

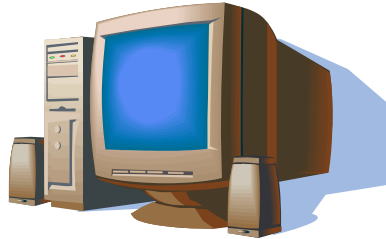
MANAGING ONLINE CLASSES

Mayland Community College

S.O.A.R. Program

2011 - 2012

INTERNET, HYBRID, DISTANCE EDUCATION: THE NEW FACE OF EDUCATION



Education today is delivered in a multitude of ways to reach a broad range of learners. In-class participation is predicted to become less and less the standard for educational delivery as advances in technology make distance learning a viable, and often preferred, option for many students.

Many resources are available to help class instructors create lessons, teach, and evaluate students in online courses; few, however, exist to help students manage such classes successfully.

While online classes have helped thousands of working adults attain their dreams of earning a degree or certificate, they also create problems for students who struggle with time management and organization, leading them to quit in frustration before achieving their goals.

As an online or distance education (DE) student, you must work independently and be able to carry out course assignments, write papers, post to discussion boards, organize and schedule your own time, and meet deadlines on your own in order to meet course requirements.

This module is designed to help you make the most of your online classes. In it you will find tips that, if practiced, will make the difference between thriving or struggling in an online class.



THE PROS AND CONS OF TAKING ONLINE CLASSES

Taking a class online has its challenges, as well as its rewards. For the convenience of being able to fulfill your class obligations at home or in a computer lab, there are special requirements for these classes.

While you don't have to be a technology wizard to take an online class, you do need a certain amount of computer skills and be comfortable managing discussion boards, email attachments, uploading documents, and responding to instructors and students' comments in writing, on the computer.

You must keep up with your daily assignments, postings, blogs, readings and any other course requirements on your own. You must also be able to manage technical difficulties, power outages, Internet problems, and other unforeseen difficulties that can make distance education challenging at times.

Some students miss the direct contact with other students and the instructor. Online classes do not afford the social contact or attention some students need to be successful. They can be more difficult than seated classes for this reason. Feedback from instructors is often not as steady or immediate as students wish.

Not reading the syllabus and course requirements carefully, not keeping up with daily assignments, and falling behind is a problem for many students who are not accustomed to independent and self-directed learning.

On the positive side, taking an online class can be a workable solution to taking a class while holding down a job, taking care of a family, and having other obligations that do not allow in-class participation. The class hours are flexible and the time you spend on your class assignments is completely up to you.





TAKING ONLINE COURSES AT MCC

If you are planning on taking an online course, here are some important points to be aware of:

1. You must inform your advisor. You cannot register without your advisor's permission and the appropriate paperwork completed.
2. You will not receive a refund if you drop an online class, even during the schedule revision period.
3. You must complete the required orientation to the class before the end of the schedule revision period.
4. You must check the course syllabus, not only for contact information for your instructor, but for all information about the course requirements, deadlines, etc. Your instructor may have an email address outside of MCC's system or may prefer contacts by phone.
5. If you are not in contact with your instructor or do not have an online presence for two weeks, you will be dropped from the class. Many MCC instructors of DE courses are available on campus during office hours. Call to make an appointment instead of just dropping in.
6. Meeting course requirements is expected of you. Late assignments, missing discussion topics, failing to respond to discussion boards, missing tests, and not meeting course deadlines for tests and assignments are not acceptable and will result in lowering your grade.



ONLINE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are some tips to help you make the most of your online class and get the best grade possible.

1) You Must Access to a Working Computer and be Computer Literate

The most important requirement is that you have access to a computer on a regular basis and software that is compatible, if not identical, to that of the college providing the course. If this is not the case, you may need to plan time to do your online classwork on campus, where the computer software is compatible. If you cannot login every day, at least login every other day to avoid getting behind.

2) Read everything twice. Read everything twice.

Although this seems self-evident, it's easy for a student in an online environment who feels pressed for time and anxious to complete homework to scan through postings, lectures and assignments without really reading or, consequently, retaining anything.

Perhaps because the online medium is relatively new, most people have not trained themselves mentally to retain what they read onscreen as much as they do with printed material. By reading each posting twice, you have a better chance of understanding the message being communicated.

3) Wait...to reply.

