

Succeeding with online learning

Online learning could present unique challenges if you are not used to it. However, if you develop and implement skills for effective online learning, you will find the online environment to be an excellent alternative to face-to-face teaching and learning.

Online learning requires the independence, internal motivation, responsibility and certain level of maturity that may be expected of university students. If you want to succeed, you have to take responsibility for your own learning, settle into good study habits, deal with technical problems, seek help when needed, work daily on every module and persist through challenges. In short, you need to be resilient.

Things to keep in mind

1. Online learning requires just as much, if not more, time and energy as learning in a face-to-face contact environment.
2. Self-discipline is the mainstay of success. You have to sit down and say, “I am going to work on this,” and have the dedication to follow through. You can be flexible with when and how you work, but procrastination will work against you. You need to “show up”.
3. You have to manage your time effectively. The flexibility of online learning could tempt you to procrastinate. It is important to stick to a study schedule without relying on reminders from lecturers to engage with your academic work. It is up to you to make sure you have allotted enough time to complete and submit your work on time.
4. Be sure to keep your learning material well organised. Label documents and folders clearly, then you will not waste time hunting around for notes or documents. Organising includes filing electronic and hard-copy notes, and making summaries.
5. You will be faced with many distractions that can easily derail your studies – from social media to online movies and even the dishes piling up in the sink. Shut them out as far as possible, so as not to interfere with your schedule.
6. Establish a routine and, if possible, set up a dedicated learning space for yourself.
7. Attend to all your modules regularly. If you feel you are falling behind, reach out.
8. Participate actively to enhance your own learning and to avoid feeling isolated.
9. By being organized, proactive and self-aware, you will benefit the most from your online classes, even when life in general feels somewhat chaotic.

Ways of assisting yourself

1. Pair up with a classmate or enlist the help of a friend as an accountability partner.
2. Have an open conversation with your family, housemates or people you reside with, to explain your situation and ask their support.
3. Effective time management skills have to be learned; it takes time and effort to develop these good habits. Tips for practising and improving your time management skills: diarise important dates, create a weekly plan, work on a daily schedule similar to your face-to-face timetable, set reminders for yourself and block out study times. Stick to these measures.
4. Know yourself. Not everyone learns in the same way. So, think which types of information help you best grasp new concepts, and develop your study strategies according to that.
5. Exercise self-care, be kind to yourself and others, and live a balanced life.

Online learning comes with its own unique challenges and these might differ given your specific circumstances. Following these pointers, even if circumstances are far from ideal, might help you be successful. Wishing you all of the best with your studies!

Academic support: studysuccess@sun.ac.za | Writing assistance: <http://www0.sun.ac.za/languagecentre/?p=3057>