



# Online Learning Guidebook 2024



## **What is Online Learning?**

Students who have spent their formative educational years in a classroom may be wondering how to best adjust to the rigors of online learning without sacrificing academic performance. Online students are given a unique experience to learn at their own pace, at any time, any amount and with fewer constraints than campus-based students. This means students must be vigilant on time management and maintaining disciplined study habits.

## **What do you need to think about before deciding to enrolling in a virtual course?**

Learning online is a very different experience and takes different skills than learning in a face-to-face classroom, but virtual courses are just as valuable.

In considering your readiness for Online Learning consider the following questions;

- Do you have the technology skills needed to succeed?
- Are you willing to dedicate as much time in an online course as to a traditional classroom course?

When it comes to online classes, you need to have the discipline to sit down and say, "I am going to work on this," as well as the dedication to actually follow through. Though you can be flexible as to when you choose to complete your work during the week, you cannot put it off indefinitely!

One of the easiest ways to ensure follow-through is to remember that you are **paying** to take this online course, just as you would for a traditional, face-to-face class. You must show up if you are going to get real value out of your class. Treat your online classes the same way you would a face-to-face classes. You will be off to the right start.

- Do you have a dedicated place where you can study?
- Do you have ready access to a computer and have an internet connection so you can work on class work both at home and outside?
- Do you have good reading and writing skills?
- Are you confident communicating in both spoken and written language?
- Are you ready and willing to initiate a conversation with your faculty and ask for assistance when you need it?
- Do you have the discipline and motivation to take on all the parts of your course (for example, reading, assignments, labs, tests, and projects) without being in a classroom? This requires great levels of self-motivation and good time management skills.
- Faculty comments & feedback are to be used to improve your assignments and participation in online discussions.

- Do you have good technology skills beyond social media? This is not a prerequisite and it is intended that these skills will be learnt or honed over time. Adequate support/ tools were provided in this initial learning phase.

For students who have prior working knowledge or are very proficient, it is a great opportunity to learn advanced skills during the course of the program.

## What Are Online Courses Like?

An online course requires just as much work as a full-time face to face format, and the amount of time you dedicate is also about the same. However, the online format affords you more flexibility. Any pace, any place, any time learning sounds great, and it is for some students. Most students like the flexibility of being able to study when and where it is convenient for them.

As long as you meet your deadlines and communicate with your faculty and peers, it doesn't matter where, when, or how you fulfil the requirements.

Each week, your faculty typically expects you to take the following actions yourself:

- Review the **learning objectives**
- Complete the **assigned readings**
- Submit **assignments (Due dates are listed in the course syllabus.)**
- Go through the **lecture materials (Accessed through the Learning Management System.)**
- Participate in the **discussion boards/chat rooms with Peers and Faculty**

## Study Tips for Online Learners

### 1. Understand online learning practices and expectations.

The first thing you need to realize is that online courses are not an easier way to learn, but rather a more convenient one.

To successfully learn online, you need to dedicate a significant amount of your time, consistently attend the program online, be focused while studying, and fully commit to your

learning process to ensure timely completion, just as you would do for a traditional classroom-based course.

Refer to the syllabus and course materials frequently to become familiar with the objectives, assessments, and deadlines. Print the syllabus and place it somewhere where it can be quickly reviewed, such as a workspace or a notebook.

Consider your learning objectives and ensure that they align with the program and faculty goals. Creating notes that relate to your objectives can foster a conversation between you and faculty or at the beginning of the course, setting the appropriate learner expectations.

You should also have in mind that when you take an online course, you may be expected to:

- Fully commit yourself and participate in the virtual classroom as required.
- Be, or be willing to become, tech-savvy.
- Work with others effectively virtually.
- Complete your learning tasks and assignments on time.
- Be self-disciplined.

**If you are not able or willing to do all of the above, you will probably not be a very happy online learner.**

## **2. Make sure that you have reliable internet access.**

Take some time to become familiar with the tools you will need to participate in your online courses. Explore the tools provided to ensure that the technology works on the computer you will be using.

## Technology Requirements

At IBES, electronic communication is the preferred medium for students, faculty and staff. To take advantage of this technology, it is required that students, faculty and staff acquire and maintain e-mail access with the capability to send and receive attached files.

In order to navigate the Internet, it is recommended that the latest version of one of the following browsers be used:

Mozilla Firefox

Google Chrome

IBES also provides documents that can be accessed using Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available without cost to students at [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

IBES strives to prevent the spread of computer viruses by employing the latest virus detection software on all university-owned computer systems; however, IBES makes no guarantee related to the unintentional propagation of computer viruses that may go undetected by our virus detection software.

## Technical Specifications and Instructions

In general, students access course materials using a computer or laptop (PC or Mac), a modern web browser, and a high-speed Internet connection.

