

Tips for Success in Self-Paced Packaged and Online Courses:

To avoid having the course(s) become a burden, use the tips below to be prepared, stay ahead, and to create interaction. If you are feeling overwhelmed, take a break. Learning should be fun, do your best to make it an enjoyable experience.

- Choose your courses carefully. Take the time up front to do some research on the course. A good place to start is to contact the instructor to inquire about the course content and expectations. Ask for a course syllabus and review it. Speak with someone who has taken the course previously to get a feel for distance learning.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses ... not all students possess the necessary qualities to perform well while studying individually, at a distance.
- Be Self-motivated and self-disciplined. With the freedom and flexibility of the self-paced study environment comes the responsibility to manage your study time.
- Expect that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom. If a student feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, they may be more comfortable in that type of classroom. Self-paced, distance learning is not for everybody. While the level of social interaction can be very high in the virtual classroom given that many barriers come down in the online format, it is not the same as being on campus. A student's expectations can help to create a positive distance learning experience.
- Make sure you have access to the technology needed to complete the course, and that you are able to use the technology properly. Specific software versions and access to a computer and email, a fax machine, and/or a VCR or DVD player may be required. If you have access to all technology and software and are comfortable using them by the time the course begins; you can concentrate on the content of the course rather than fumbling with the technology.
- Be willing and able to commit to sufficient hours per week per course. Online and packaged courses are not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many students will say it requires much more time and commitment. The successful student will view studying at a distance as a convenient way to receive their education – not an easier way
- Establish a routine for completing course work on a weekly basis. Prepare a weekly schedule and stick to it. Set goals for completing sections of the course. Create a calendar and set deadlines to complete assignments for your self-paced course. A good rule of thumb is to allow 3 to 4 hours per week per credit. It is best to break this down into time blocks throughout the week. Be sure to allow plenty of time for reviewing the lesson, reading and completing assignments to avoid being rushed.
- Be sure that you have time that will be uninterrupted in order to concentrate on the material. Select a study location without distractions. Ask family members and friends not to interrupt while doing online coursework. Avoid self-defeating study habits such as procrastinating or watching TV while working.
- Stay in contact with your instructor on an on-going basis. You will not have the face-to-face interaction as you do in the traditional classroom, which makes it very important to interact with the instructor, whether by telephone, e-mail or even through a chat room.
- Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise. Be sure that you ask questions and get further clarification on material that you do not understand. Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether students are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the packaged or online course paradigm. So, ask questions and speak up, otherwise the instructor will never know that something is wrong.
- Be prepared with your assignments and for tests. Prepare as you would for a traditional course. When taking tests online or with paper and pencil at a proctoring site, be aware of the time allowed for the test. Budget your time to make sure you are able to complete the test during the allotted time but do not rush through it.
- Be able to communicate through writing. In a distance/online classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing. Also, give yourself time to think ideas through before responding.
- Reflect on and evaluate your experience with the course. Reflecting on the material and how it fits into your personal and professional goals throughout the course can help provide motivation as you progress. At the end of the course, evaluate how well you did at pacing your work for the course and whether self-paced distance study is a good fit for you.

Some Information in this article was adapted from these Resources:

Illinois Online Network - www.ion.uillinois.edu/

SDSU Distance Education - <http://distance.sdstate.edu/>

DeVry University Online - www.devry.edu/online/online.html