

What is really so great about online courses?

The benefits are so numerous; it is hard to know where to start. If you have an up-to-date computer, a fast internet connection, and the right software and plug-ins, you are set. You can take the courses anywhere. If you do not have online access all day, that is often perfectly okay. Most online courses do not require you to be online all the time, and they encourage flexibility.

You can download audio and video to experience later. You can read your books and materials offline. The things you will do online involve communication with your professor, downloading information, taking online quizzes, practicing online quizzes and engaging in dynamic, interactive elements (virtual labs, activities, communication). If you have to travel for your job, do not worry.

Have WiFi—will travel. You will be able to take your course anywhere you have a computer and an internet connection. You would be amazed how many people log on and do their online courses from their hotel rooms while they are traveling, or going to an internet cafe or coffee shop with connections. You can be overseas, in an airport, or any other place with a connection.

Do online courses cost more than regular ones?

Online courses will often be the same tuition as traditional face-to-face courses. However, there may be a fee for connections and support. On the other hand, if you are taking a course with a lab, your online course may be less expensive because you will not have to pay lab fees or purchase lab equipment. You will just need to have the book and passcode for the virtual lab. If you compare the cost of an online college with a private institution, you may be surprised at how affordable the online courses can be.

How much money am I going to save by taking online courses?

You may think that if you are taking an online course, you will need to buy a better computer than you would need for a regular face-to-face course. The truth is you will need the same kind of computer for your regular courses. The reason is that most courses, online or off, require you to go online for research, to use e-mail, and to access files and instructional materials for your course. You are going to save a great deal of money in terms of commuting time, parking, transportation costs and incidentals.

How convenient will it be?

Taking an online course is extremely convenient. Because most courses are asynchronous, which means you can be online any time and can follow a schedule that makes sense to you. You can work according to your own schedule. That said it is important to keep in mind that you really need to have a reliable Internet connection that you can access often. Ideally, you should log on twice a day, even if it is just to check announcements and to see what is happening in the discussion board.

What kind of Internet connections will I need?

Dial-up used to work. At present, dial-up can get in your way more than any course requirements. Wifi is good, although there may be times when it can be problematic, particularly if there are many users and band-width is crunched.

Do I have to be connected to the Internet all the time?

You do not need to be connected all the time. However, some courses need more connectivity than others do. If you have to do activities that are accessible online, but not downloadable, you will need to be online. If this is the case, be sure to plan your day and your proximity to a computer with a high-speed connection.

Will I need textbooks?

Yes. In fact, they are included, print out your assignments and review what you will be doing. Be sure to map out your work, and have a good sense of how to budget your time and to schedule your study time.

What is the best way to succeed in an online course?

Follow the guidelines below.

Top Ten Ways to Succeed

1. Sign up early, take courses in correct sequence;
2. Check out entire course, clicking all links;
3. Find timeline and familiarize yourself with tasks;
4. Have appropriate computer, software and connection;
5. Keep up with reading and tasks;
6. Establish connection with fellow students; keep up with discussion/cooperative tasks;
7. Practice writing activities: paragraphs, short essays, research papers;
8. Practice quizzes, review materials;
9. Perfect online research, writing.

If you are used to face-to-face courses and traditional formats, you probably feel fairly comfortable and confident. However, why do you feel so good about what you are doing? You probably have a good attitude about the course, the delivery format and the instructional strategy.

Chances are you have a good attitude because you have succeeded in many similar situations and you are not a bit worried about what you have to do. You trust the teaching method, are convinced that you can learn, and that you can demonstrate what you have learned.

When it comes to online courses, e-learning that involve web-based learning mobile learning, you are not so comfortable. In fact, you might feel awkward, uncomfortable, even defensive and nervous.

Why the difference?

It all boils down to the affective domain. Instructional psychologists use this term to describe the realm of feelings and emotions as they apply to learning.

The affective domain includes attitude, values, beliefs, opinions, interests, motivation, and even basic emotions such as fear, joy, anger and sadness.

The elements in the affective domain are almost always key determinants in whether or not you, the e-learner, succeed in your course, and whether or not you perceive you had a positive experience.

How can you use this information to improve your chances of success, even enjoyment, in your course? You can start by building a framework for the affective domain and equipping yourself with what you need.

What are the elements to include in the framework? How can you construct them so that you are able to manage them? Here are the elements, and here are suggestions for putting them together.

1. **Attitude.** Attitude can be viewed in general terms as one's tendency or predisposition to respond positively or negatively toward things, people, places, events, concepts and ideas (Koballa, 2008). The first step is to become aware of your attitudes toward e-learning, online instructors, the software, the technology and your fellow students. Once you identify where you may have a negative reaction, then find out what is shaping your attitude. Once you identify the points of stress, are you able to change your attitude by adjusting your attitudes or beliefs? Often your self-investigation will reveal that many of your attitudes are shaped by fear of the unknown and/or fear of failure. Practice the technology. Read your materials. Tell yourself that you like adventure, and you thrive in an intellectually challenging environment.

2. **Values.** Keep in mind that values tend to be less malleable than attitudes. Your values tend to be strong and enduring. So, with that in mind, use your values as muscle. Put your values to work. If you

value education, knowledge, learning and respect, remind yourself of that. Keep in mind that your regard for education can help you overcome your fears.

3. **Belief and attitude work together.** They mediate, modify and alter behavior. This is a powerful insight. Think of the implications. If you do not believe in the efficacy of e-learning, then your behavior will demonstrate that. You will not attack your lessons in an enthusiastic way. You will hang back and resist purchasing the equipment you need. You will behave unenthusiastically in the collaborative activities you need to do (discussion board, sharing messages/IM/Twitter, posting portfolio materials).
4. **Need to change your attitude?** Look to your instructor for help and guidance. Studies have shown that a positive attitude from your instructor can work wonders (Glynn & Koballa, 2006). If he/she demonstrates a positive belief in you, and has a supportive and encouraging approach to you, you are likely to start forming more positive beliefs about yourself and your ability to succeed. Furthermore, you are more likely to enjoy what you are doing.
5. **Becoming a self-starter.** A well-designed instructional strategy or lesson plan will capture your interest, engage your feelings and entice you to start trying out the activities, even before instructed to do so.
6. **Believing in yourself and your power to positively change your situation.** One way to bolster your confidence is to actively tell yourself how your academic activities are worthwhile and meaningful. You should tell yourself how much they will positively impact or influence your personal life. Map out the ways in which your academic activities will lead you toward achieving your goals.

7. **Motivation.** There are number of tried and true ways to bolster your motivation in an e-learning context.
 - First, reinforce yourself with the positive benefits of what you are doing.
 - Second, look at what you will get. What are the re-wards? Are they extrinsic (a raise? a promotion? a new job?). Are they intrinsic? (Do you love the topic? Are you interested in the subject?).
 - Finally, how can you set goals? What is the best way to break down the task into small tasks?

8. **Self-determination gives you a better sense of control.** In e-learning, having the flexibility to work on your tasks at a convenient time and location, and have choices about the topics you write about, what you study and what you discuss can make a huge difference. When possible, remind yourself of where and when you have choices. That will build your sense of self-determination.

As you read these points and suggestions, you may be feeling a bit of anxiety. If so, relax. Keep in mind that a certain level of anxiety is, in reality, motivating. So, whenever you feel nervous about new challenges or changes in your e-learning experience, tell yourself it is a good thing. You are keeping your edge. **You will succeed.**