

Tips for Successful On-line Learning

by © June Kaminski, RN MSN PhD(c) - 2006-7



There are several advantages to taking on-line courses and programs, including 24/7 access, flexibility, greater fluidity in combining school with work and family, and the potential for interaction and experiences with other students and teachers from all around the globe. But, as with anything else, there are also some drawbacks. Learners need to be keenly self-directed and independent, it is very easy to get distracted and not keep up with your studies, and some learners feel isolated and/or frustrated with using a computer to learn.

There are some proven strategies that teachers (like myself) can share with learners to help make the on-line learning experience more enjoyable, manageable, and can support you to complete your course or program successfully. Here are a few suggestions that you may find useful as you undertake your on-line learning journey.

- **Set Up Your Computer** The first step in preparing yourself is to ensure your computer meets the requirements of the course. It is highly recommended that your computer is reliable, has plenty of harddrive space available, and can handle downloading files, video and audio recordings, and multiple windows can easily be open simultaneously without crashing the whole system. It is also very helpful to have a broadband connection versus a dial-up network access, if at all possible. Life will be much much easier with this simple intervention. If you can afford to have your own private computer, all the better. There is nothing more nerve wracking than living in fear that your loved ones may erase or somehow damage your precious school files. As well, having a private, pleasant place to work on your computer also boosts your ability to study quietly and with as little distraction as possible.
- **Prepare your Course Files** The second step is to prepare your cyber workspace. First, make a special folder on your main computer drive (probably Drive C) and name it to match your course. If you are taking multiple courses, it is helpful to make a separate folder for each course. Then, make a similar folder in your email program to store emails from your instructor, classmates, or files you have sent to yourself (readings, references, etc.).

- **Prepare your Paper Files** Many students who take courses on-line like to have a hard copy of course materials, references, assignments, etc. Purchase some three ring binders and some computer paper (and ink) and a paper punch so you can easily and neatly store your printed materials.
- **Set Your Study Schedule** It is important to set some regular time for your course(s) and to resolve to stick to it. It can be very easy to be distracted. Within reason, refuse to let anything stand in your way. This may take some negotiation with family members, but if you are determined, usually loved ones will get used to the routine and may even help you to abide by it. The best way to choose this special time is to evaluate your current schedule and select, say, three two-hour blocks that fit into your weekly routine well. You also need to consider your own body and mental rhythms. What time of the day do you feel the brightest and most alert? For some, night time is the best time...for others, early morning is best. Or maybe for you, mid-afternoon is the high point of your energy cycle. Figure out when your most productive time is, then try to capitalize on this.
- **Participate in all Interactive Activities** You may find it a little intimidating at first, but it will really help your feeling of belonging, plus help you to learn the course content, if you make sure that you participate in all scheduled or assigned forums, journals, chats, email discussions and other interactive activities. Do not hesitate to interact with your instructor as well - they are there to facilitate your learning. A good instructor will encourage student participation and individual interaction.
- **Organize your Work** Even if the course you are taking is self-paced, try to do some work every week. If the course is based on weekly assignments and activities, resolve to keep up. Learn to deal with procrastination so that you don't fall behind in your readings, interactive activities, weekly assignments, or studying for tests and exams. It helps to have an on-line or book journal organizer and to record your goals for each week in it. Remember to write or type out due dates, exam dates, etc. so that you avoid a mad dash to get things done. This will help you to feel both control and enjoyment as you move through the material.

All of these strategies will help you to move through your on-line course with confidence, and to enjoy the journey. And again, remember your teacher is your guide - don't ever be afraid to approach them with questions, and requests for directions or clarification. You have invested in this course experience, and have the right to ask for help or support. Happy Learning!