

ON-LINE COURSE HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS

Washington State University

College of Nursing

Written by Joan Thiele, PhD, RN

December 7, 2001

Preface

Powerful technological changes in the early to mid-1990 have had a tremendous impact upon all of education. At the postsecondary level, dramatic increase in use of the Internet, electronic mail and Web resources occurred. The power of the Internet for teaching and learning has changed the educational landscape (Web-Based Education Commission Report, 2000).

The Internet enables educators to bring learning to students, rather than students to buildings in which teaching occurs. New research in how people learn coupled with the new technologies supports the provision of high quality online educational content. Online learning environments focus on knowledge development by learners, rather than short-term recall of facts. Multiple interactions and assessments guide the learner through the process of creating their own knowledge from the information available to them. Being a part of an on-line learning community is exciting and challenging. Hopefully, the information contained in this handbook will allay anxieties about this form of teaching and learning and prepare individuals to participate fully in this learning adventure.

Index

On-line learning – what’s so different about it?	4
How does on-line learning differ from the traditional classroom lecture?	5
Characteristics of on-line learning	6
What are the benefits of on-line learning?	7
How will I feel about on-line learning?	8
Changes the Learner Must Make for Success in On-line Classes	8
What if I need in-person help?.....	10
What happens if I get behind?	10
Where do I obtain technical assistance?	11
References	12

ON-LINE LEARNING - WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT IT?



For most of us, going to school has meant just that – going to a bricks and mortar building and sitting in a classroom at a student desk. Our role as a student was to sit quietly, job down a few notes, and occasionally ask a question. The teacher was expected to stand in front of the class and explain the class content in a way that we could understand, even through our daydreaming. On-line learning changes all of those ideas.

In the last 30 years, computers have insidiously changed our lives. First it was ordering at McDonald's in which the information was punched into a computer and eventually placed in a bag at the take-out window. Next, our banks discouraged us from talking to tellers, instead, on-line banking became the way in which we controlled our finances. Then, airlines began offering us discounts to buy tickets on-line. After that, any business without an on-line catalog and shopping area was not operating in the 21st century.



In the same manner, computers have drastically changed education. The Internet has changed the way we teach and learn more than any other event since the advent of the printing press some 500 years ago. The “virtual classroom” has replaced the traditional classroom. Learners learn more, at their own pace, and from

the comfort of their home. Education is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As learners flock to the on-line classroom, education in the 21st century has been forever altered. In fact, one prediction is that “online education will constitute 50 percent of the way people learn. It will not be 100 percent, and we will still have in-person learning, but even in-person learning will be very different from how it is today.” (Draves, 2000, 6).

HOW DOES ON-LINE LEARNING DIFFER FROM THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM LECTURE?



Let's begin by looking at the characteristics of traditional classroom lectures.

- Classroom lectures are traditionally oral presentations in which the teacher does 98% of the talking.
- Participation from learners is minimal; the instructor is expected to fill the time with “information transfer”; the information flows from the presenters notes to the students notebooks.
- Participation consists of being there, physically.
- The traditional class is held at a specified time and a designated location.
- It is a social endeavor; you get to talk to other students and enjoy snacks with them during breaks and before and after the presentation.

- During the presentation, the learner is very passive, maintaining silence broken only by the sound of individual's writing notes or snoring.

Let's compare this scenario with that of the on-line learning class.

The following are major characteristics of the on-line class.



- The learner must initiate activity to attract the attention of the teacher. That activity may be asking a question, seeking clarification of an assignment, writing and e-mailing an assignment or posting a response to a question. In each of these examples, the learner is an active participant in the class.
- The learner is expected to work; content is not delivered in the form of a lecture or handouts of notes and/or slides. On-line learning is work for the learner. Typically, 3 hours of work are expected for each credit hour of a course, **EACH** week.
- Studying just before a test is **ABSOLUTELY NOT** the norm.
- On-line learner is outcomes oriented. How you acquire the knowledge is not as important as correctly using the facts to create new information. The result is an outcome in the form of a paper, a response, a product of some type that can be evaluated.
- Participation is evaluated. Not only being there, but being an active and informed contributor to the class discussions is required and evaluated.



- The class is available to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You may wear your bathrobe and fuzzy slippers to class and no one will notice.
- Interactions with the instructor and with other students in the class are very frequent, often, multiple times a week.
- You would not recognize your instructors or classmates unless they wore their e-mail addresses instead of a name tag, as you may not ever meet in person.
- You will learn more and at your own pace.

What are the benefits of on-line learning?