IBES does not support the use of tablets, smartphones or other similar devices for taking any of

the courses in the program. While some course material might be accessible on those devices; students are likely to encounter technical issues that may prevent them from successfully completing courses.

Technology glitches happen all the time. To avoid mishaps, ensure that you save your work repeatedly and backup regularly using cloud storage, for example, Dropbox or Google Documents, to be able to access your previous work from your smartphone or tablet if needed.

Furthermore, ensure that you not only have a backup of your online course material and assignments but also you have saved your faculty contact information in your cell phone or your email. Reliable internet access will also allow you to check in, stay current with your eLearning course, and deal with sudden schedule changes.

### **3. Have a dedicated study space.**

Whether you decide to study in your office or your living room, ensure that this place is quiet, organized, distraction-free, and available for use at any time. Your study environment should be one of your main concerns when you are an online learner, so make sure that it enables your study routine.

Setting up a regular workspace or office will also help you to stay organized. Knowing exactly where important dates, files, forms, syllabi, books, and assignments live will help keep you on track towards hitting your goals.

Furthermore, consider turning off your phone and logging off of all social networks when studying; you will want to be neither interrupted nor distracted. Using applications like Cold



Turkey and Freedom can help eliminate distractions by blocking the apps or websites that tend to compete for your attention, such as Facebook and Twitter.

#### 4. **Figure Out How You Learn Best**

Once you've established where you'll learn, think about when and how you accomplish your best work. If you're a morning person, make time to study the first thing. More of a night owl? Set aside an hour or two after dinner to cosy up to your computer.

Brew your usual cup of coffee, put on your go-to playlist, and do whatever you need to get into the zone and down to business.

Not everyone learns the same way, so think about what types of information help you best grasp new concepts and employ relevant study strategies. If you are a visual learner, for example, print out transcripts of the video lectures to review. Learn best by listening? Make sure to build time into your schedule to play and replay all audio- and video-based course content.

#### 5. **Set smaller goals**

Goals, goals, goals! They cannot be over emphasized.

At the start of each week, have a main goal you would like to accomplish by the end of the week. Write it down and put it somewhere it can be seen and remind yourself every day.

The weekly goal is great but does not end there. Each morning, take a few minutes to review the current situation. What do I want to accomplish today?

It is important that this goal be reasonable and achievable. Don't shoot for the stars because if something comes up or it's too high of an expectation and you get stuck, you will be disappointed and on to the onset of being demotivated.

#### 6. **Find a study buddy**

Online learning can be a very “*lonely form*” of learning as all materials are Online and your faculty and classmates are virtual. This should not deter you from your primary objective of completing the program and receiving your IBES award.

During your journey to completing this program, it is always a good idea to develop online rapport with fellow learners. In this way, you will be able to form a study buddy system or collaborative learning. This is a great means of learning from others, sharing ideas, and having intellectual debates to make meaning of alternatives or counter views points. Eventually of course some consensus must be reached to determine the desired solution or present an alternative workable solution.

It must be noted that NOT all learning is derived from faculty materials. They form the basis of higher-order thoughts from fellow cohorts from the program.

#### 7. **Actively participate**

Participate in the course's online forum to help you better understand course materials and engage with classmates. This might involve commenting on a classmate's paper on a discussion board or posting a question about a project you're working on. Read what other students and your faculty are saying, and if you have a question, ask for clarification.

And if you do feel yourself falling behind, speak up. Don't wait until an assignment is almost due to ask questions or report issues. Email your faculty and be proactive in asking for help.

Set a goal to check in on the class discussion threads every day. This enables to see what are the current topics of discussions that is being debated & also enables/encourages to respond appropriately.

Take advantage of the discussion board make every effort get involved in the discussion and engaged in the conversation, commenting on fellow students' posts and sharing your viewpoints.

Active participation increases your Social Presence in the class and improves your learning. Social presence can be defined as being connected and interact with other human beings as real people through the medium of communication being used, which in this instance will be through the Learning Management System or any other computer-mediated communication.

### **Netiquette Tips For Online Discussions and Forum Postings**

- **Use proper language**

Typos, spelling errors, and mixed-up sentences reflect on you; correct spelling and grammatical construction are a must, so keep in mind to read through your posts before you submit them.

Moreover, try to avoid slang/acronyms as much as possible, as this is also an online education environment and such usage is considered neither academic nor professional.

Never type in all caps; writing in all capital letters is regarded as shouting, and this, apart from being annoying, it could be considered rude.

- **Be precise**

Being misunderstood is quite common in online interactions; escape the miscommunication trap by double-checking that what appears perfectly clear to you is not confusing your readers.

