

Tutor guide

Supporting student transitions into and through online learning

These resources were developed collaboratively by learners studying at four Scottish universities. These students have drawn upon their experiences of studying to create these guides for those who have less experience learning in the online environment.

University students are increasingly asked to navigate an online environment as part of their learning experience, whether this is a complement to face-to-face teaching or the primary mode of learning and tuition. For many (but not all) students, online worlds are deeply familiar. However, when the online environment becomes an educational tool and a means by which to build a professional future, new challenges and opportunities emerge for all students.

This is a guide to a set of resources for tutors to use with students in further or higher education of any level who are starting or continuing an online learning experience. The resources cover four themes:

1. **Being an effective online learner:** academic time management, independent learning, motivation and self-regulation.
2. **Working with others online:** working in groups, and effective communications with peers and tutors.
3. **Learning effectively with technology:** ICT proficiency, and how technology can help online learners.
4. **Being a responsible online learner:** managing an online digital identity, being professional online, and protecting data and privacy rights online.

For each theme, you can access a **three-minute video**, a **checklist** of important skills and tips, a **20-minute reflective activity**, and **links to further resources**.

We encourage tutors to use the resources as a template, modifying them as appropriate for the teaching context. The themes can be introduced together or separately; each can stand alone and may contain some overlap with other themes.

Some suggestions for tutors when using the resources:

- You may wish to encourage your learners to return to these resources after a few weeks of their studies. At this time, they might like to reflect upon their initial responses, consider if there any changes to their responses and, if appropriate, explore what has caused the changes.

- The resources have been designed for learners to use individually but you might wish to encourage learners to share their responses to the reflective activities in moderated online discussions. The responses to the reflective activity for the 'working with others online' could be shared with the learners' group.

1. Being an effective online learner

These resources introduce students to some of the opportunities and challenges of learning effectively online: flexibility, but less imposed structure, and perhaps more distractions. They also emphasise similarities with face-to-face learning that can be often be forgotten or overlooked, and strategies that can be transferred across settings.

Students are made aware of practical time-management and motivation strategies, including advance preparation and access to course materials, realistic scheduling of study around other commitments, finding a good study space, accessing library materials online, staying aware of course developments and deadlines, and seeking help when needed.

The reflective activity for this theme asks students to consider how they engage with learning materials in a number of face-to-face scenarios, and how they do this for online learning. They are also encouraged to consider strategies they have for managing their time, and how they interact with their tutor. The final question asks students to identify skills they have and to consider skills they will need to develop to be an effective online learner.

Ideal timing of delivery: before students start an online course or in the earliest phase.

2. Working with others online

Working with others, especially in groups, is an important skill and challenge in any context but there are extra considerations when group work occurs primarily online. These resources make such considerations explicit and offer practical advice that can easily be overlooked such as establishing expectations early, checking communication channels regularly, acting respectfully as part of a team, delegating tasks appropriately, raising concerns before problems develop, and remembering that tutors can offer guidance and support remotely.

The reflective activity for this theme involves combined reflection on learning experiences with creative storytelling, encouraging students to have fun whilst communicating in small groups and also reflecting seriously. Learners are asked to consider advantages and benefits of working in groups face-to-face and then online and to review skills required to work effectively in groups in both environments. Next, learners reflect upon a scenario involving group work which is experiencing problems, considering how best these can be resolved for the benefit of the group.

Ideal timing of delivery: prior to setting group activities online.

3. Learning effectively with technology

Learning effectively with technology is about using different digital tools, resources and platforms in an appropriate manner to help students learn both individually and in collaboration with others. This goes beyond IT skills, and requires students to understand how they should engage with the digital tools and resources at their disposal in an educational context. This includes understanding the particular ways in which specific tools or resources are intended to support key aspects of their learning.

The reflective activity asks students to identify the digital tools and resources they are expected to use in their own course or institutional context, to reflect upon their current understanding and level of confidence in making effective use of them, and to identify where they may need to seek additional support or clarification.

Ideal timing of delivery: pre-arrival or during induction as well as during early stages of the course. Good to re-visit during the course.

4. Being a responsible online learner

Most students come to online learning with a “digital footprint” – all of the traces left by things they have done or been linked to online. However, even if they have not actively engaged with the online world, online learning presents and draws attention to a new challenge: developing an online digital presence that is compatible with professional life and a future career.

These resources help students to become aware of their existing digital footprint, to define their ideal online presence, and to take action towards creating that ideal. Students are also asked to think about how their online presence – especially on social media platforms – affects their data and privacy rights, and how they can be respectful of others’ digital footprints.

The reflective activity for this theme asks students a series of targeted questions to help them document (privately) their digital footprint on social media or in search engines. It encourages students to set an explicit goal, and to follow up by repeating the activity at a later date.

Ideal timing of delivery: any time during an online or face-to-face course, ideally more than once (e.g. at the beginning and end of a course).

Contact details

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