- Cognitive learning, facts, data, information is achieved faster and better online (Draves, 2000, 11).
- Learners can learn during their peak learning time; you set your schedule according to your own peak performance periods.
- Learners set their own pace and learn at their own speed.
- Learners set their own goals and objectives, focusing on areas that are of greatest interest.
- On-line testing enables the learners to measure their own progress and accomplishments.

- Learners interact more with instructors; on-line learning is more personal and more interactive than the traditional classroom setting.
- Learners become more technologically competent and increase their computer skills.

HOW WILL I FEEL ABOUT ON-LINE LEARNING?

You may experience feelings that are different from your traditional first day of class emotions when you first start an on-line class. You may feel lonely, confused, frustrated, and technologically challenged. All of those feelings are expected; you have been placed in a state of cognitive dissonance; what you have experienced before does not match what you are feeling now. The best thing to do is simply acknowledge that dissonance. On-line learning is relatively new; let yourself enjoy this new form of learning. Become an active participant; in this way, you will soon know your instructor and classmates. Enjoy the new responsibility and freedom that are afforded by on-line education. Change your techniques for learning to match this new situation.

CHANGES THE LEARNER MUST MAKE FOR SUCCESS IN ON-LINE CLASSES.


Like many new adventures, on-line learning requires that the learner make changes to be successful. The traditional study habits and patterns simply do not work. The following suggestions are offered to insure your success in this new venture.

- Set aside a specific time during the day to participate. Since on-line classes are asynchronous, select your best time for learning as your specific study time. Whether this is 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. is your choice. The important thing is to schedule sufficient blocks of time across each week to meet the course requirements. Remember, each credit hour equals about 3 clock hours of study time per week.
- Participate actively – ask questions, post responses, read the postings of others, respond to the postings of others, send e-mail questions and comments to your instructor. Interaction between teacher and fellow students is a major key to the success of on-line classes.
- Dialogue with others in an informed manner. Responses such as “I agree”, “yes,” or “okay” are not acceptable. Try “tell me more”, “I don’t understand what you mean. . .” or, “that was a very understandable way of explaining. . ., thanks for the new ideas.”
- Use the results of tests, quizzes, and responses from others to guide your learning. If you did not understand the information, locate another on-line source that explains the ideas in a way you understand. Then, share this resource with your teacher and classmates.
- Complete all assignments in total. If you are directed to read something before answering questions, do the reading, then use the questions to test your understanding.

- Be self-directed; initiate your own learning, explore links to other sites, both those posted and those you locate yourself. Allow yourself time to do the required work.
- If these strategies do not work, on-line learning may not be for you. Remember, only 50% of learning is predicted to be on-line.

WHAT IF I NEED IN-PERSON HELP?

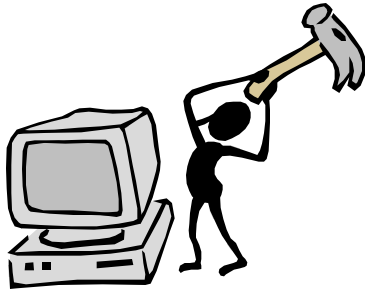


-  Contact the instructor – a simple telephone call may provide reassurance and the direction you need to continue learning.
- E-mail your instructor; on-line educators anticipate a large volume of e-mail.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET BEHIND?

- Keep your instructor informed. On-line educators understand that on-line courses are specifically designed to appeal to working professionals with multiple roles in their lives. Sometimes an individual needs to be a few days late with an assignment to cope with other aspects of their multi-faceted life. Let your instructor know that you will be late, but provide an estimate of when you will be back on schedule.
- Stick with your scheduled times for course work.

WHAT IF I NEED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE?



- Begin by problem – solving – is the problem your technical skill? Your computer? Incomplete directions?
- The help feature built into today’s software (usually the F1 key) provides assistance and demonstrations of “how to”. . .
- If you simply need to know “how to”, for example how to create a table, post a question to your classmates – one of them will be able to provide directions to you.
- Read the reference manual in relation to the problem you encountered?
- Contact the computer personnel or information technology staff listed in your course syllabus or campus home page for assistance.
- If your computer develops a problem, contact the service representative of the business from which you purchased your computer.
- If the directions provided to you for an assignment are incomplete or not clear, contact your instructor.

Above all, enjoy the ride and keep learning.



References

Draves, W. A. (2000). *Teaching Online*. River Falls, WI: Learning Resources Network (LERN) Books.

Report of the Web-Based Education Commission to the President and the Congress of the United States. Washington, D.C. (Dec. 2000). *The Power of the Internet for Learning Moving from promise to practice*. Accessed Dec. 19, 2000, <http://www.ed.gov/>