

Learning how to learn

Online learning

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The advent of computer and internet during the past few decades has transformed education and learning. It is possible nowadays to join study courses and programs to gain your certificate, diploma or master exclusively through online or distance learning. This means being able to register to, receive learning materials and pursue your studies by communicating with the training institution through e-mails and internet facilities.

The most striking feature of online learning is its ability of breaking the barriers of cost and travel to attend training programs. There are no 'live' classes to attend; instead, lectures, coursework and discussions all take place at your convenience with reasonable degree of flexibility.

The process of online learning is composed of three pillars: the learner, the institute and the learning medium.

The learner needs to be proactive and motivated and should be mastering the basic computer and internet usage skills. It goes without saying that the place where the learner lives in must have computer facilities with access to internet. The learner, after finding his/her relevant course, should invest in precisely understanding the requirements and instructions of the learning institute for online study. These are crucial to get started and continue through the learning duration.

The learning institute, on the other hand, should support well-designed online courses that provide an environment closer to 'live' classes. In some universities and training institutions, online learning usually supports interactive web-based classes. A

tutor is usually assigned to guide students all through the course duration. Program web-page is designed to provide for access to learning materials, discussion forums for candidates and a facility for general comments and inquiry. Such arrangements can provide for communication between students and teacher as well as interaction among students themselves.

The learning medium is composed of the World Wide Web space together with the hardware setup that is necessary for communication. There is apparently a need for a computer, modem and an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Good institutional or home-based support for rapid sustained internet services is a corner stone in sticking to and enjoying online courses. The learning class is found on the web as mentioned above. Communication among people involved in the learning process (students, tutors and IT persons) is maintained through e-mails or directly on the course web page. In the University of Oxford, for example, online learning is done through interactive dedicated webpage for each course. The tutor and participants have personal profiles containing the information necessary to get to know each other. All learning materials, including links to relevant sources are boosted on the webpage in a print-friendly format. There is also a news area in which notes and directives from the tutor is communicated to participants. The webpage has also a discussion forum where participants boost their questions and comments in reaction to course topics or prompts from the tutor. The bulk of learning takes place

through the discussion forum, which enables exchange of views among participants as well as feedback from the tutor. There is also a chat room where you can boost general topics including funny materials. The webpage also provides for self assessment and monitoring of personal activity. The outcome of all these arrangements is a fruitful and amusing learning experience.

Tips for the online learner

Get comfortable ... practice computing skills until you feel comfortable

Be prepared ... read syllabus and course material carefully

Plan ahead ... download and install needed software and secure access to internet

Get organized ... secure time to study and develop schedule and stick to it

Depend on yourself ... self responsibility is crucial for online learning

Develop good habits ... visit your e-mail inbox and the website on daily basis!

Communicate ... do not isolate yourself and keep in touch with the learning group

Ask for help ... do not hesitate to ask the tutor for any clarification including technology questions.

Sources

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