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Studying Online: Getting the Most Out of Your Online Studies

Online education has exploded in the recent years, thanks in part to pandemic quarantines, economic recession and changing workplace dynamics, all rolled into a 3- or 4-year period. For many, the transition to an online classroom is a difficult endeavor, bearing with it its own challenges and hurdles to overcome.

<https://pdmacademy.com/studying-online/>*(opens in a new tab)*



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Studying online is not your typical classroom environment. Replacing an immersive environment with a screen leaves a lot of room for distractions, competing interests, and technology fatigue, in addition to placing much more emphasis on self-focus and mental discipline to stay the course (pun unintended but achieved).

What is the difference when studying online?

There is traditional learning and online learning, these two are similar yet different in many ways.

Traditional learning programs use an established technique of in-classroom meetings for delivering course information and facilitating student conversation and debate. Traditional learning environments are more structured than distance learning programs and provide face-to-face contact with fellow students and professors. Students meet at an assigned time and place to partake in class lectures, labs, study groups and exams.

Online learning is a method of delivering educational information via the internet instead of in a physical classroom. There are many different applications for online learning, ranging in scope from simple downloadable content through to structured programs that include assessment and award.

Pros of studying online

Online learning brings a lot of conveniences to persons seeking to develop their talents or build new skillsets. Benefits include:

Convenience: With little to no commuting/traveling time to a campus or training facility, you have more time to not only prepare for class / revise work, but to live a better quality of life. This gives you the

advantage of being able to more easily afford to study anywhere in the world. Online studying is generally less expensive, eliminating the need for travel, housing and meal costs to get to training facilities and classrooms.

With ready access to resources online, it becomes easy to include guest experts or students from other institutions, or curate additional information, as well as gain access to resources and information around the world. A major convenience of online study is that class attendees can continue to work at his/her job while taking classes.

Studying online bears no learning pace constraints – depending on the course. You can learn at your pace and study at your convenience. Some relish the additional benefit of being able to express themselves in writing than having to interact verbally, where classes are to groups of persons and not catering to individual study.

Online students stand to benefit greatly from synergies of the online classroom. High levels of dynamic interaction between the instructor and students as well as among the students themselves mean that ideas and resources are shared, and continuous synergy will be generated through the learning process as each individual contributes to the course discussions and comments on classmates' work.

Even in online study courses, the curation and inclusion of additional materials, with ongoing access, mean that students stand to benefit from a diverse and robust body of knowledge. Of course, there's the additional benefit of equal participation - from all classmates, helping to ensure that the most outgoing student(s) will not monopolize the discussion.

Major Challenges

Studying online does bring with it some challenges, which can include:

Online studying requires a degree of knowledge and comfort in the use of technology, and having a strong understanding of how Web technologies functions.

Not everyone is comfortable with this option, since it means having to learn the tool in addition to learning the content of the course of study.

Delivery of a course online can be a challenging endeavour. Re-envisioning course goals, activities, and assessments can take considerable time, energy and skills that many facilitators and instructors do not possess.

In many cases, goals, activities, and assessments that work well in the face-to-face class can fall flat in the online environment, and online students have to toil through the experience while ensuring the learnings are transferred.

Balancing work and class responsibilities, juggling professional and academic commitments is challenging regardless of an online student's field of study. One way a student might stay on top of their workload is by seeking online programs that have elements of synchronous – or real-time – instruction, where students and faculty meet virtually on a regular basis.

Tips and Techniques to Online Studying

There are quite some things one can do to ensure they get the most out of their online studies.

1. Ensure you are passionate about the course. Once the interest is there, you would be motivated to pursue the course.

If you are less interested, find a way to link the course with something you are passionate about, and see it as a means to help you in that area. This you will need on days when you really, really don't want to attend classes.

2. Set aside time each week as needed to pursue the course. Treating attendance to the course as non-optional helps you build or maintain the mental discipline to ensure you stay the course and get the certification you seek.
3. Have a workspace at your home, office or other facility to support your online study. A quiet area with less distractions means your focus can be more targeted, helping you get more out of your course.

Being in an area where less people know you (like a different café or in a separate room) would also help you avoid distractions from other persons.

4. Have your folders organised on your system or desk means that you spend less time having to catch up and dust away cobwebs, and more time focusing on the topic at hand. In this way, you can steer effort to think through the topic and its application rather than playing catch up to get your bearings.
5. Know how you learn: some persons prefer using videos, conversations and activities. Others prefer to read and write. Some learn better through the use of imagery and diagrams. Knowing how you learn best – and utilizing the corresponding tools of the course, would help you to cover the topics, and subjects, much more efficiently and effectively.

Any educational pursuit is not easy. But in the online era, it is a lot easier option. Students are no more having to relocate, or be in a fixed location at a fixed time, or be relegated to what options are available in their immediate environment, or face the group dynamics while seeking to learn... all at considerable costs of money, time and effort.

In this transitional era of technological disruption, using the technology to build your skillset and power your performance can have disruption work in your favor, and prepare you for the next level.

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Sources & Further Reading:

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- <https://www.ies.ncsu.edu/resources/white-papers/pros-and-cons-of-online-education/>
- http://study.com/articles/Pros_and_Cons_of_Online_Classes_Info_for_Students.html

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