

Distance Learning Basics

Some of you have taken online courses before, while others may be new to the process. For those of you who are new to online learning, or even new to taking classes through our program, we have developed some keys to success for you to keep in mind while you decide if Distance Learning Courses are right for you.

Key #1: Basic Computer Skills

We have chosen a user-friendly platform for our courses, but there are still a few basic computer skills that are essential for your success. Students taking an online course need to be able to do:

- Use email
- Have reliable and fast (non-modem) access to email and the Internet at least several times per week
- Find a website when given a link or URL
- Log in to password-protected sites
- Post messages to a discussion board
- Attach a file or document (if you can attach a file to an email you should be able to use our platform)
- Write documents using a word processing program of your choice
- Either use a basic drawing and/or graphing software or be able to scan in, save, and attach hand-drawn documents

If you are concerned about your readiness for online learning please contact Lisa Rezende (contact info at end of this document).

The first unit of the course is designed to introduce you to the course tools. If after completing that unit you feel that you do not have the necessary skills you must contact the instructor or Ellie Warder immediately so you can be dropped from the course.

Students who wish to drop the course must contact us by the beginning of the second week of the course in order to receive a full refund (minus a \$25 fee) on their tuition.

Key #2: Knowing What to Expect

Although we are all pretty sure what to expect if we sign up for an in-person course, online courses are fairly new and we all have different expectations. Here's an example taken from our Genetics for Teachers class so you know what to expect from one of our courses:

- Genetics for Teachers is a "guided course," which means we all work on the same unit at the same time.
- Discussions are an essential component of the course, so it is critical that we are all at the same place in the course content at the same time.
- If you have a trip planned during the time that this class will be active, please contact the instructors ASAP.
- You should plan on spending as much time on this course as you would for an in-person course. However, in an online class you work a bit differently. Rather than sitting through 3+ hours of lecture, activities, and class discussions per week, you will be reviewing lectures online and discussing topics on message boards. In addition to that, we will assign reading and assignments, just like a regular class.
- Just as in a traditional course, predictable scheduling of your study time is very important. We will do our best to set norms for when materials become available and when different assignments and activities are due, and then to keep that same schedule for each of our units. This should help you to establish your own predictable routine as you progress through this course.
- Successful online students are able to work independently and keep up with the material.

Key #3: Communication

Imagine your last in-person course. Perhaps you ran into the instructor in the hall and chatted for a few minutes. Or raised your hand when you did not understand the instructions. These simple interactions that make classes flow more easily don't happen in an online course. We are left with written communication, which can be more formal, or for some even more intimidating than a brief chat in the hall. However, these communication lines are absolutely critical. Please don't hesitate to ask any and all questions, or request clarification and/or alternative explanations from the instructors. If you feel like you are having trouble, please let us know!

Now that you have looked over these guidelines, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

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