

Checklist

Being an effective online learner

Awareness:

Knowing about the resources needed when taking an online course and the ability to use these

- 1. I have access to the up-to-date hardware/software needed for the course and my internet connection is fast.** This is important as it will facilitate a fluid and uninterrupted learning experience.
- 2. I am able to use the platform I will be undertaking the course on.** Be aware of which Virtual Learning Environment you will be using, and understand how to navigate it prior to the course beginning. This will mean that accessing classroom materials will be easy and stress-free.
- 3. I will practice video calling and methods of online communication before starting my course.** Many components of the course will use these methods of communication. An awareness of these is vital and will make you more confident when beginning the course.
- 4. I am able to access the online resources and services provided by my university.** Universities offer online services such as language support. It will also have online services and staff who can be contacted to help you navigate the online library. It is important you use these resources and services as they are crucial for personal study.

5. I will check the handbook the tutor has written prior to the course starting.

Be aware of any course deadlines (place these in a calendar) and look at the reading list. This way you can plan ahead and do the preliminary reading to avoid becoming overwhelmed when the course begins.

Taking Action:

Planning to be an effective online learner

- 6. I am able to plan a study schedule prior to the course starting.** Routine is key and flexibility is a perk of online learning but do put aside certain times of the day to focus on your studies. This means you won't fall behind and work won't pile up.
- 7. I will make sure I have a study space where I can work with minimal interruptions.** It is important to have a designated study space you can leave when you need to relax. This is important as a quiet space is key for course components like online webinars and Skyping with other classmates.
- 8. I am capable of time management.** Sticking to a study schedule will help increase focus and setting aside time to focus on course work will help you to prevent getting stressed.
- 9. I can avoid social media during study hours.** This is a major distraction during study periods. It is important to avoid social media during these times as this will help to increase focus.
- 10. I will check-in regularly.** This is vital to knowing when deadlines and discussion opportunities are. These opportunities really enhance and will allow you to make the most of online learning.

Practice:

Regularly practicing the following will allow me to gain the most of the online learning experience

11. I can use opportunities to interact with course peers in group discussions or projects. This will help you to meet others on your course and challenge you. This is important as it will make you reflect on different viewpoints and spark debate.

12. I am able to avoid using text speak. Although the course is online, it is important to practice using proper academic English. If you need help with this, you can contact the university where someone will be able to provide support.

13. I am capable of speaking to others online in a professional matter. Speaking to others online respectfully is of the utmost importance. This way you will create successful working relationships with your tutor and your peers.

14. I am able to self-motivate. Practice setting up a reward system when you achieve tasks as this could be a great way to keep motivated. A mood journal may be helpful in recording your emotions and reflecting on learning progress.

15. I know that help is available. Remember that there are people there for guidance if you feel stressed. Contact your tutor and use class peers as a support network, this way you will never feel alone or under supported.

16. I am capable of managing my workloads. Be aware that online learning requires time-keeping, scheduling and meeting deadlines. Keeping on top of workloads will have a positive impact on your online learning experience.

Top tips

Downloading a plug in for Firefox/Chrome/Explorer is a great way to stop using social media during these times (e.g. for Chrome try *StayFocusd*)

Written notes using the Cornell system may consolidate and help you question online material. A clear guide to this system is available here: <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>

FutureLearn offers free, short online courses. They have three to prepare you for learning online. These are linked to in the further resources.

Reflective activity

Being an effective online learner

Please complete this activity individually, with access to the Internet. The results are for your personal use. Start by reading the Introduction and then proceed with the activities. You might wish to refer to the video, checklist and further resources while taking this activity. In total, the activity should take about 20 minutes. If, after completing the activity, you have further queries, please contact your tutor and support available at your university. Remember to save your completed activity as it will be useful to return to later in your course.

Introduction

Online learning is comparatively different to face-to-face learning, although many of your skills are transferable. You need to consider how you study, where you study, how you engage with your learning materials, and how you communicate with your tutors. There will be some skills that you already have e.g. time management but others that you may wish to develop to become an effective online learner.

This activity is designed to get you thinking about how you learn, face-to-face and online, and how you can ensure it is beneficial to you (and others).

Section 1: Reflecting on how I learn and, how I will learn online (15 mins)

Using each question as a prompt, reflect on how you have learned in face-to-face environments and how you will adapt your study strategies to become an effective online learner.

1a: How do I engage with learning and teaching materials?

This could include many different types of materials eg lectures, seminars, videos, podcasts or slides, course handbooks and handouts.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1b: How do I access and annotate readings and video materials?

This could include books and journals as well as online readings, articles, and video materials.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1c: What digital literacy skills do I need?

Digital literacies are the skills you need to live, learn and work in a digital society

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1d: What strategies do I use to manage my time and avoid distractions?

This may include approaches you take to avoid disruptions to your studying and tactics for time-management.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1e: How do I interact with my tutors?

Communications with your tutors help to enhance your learning. How can you adapt the way you communicate face-to-face to online to ensure you interact effectively with tutors?

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

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Section 2: My skills for effective online learning (5 mins)

Using your answers from Section 1, identify five skills you already have which will help when studying an online course and five skills that you will need to develop to become a more effective online learner.

	Strengths	Skills to develop
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Section 3: My on-going reflections for effective online learning

Now that you have identified the five skills that you would like to work on, investigate the ways in which you can develop these. Utilise all of the help available to you including your tutors, your university's learning service or study skills support, your university library, your fellow students and all the resources in your virtual learning environment. You can continue to work on developing your skills throughout your course.

Further resources

Being an effective online learner

General

Student transitions to blended learning, University of Glasgow. Student experiences of using blended and online learning for the first time. The first four videos in particular highlight the study skills needed for independent, online learning:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/staff/telt/blended/students/>

Jisc Digital Student. Online learners' stories. A useful way to see how other students navigate online learning:

<https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/digital-learner-stories/>

Essential student skills: Getting online. Tips for getting set up at home including preparing your computer hardware:

http://induction.uhi.ac.uk/Using-technologies/Getting-online/set_up_home.html

Skills for OU study: Study skills for online learners by the Open University:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/>

Study skills for online learning. Open University tips for studying and making notes online:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/help/topic/computing/category/study-skills-for-online-learning>

Five-step strategy for student success with online learning. Further hints and tips for students hoping to study online. There is a lot of information here, so take your time to look around the blog. <https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2012/09/28/five-step-strategy-for-student-success-with-online-learning/>

7 tips for success when taking online courses: From University of Illinois, more tips regarding online learning:

<https://online.illinois.edu/articles/online-learning/item/2015/09/16/7-tips-for-online-success>

University of Exeter iTest: A short quiz from the University of Exeter to find out how you can improve the way you use technology to make you more effective in your studies.

<http://wip.exeter.ac.uk/collaborate/itest/>

How to be a successful online learner: Introduction to studying online resources from Northeastern University:

<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/successful-online-learning-strategies/>

Student guide to online learning: Resource from Michigan Virtual University that also includes an online learner readiness rubric:

<https://micourses.org/resources/pdf/toolkit/studentguide.pdf>

A student guide to studying online: Blog post by Tony Bates on issues to consider before commencing online studies. Includes links to other universities' guidance on online learning: <https://www.tonybates.ca/2012/02/29/a-student-guide-to-studying-online/>

Open online courses

Get starting with online learning: FutureLearn MOOC by the Open University that explains what online learning is. You can also review your own online study skillset, learn in online communities and use different technologies: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/online-learning>