An immediate response to a posting or message you find upsetting or challenging can result in a war of words rather than thoughtful or meaningful discussions. Without being able to see the sender's facial expressions or hear his or her voice, the context of the message may be lost. You may send something thinking your words are humorous or satirically funny, but others may misinterpret them. Take the equivalent of a Count to 10 and breathe before hitting the Reply button.

4) Reference it. Perhaps Print it.

The temptation in an online classroom is to print everything you are assigned to read, from emails and postings to websites and lectures. **Only print** reading assignments that are to be referenced later, unless the assignment is somewhat

lengthy. However, if you are “paper-trained,” you may need to have the tactile sensation of holding what you read in your hands, so feel free to print your reading assignments. As time goes on, and you become more familiar with the online learning environment, you will find yourself doing less printing and more online reading.

5) Talking In Class.

One of the drawbacks of an asynchronous online classroom is that discussion with your instructor and classmates is hindered by relying only on Email and message board postings. Using instant messaging programs, such as AOL Instant Messenger or Yahoo Messenger, can bring spontaneity of real-world conversation to you and your fellow online colleagues. The use of this technology is, of course, dependent on the school, program, or instructor.

If you are allowed to use chat software, it is important to keep a log of your conversations for posting to your classroom. For example, when you and your teammates chat about projects, it’s a good idea to copy your conversations to the class folder. This allows the instructor, other students, and absent team members to follow your train of thought as you develop your ideas and processes.

Post with an open mind and receive postings with an open mind. Not everyone thinks the way you do. Discussion boards are not a forum for fighting or arguing. Post with the sense that you are sharing information, not opposing or arguing against someone, not even if it is a topic about which you are passionate.

Pay attention to issues generally considered HOT TOPIC or HOT BUTTON issues. Understand that others may find them intimidating or offensive, which may lead them to respond with hostility or derision. Do not expect everyone to share your views.

Also, remember that there are age differences among students. Your classmates may be from different generations, with different viewpoints from yours.

6) A Place for Everything and Everything in its Place.

In an online course, information comes at you fast and furious. Before you realize it, you are buried under a deluge of data and piles of printouts. Organize both your printed and computer files the same way. The naming structure you have on your

hard drive should mirror what you have in the real-world. For example, if your course is called Curriculum Design & Development, name your computer folder for this class as CURR DESIGN. In this folder, create sections for Week 1, Week 2, Week 3, and so on. For printed materials, create sections for the topic printed, adding tabs to the pages for easy retrieval. This method of organizing your coursework will save you time, ease your frustration, and help you focus more on the course.

7) Identify Your Postings and Assignments

Title the subject line of postings with personal and requirement data. Simply put, make it easy for the instructor to know who sent the posting and why. Is it an assignment, a comment, a question to the instructor? If you are required to respond with substantial postings on at least three different days of the week to receive discussion credit, label your discussion line: Week 2, Day 1; Week 2, Day 2; Week 2, Day 3; etc. so the instructor can easily see the posting has been made during the designated week. Above all, use your subject lines for quick identification by others of your postings. **Example:** Week 2, Day 1, Analysis of Project. **OR** Week 2, Discussion 1, (date), TOPIC.

8) Make Your Message Meaningful.

When threaded discussions grow in length, the temptation is to respond with cursory comments such as, “I agree,” or “That’s true.” These comments add little to the dialogue. Rather than use these types of responses, make an effort to include more details, give a rationale, or state your opinion. Cite the specific portion of the discussion to which you are referring. This enables those in your class to follow the conversation’s path and contributes to a more intelligent discourse. Otherwise, postings have little meaning, and the students and instructor have to hunt for shifts in discussion topics.

If message boards are included, read directions carefully so you know what is expected of you. Your postings will be noticed, as will your absences. Your replies to other’s posts count, too. Use weekends to post information and always be aware of posting deadlines.

9) Better to Save than be Sorry.

For complete and accurate documentation, anytime you send an Email or posting,

send a copy to yourself. This provides proof that the Email is delivered through the school's system and shows when the Email was sent. This is critical for assignments due by a certain time. Send a copy of important messages to yourself at an alternate Email address (such as a LEO, Hotmail, Gmail, or Yahoo account) to ensure that you have a complete set of records in case something happens to the program server or network.

If you have all of your information stored in a separate account, you can continue working without interruption. In the event that an instructor or classmate fails to do their part, or worse, claims that you did not do yours, sending a copy to someone at a higher level may help resolve any problems or disputes. Use Email options such as 'delivery' and 'read' receipts to help in the documentation process.