The best way to test your messages for clarity is to read them aloud before you send them; this way, you will be able to see if they make sense. Another option is to write in draft form, taking time to read it again for clarity before posting.

- **Avoid emoticons and “texting” writing**

Using emoticons and writing in texting language, that is by using abbreviations, might be considered too casual or even childish; refrain from them as much as possible.

Online discussions require professional writing; smiley faces or linguistic shortcuts are more appropriate for chatting with your friends or instant messaging.

- **Be explanatory. Justify your opinion**

Points can be easily missed if hidden in a flood of text; when making a thorough comment, be as brief as possible.

If you have several points you want to develop, prefer to post them individually in more than one focused messages, rather than in a long, overly wordy paragraph.

However, avoid posting messages that contain only a few words and generic statements, such as I agree with you. Keep in mind that you need to contribute to the online discussion, so remember to always justify your points of view.

- **Read all comments before hitting “submit”**

What you need to remember when participating in an online discussion is that once you

send your comment, there is no way to take it back. This is why you should always think about the content of your message before contributing it.

Before replying to a question, read carefully all comments that your peers have already posted, no matter how many they are. If you don't, it is very likely that you will end up repeating things others have already said, and this, apart from contributing nothing new to the online discussion, will seem like you ignore your virtual classmates.

Once you have ensured that your comment will indeed add a new element to the online discussion, try to explain yourself as clearly as you can. If your post is still misconstrued, correct the misunderstanding right away and if you deem necessary provide a working example.

- **Tone down your language**

Because written language lacks the support of facial or voice communication clues, it can be easily misinterpreted. A great way to deal with this is to tone down your language; avoid the use of strong words and, again, read aloud everything you want to post before you send it.

Moreover, sarcasm completely, as they can both easily create misunderstandings and tension.

- **Recognize and respect diversity**

A salient feature of an online program is the diversity of learners from all parts of the world, as internet is a global medium. This means that while participating in an online discussion you and your virtual classmates may use the same language to communicate with each other, but the truth is that cultural backgrounds, linguistic terminology, and abilities to express oneself in written language may vary significantly in an online learning environment.

If your virtual classroom is a typical one, it will be ethnically rich and multicultural. This is why it is important to respect diversity and opinions different from yours, no matter where they come from. It is ok to disagree with a point of view, but it is definitely inappropriate to disrespect and be offensive towards others.

Being open to different points of view is a sign of intelligence; furthermore, paying attention to alternative viewpoints is one of the greatest ways to learn.

Needless to say, profanity and racist, sexist, ageist, and religious comments are unacceptable, no matter how innocent or funny may sound to you.

On the other hand, if you are the victim of an insulting remark, try to maintain your calm and resist returning the offense. Rather, report the issue directly to your course faculty.

- **Take your posts seriously**

Participating is the number one rule for online discussions, but posting for the sake of posting wastes other people's time.

Always remember to add something new to the conversation and not repeat something that someone else has already said. Most importantly, stay on topic. Irrelevant tangents confuse your peers and make you seem that you don't know what you are talking about; make sure that every comment you post stays within the scope of the online course material. If you are looking for simple social interaction with your virtual classmates, check if there is an off- topic discussion area in the online forum or you can communicate via private email.

- **Be credible**

Finally, be careful not to mislead people when replying to a question. If you are not a 100% sure of your answer, say so. And if you are using the intellectual property of others, e.g. websites, books, blogs, journal articles and any cited source of information.

To support your argument, always cite your sources. Assigning proper credits when referencing other sources is a sign of being a respectful, responsible, and trustworthy online discussion participant.

#### **8. Leverage your network**

Online classes may sometimes make you feel like you are learning on your own, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Build relationships with other students by introducing yourself and engaging in online discussion boards. Your peers can be a valuable resource when preparing for exams or asking for feedback on assignments. Don't be afraid to turn to them to create a virtual study group. Chances are good that they will appreciate it just as much as you will.

Most online courses are built around the concept of collaboration, with faculty actively encouraging that students work together to complete assignments and discuss lessons.

Collaborative Learning is when two or more individuals learn something distinct together. The simplest model of collaborative learning is mutual study. Collaborative learning may be helpful in research projects, project work and other sorts of team-based activities. In collaborative learning, individuals learn new things with each other's help. Collaborative learning can be divided into online and offline.

In the journey of completing the courses, learners are encouraged to form informal

learning groups as an alternative to self-study. Some inherent benefits are;

An excellent way to share ideas/ learning resources,

- have topic related discussions,
- provide feedback to contributing members of the group
- Enhances Problem-solving skills
- Inspires critical thinking
- Improves social interaction in an online learning environment
- Develops good communication skills especially improving the ability to communicate online & learn to use new collaborative tools readily available on the web
- Helps foster interpersonal relationships with fellow students

## **9. Time Management**

One of the most valuable skills you can have as an online student is effective time management. The better you manage your time, the easier it is to achieve your goals.

