact: Ecampus courses often have the same faculty as the campus courses, and are held to the same academic standards. The nature of learning in an online format often means there will be more reading and writing than in a traditional course, and there may be participating more actively in discussion boards and group work. In addition, the self-management required and the possibility of a technology learning curve will add to effort needed to be successful.

Tips: Learn and practice specific reading strategies, as well as strategies for note-taking and exam preparation. There are tools for all of these on The Learning Corner website.

#5- I can be anonymous in my class

Fact: The nature of online courses often turns out to produce more active communication rather than less. Developing a presence and communicating actively is a success strategy. Students will be posting each week in discussion boards with their thoughts on the assigned material, and occasionally will need to “present” virtually to their class. More peers will be able to read and comment on their work. Establishing communication early with the instructor is also critical.

Tip: Encourage students to contact instructor on a timeline for check-ins, and to go to the instructor first with any questions or concerns. Also, being proactive is essential in letting instructors know about unique situations, potential absences, and any needs or requests for extended time.

#6- It's harder to make friends

Fact: It will require different types of interaction perhaps, by Ecampus courses are designed ideally to include student-to-instructor, student-to-content, and student-to-student interactions. The discussion boards are one of the most important elements of courses both because of the weight (grade) and because of the opportunity for rich discussions. They will happen students answer questions, develop deeper understanding, and build connections with classmates.

Tip: Students can try to take a class with someone they know, or be proactive in trading email address, etc. with other students to facilitate communication outside of the online classroom.

#7- I won't have any team projects

Fact: Online classes are requiring more and more team involvement. Between discussion boards and collaborative groups (both formal and informal), virtual teams can happen easily in online courses. One benefit of online group work is that it mimics the professional world and can help students develop strong communication skills across different mediums.

Tip: OSU's google apps has great tools (google hangout, google docs). There are other fantastic resources out there like Skype, and gotomeeting

#8- I'll be on my own; who can help?

Fact: There may not be many chances for immediate feedback due to the asynchronous nature of the courses, but there are many resources. Generally, lots of questions can be answered by looking into the different course elements, syllabus, and/or a general FAQ's forum. If a student can't find an answer in those places, the first point of contact will be the instructor. For additional questions students can also reach out to advisors, or Ecampus student services about available resources.

Tip: If students are interested in developing online learning skills, there are a number of online success courses currently. ALS 108, 114, and 116

#9- My instructor is online 24/7

Fact: Not so. Some online instructors have established office hours when they are available. Some may have policies that outline response time (ie: 24-48 hrs). Those policies will vary by instructor and institution but it is the responsibility of the student to find out what the policy is.

Tip: Utilize all of the available tools (discussion boards, peers, announcements, and of course syllabus) to find important information. Set students up for realistic expectations of what an appropriate response time is when reaching out to faculty and staff (not going to be immediate like texting or IM's), and let them know they can contact Ecampus student services if an instructor is not responsive after a few attempts.

#10- There's no real different between online and traditional classes

Fact: A 2010 report from the U.S. Department of Education reveals that online students actually **outperformed students** who were learning the same material through traditional education.

In fact when you take into consideration the unexpected impact on your preparation for your education and career, the outcomes are even more striking: networking, familiar with online tools, developing a "how to learn" strength, allowing for personal and professional development with a schedule that is flexible around travel, attending conferences, etc.