

How to Succeed in Distance Learning Courses

This guide provides suggestions and tips covering subjects like study skills, course organization information, and scheduling suggestions for distance learners.

- **Familiarize yourself with the course design.** Check the college web site to view the distance learning course syllabus. Spend time looking at the course syllabus even before you register. Decide if you can be a successful self-directed learner in this particular study content.
- **Read all of the course syllabus.** The distance learning course syllabus contains all of the information the student needs to progress through a distance learning course. This includes information about the course description, objectives, and requirements, course meetings, assignments and testing, media and technology used, a course calendar or assignment schedule, and support contact information.
- **Identify tools necessary to complete assignments. Before** enrolling in a course, make sure you have access to the tools necessary to complete assignments. A word processor can help you to organize your work and communicate your thoughts more clearly. Access to VCR, tape player, a fax machine, computer with adequate hard disk space and modem for e-mail transmission are "musts" for many classes.
- **Be realistic.** You will not have to keep a class attendance schedule, but you will have to do regular academic work. Remember you should be spending at least two study hours each week for every credit you are taking. So if there is insufficient time in your personal schedule to do the work of the course, you will be frustrated.
- **Set interim goals and deadlines for yourself, and stick to them.** Keep a calendar showing the number of weeks in the quarter and mark it off with the amount of work you need to do each week. Mark in the days when you will expect to take tests, submit projects, contact the instructor. Don't fall behind in your work! Keep reminding yourself that you will always have more to do near the end of a course than at the beginning.
- **Organize your goals in a study schedule.** Identify study times when you are fresh and attentive and stick to those times every week. Think of the study times as "reserved time." If you miss too many study times, revise your schedule.
- **Avoid interruptions.** Avoid all interruptions and distractions while you are viewing a video program, listening to a cassette, reading the textbook, working on the computer, or studying. Take the telephone off the hook if there is no one available to answer it but you.
- **Know where to study.** Find a place that is free from distractions. You might consider work--before or after hours and on your lunch hour--a public library, or a separate room in your home.
- **Stay in touch with your instructor.** Contact your instructor regularly, especially when you have questions about course content materials. Instructors are available by phone and/or email, or you may make an appointment for an on-campus meeting. You may also correspond with your instructor by mail or by FAX.
- **Prepare for assignments and tests.** In distance learning, course assignments could involve the use from different mediums: print, videos, audios, and the Internet. Remember you are not just watching or listening. You are learning from the information on those various mediums. Take notes. Imagine questions that might be on a test from your study guide, from your textbook, from videos or audiotapes, or from the Internet course assignments.
- **Use good communication skills.** Pay careful attention to instructions and be certain that you understand what is being asked when submitting assignments. It often helps to develop a brief outline before responding to

questions whether they are submitted in writing, via e-mail, orally or on video/audio tape.

- **Evaluate your own progress regularly.** Re-read the course objectives and standards often to see how you are progressing with them.
- **Time your tests wisely.** Before you take a test, make sure you understand the information covered in the course assignments that will be the basis for a particular test.
- **Find some study-buddies.** If you feel the need to study with other students from the class, ask your instructor for help in identifying other students who may want to work with you.
- **Discuss your progress.** Ask your instructor at various points in the quarter how your progress is going. Also ask for help and point out any areas that you think are difficult or unclear.
- **Use relaxation techniques to focus better.** Relaxation techniques can benefit learning in a number of ways: heighten concentration, heighten attention focusing and lessen anxiety. Some common relaxation techniques include deep breathing, stretching, and soothing music.

Source: Terra Community College, Fremont, Ohio. *How to Succeed in Distance Learning Courses*. 30 July 2001. <http://www.terra.cc.oh.us/academics/distance/orient/toc.asp>

What Do I Need To Succeed in a Distance Learning Course?