Everyone has the same 24 hours in a day, meaning, it is not about how much time you have, but how well you can manage it.

This is especially important for online students, who are often working full-time, taking care of family, or juggling other commitments. Without the camaraderie of a class to motivate you or having a set time where you need to be on campus, effective time management is crucial to helping you stay focused.

In addition, effective time management not only helps with your learning but can also



make you more productive at work and in your personal life. If you are serious about successfully completing your online degree, it's crucial to find a good time management system to use.

### **How to learn time management**

In order to ace time management, you should be determined, persistent and highly-motivated. A strong-minded individual plans his/her schedule well and is determined to effectively follow the planned schedule so that the time is utilized appropriately.

Learning time management is not an easy task. So, one has to be strongly devoted to spare time for studies from the busy schedule. One cannot learn time management in one go, so he/she must be in regular practice so as to make it a habit.

As a learner, you can adopt different time management skills. You must keep yourself motivated to achieve time management goals. The accomplishment of various goals of time management itself acts as the main source of motivation.

### **How to manage time in distance learning?**

Distance learning is all about self-study. Since the students have the flexibility to study anytime and at anyplace, they have to take control of their studies. So, distance learners must be able to organise their daily tasks in such a way that they can easily spare some time for learning.

A distance learner must also look into his/her environment and find a time and place when he/she can study without distractions. A learner can choose to study late night, mid-afternoon or early morning, according to his/her productivity and suitability of environment. It is worthless to study at hours when there are lots of distractions, as you will gain nothing in

terms of knowledge.

Furthermore, you should plan your lessons each day and study accordingly. You can allocate time for each module to ensure that you learn effectively while managing time. Hence, finding a suitable environment and planning the studies are two ways to manage time effectively.

## **Time Management Tips for Online Students**

### **1. Plan Ahead**

Your hectic schedule, combined with daily distractions, can easily get in the way of finishing tasks. The best online students know how to set aside time to focus. This includes having a consistent time and workspace, tuning out those distractions, and avoiding surfing the internet.

Despite the flexibility in being an online student, it's important to have frequent engagement with your studies throughout the week. Provide plenty of time to space out your required readings, assignments, and online discussions.

Consider an online calendar (Google Calendar) you can use to plan your daily and weekly assignments, highlighting:

- Assignments due, including drafts and final submissions
- Activities related to your program, such as study group meetups or on-campus

networking events

- Virtual or in-person office hours with faculty and advisors

### **Sample of what a typical week might look like**

**Monday**      Begin required readings and multimedia

**Tuesday**     Continue reviewing materials

**Wednesday** Post to discussion forum and begin assignments\*

**Thursday**    Continue posting and working on assignments

**Friday**        Read and respond to posts and work on  
assignments

**Saturday**     Read and respond to posts and finish assignments

**Sunday**        Check your work and submit assignments

All assignment due dates will be highlighted upon enrolment into the program. Appropriate reminders for submission will be posted in the Learning Management System. Reminder emails too will be sent out.

It must be noted that other works requiring posting on student forums or attending webinars are also "deemed" assignments and this is the onus on the students to participate or make appropriate postings on due dates.

## **2. Don't Multitask**

Arrange your tasks in order of importance, and pay attention to the three or four crucial tasks that require the most effort. In this way, you will be complete the requisite tasks on hand and complete all require deadlines.

It is developing the ability to complete the most immediate task on hand and systematically completing other due tasks for the course.

This prevents the habit of “burning the midnight oil/ burning the candle” at both ends” to complete requisite tasks.

### **3. Block Out Distractions**

Make sure to avoid surfing the web excessively. It is easy to become distracted by the news or any other favorite website. Stay focused, and avoid Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools when you need to concentrate on your studies.

If you are still struggling with procrastination, **Freedom, Keep Me Out** and **Switcheroo** minimize online browsing and let you follow through on your daily tasks. With these tools, you can block all websites or redirect your favorite sites to your school’s homepage.

### **4. Always leave room in your schedule for the unexpected.**

Always leave a small space in your schedule to account for the unexpected. You are bound to encounter some problems when working on an eLearning deliverable, even if it is relatively simple and straightforward.

In fact, these problems can delay everything else in your schedule. For example, if you have managed your time effectively and are on track to finishing an eLearning course tomorrow, an issue that arises with another eLearning deliverable may delay your progress and force you to push back your deadline.

As such, you'll want to set aside a bit of time each day in your schedule to account for unforeseen issues, so that they won't negatively impact other tasks or assignments.







**ALL IN A DAY:**  
Time Management for  
Distance Learners