10) Be Your Own Guide, But Ask For Help

Just as students need to get accustomed to learning in an online environment, instructors have to learn how to teach in one. Many are excellent guides. However, some have not adapted to this new "classroom" as easily. If your instructor does not seem to be an effective classroom leader, you can help by communicating clearly and effectively with him/her. Keep Emails to one question or one topic; multiple questions in a message may be overlooked in a response.

Make use of all methods of communication provided by the instructor: such as phone, Email, or chat software. If you do contact him/her by phone or chat, follow up with an Email or posting afterwards stating what you asked and what you believe the answer was. Do not wait for the situation to become unbearable before asking for help or clarification. By asking questions immediately, you may never have problems.

11) Allow Time For Responses

When taking an online class, remember that you are one of a group of students who is interacting with the instructor via email, therefore it may take time to get a response. Even if you feel your question, your test grade, or clarification of the course assignment you are seeking is urgent and needs immediate attention, you will have to be patient and understanding of your instructor's timeframe for responding.

12) Maintain an Accurate Calendar/Schedule and Follow Them Every Day!

Since a syllabus accompanies every course you take, you will usually know far in advance when major projects, papers and assignments are due, as well as when tests and quizzes are scheduled. At the start of each course, enter all assignment due dates in your planner right away and block out time in the days before them to get them done. Include time to study. The same is true of work assignments. If you know you have a project for work due, pen it in, so you will know to rearrange study time around it.

Also, determine how many days you will need to complete each assignment. For instance, if an assignment is due on Thursday that you believe will take three days to complete, mark your planner to work on the assignment on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. **Remember to allow time for personal and employment-related events.**

If possible, allow an extra day or two for technology glitches, team members running behind on projects, and other unforeseen delays. Do not forget to set aside time for studying, reviewing, and researching.

13) Set Priorities.

When you get started on your courses after work, always do the most difficult assignment first. It is human nature to want to procrastinate and put off difficult tasks for later, but you'll be able to rest easier with the tougher work out of the way. You will find that you are not staying up as late to get assignments done and not sleepily dragging in to school or work the next day.

Above all, do not get behind in your reading. Even when you are home sick, or taking care of a sick family member, you can find time to keep up with course requirements.

14) Say No To TV, Social Networking and Non-School-Related Web Surfing.

Nothing is more time-wasting as an online student than trying to get schoolwork done while watching your favorite sitcom, eyeing your current eBay auctions and sifting through the latest Facebook posts. Turn off the TV, sign out of your social networks and get to work. You will find you get your class work done in half the time.

15) Let Your Boss Know That You are Taking Classes.

Some students are able to work out more school-friendly schedules with their workplace or even negotiate moving down to part-time status while they are in school. It never hurts to explore your options, and you'd be surprised how many supervisors are glad to hear an employee is advancing their education.

16) Log In on Your Lunch Break.

If you get a lunch break at work, take advantage of it to log in to your classes and maybe even study a little. Try packing your lunch rather than going out for lunch to make the best use of your daytime free time.



What to do in Case of Illness or Emergencies:

Even the best planning can fail when illnesses or unexpected life events interfere. If such is the case, observe the following suggestions:

1. Email the instructor, talk by phone, keep him or her informed of your status, and stay in touch. You may be dropped from any class, online or in-class, by not being in contact for two weeks or more.
2. After explaining your situation, accept that instructor has the right to refuse to give an extension of time or make an exception to the class rules. **In most cases, absences, no matter what the reason, are not excusable** and may result in lowering your grade. If such is the case, consider dropping the class and discuss this with your advisor.

Distance Education is Here to Stay - Prepare Yourself

If you are taking, or considering taking, an Online, Internet, Hybrid, or other type of distance education class, be sure to discuss this with your academic advisor, and read this entire module to prepare yourself to be successful. You may be taking more and more classes in the format of online or hybrid classes, so make the most of this opportunity by using these proven strategies for success.

Always remember the basic rules of all classes: do your own work and never plagiarize, copy, or otherwise present the work of others as your own. Academic honesty pertains to all classes, whether online or in class.

Finally, if online classes are not for you, talk with your advisor and choose classes that are more suitable to your needs.



**GOOD LUCK AND ENJOY THE DISTANCE
EDUCATION EXPERIENCE!**