Each CCC&TI Distance Learning course provides you with dozens of resources to help you succeed, including connections to discussion groups, libraries, writing guides, and a student manual for using all of the courses resources. To succeed in a distance learning course, you also need the following equipment and skills:

1. **Internet Access:** You must either own or have frequent access to a computer connected to the Internet. You should have access to this computer at least 3 hours per week for online discussion groups, for doing online research, for sending and responding to email messages, and for writing papers and submitting them via the Internet. You will, of course, need to spend more time than this reading textbook assignments, viewing videotapes (if required), and participating in other types of learning experiences. If you connect to the Internet with a modem, 56K is the minimum modem connection.
2. **Computer Knowledge:** You must also know how to use your computer to save files, access those files on your computer, copy files, use word processing, cut and paste text, copy text, and send and receive email. Since Microsoft Word is the program your teachers will be using, your course will provide you with detailed guides to using Microsoft Word.
3. **Email:** You will need your own email account. If you do not have one, each Internet course provides a connection to free email services. In addition, you can send messages to your teacher and classmates in an CCC&TI Distance Learning course without having to connect to your private email service. If you do not have an email account, click on the following address to set up a free account that you can use from any computer connected to the Internet: <http://mail.yahoo.com>.
4. **Up-to-date Browser** You also must use either Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher or Netscape 6.0 or higher for your Web browser. It is strongly recommended that you download and install the latest version of either IE or Netscape for the best Internet experience. To download the latest version of IE; or download the latest version of Netscape.
5. **Videotape and CD:** You may need to have access to a videotape player, a DVD player and a CD-ROM drive since some CCC&TI Distance Learning courses use videotapes, DVDs and materials on CD-ROM. Some of these you will purchase from the CCC&TI Bookstore. Other videotapes, DVDs or CD-ROMs may be available through checkout, through the Learning Resource

- Center on the CCC&TI campus or rental from a video store. Thus you also must have access to a videotape player and/or DVD player at your home, or you can view these at the LRC.
6. **Writing Skills:** Aside from the technical requirements, you must be able to read and write effectively. Using the Internet is a point and click experience, but the Internet and Internet courses are reading intensive experiences. You must also be a self-motivated person who can maintain a schedule. CCC&TI Distance Learning courses are not correspondence courses that you will complete in the far-distant future completely at your leisure. CCC&TI Distance Learning requires weekly activities just as in any course, although you can complete these activities any hour of the day or night during that weekly period.
 7. **Self-Evaluation:** Take the Distance Learning Pre-test to determine if you are ready to take a distance learning course.

Five Crucial Tips for Success

1. **Schedule your own "class time."** Be sure that you have time to take a distance learning course. While these courses are convenient, they do require time and the ability and willingness to study independently. You should schedule time several hours each week to work on your distance course and adhere to that schedule just like you would attend an on-campus class. If you're taking an online course, plan to spend considerable time online. You will need to log into the course web site several times each week to keep current with assignments, announcements, and discussion forums. You will also need to check your e-mail frequently for messages from your instructor or from other class members. Keep up with the assignment schedule, submitting all assignments promptly.
2. **Limit the number of distance classes you take.** Because of the time and effort you will put into each distance learning class, you should limit the number of classes taken in this manner. If you have never taken a distance class before, do not take more than one class at a distance. This way, you can decide if distance learning is for you before signing up for other distance classes. Even if you are an experienced distance learner, it would be wise to take only two or three DL classes at the most. Many students find that distance classes require more time than their on-campus classes, so take this into consideration as well.
3. **Attend the required orientation session.** This is the time you will meet with your instructor and learn about the course requirements and the support services offered. Ask plenty of questions, and make sure you know how to contact your instructor if you find that you have other questions once you leave or once you begin working on course assignments.
4. **Keep up with your reading assignments.** For telecourse students, obtain your study guide and/or textbook before you watch the first program. The study guide outlines lessons, gives details, includes sample tests, tells you what to watch for in the television program, and helps you review before tests. The textbook contains the primary reading material for each lesson. Both are available in the bookstore. Read the associated study guide and/or textbook materials before you watch each program. Watch the program in an environment that is quiet, but not too comfortable, and do not try to take detailed notes.
5. **Keep in touch with your instructor.** Do not hesitate to phone or send an e-mail anytime you have questions or problems. If you've e-mailed and gotten no response, don't assume that your instructor is ignoring you. E-mail is not always reliable. In cases like these, just pick up the phone and call your instructor.