

Successful Online Learners Are

- Self-motivated
 - Can keep track of due dates and schedule time needed for course work
- Mature
 - Able to communicate ideas
 - Seek help when needed without procrastinating
- Flexible
 - Able to work at various times of day and handle interruptions
- Independent
 - Can successfully access and understand information online without oral explanations
- Computer skilled
 - Know basic computer operations and software
 - Comfortable with the Internet
 - Able to send emails with attachments

Success Strategies for Distance Learners

The consensus among students is that the biggest obstacle to achieving success in a distance learning education program is the necessity of independently keeping themselves on track. The idea is so daunting to many students that they don't even attempt the distance learning process. Students have been trained throughout their educational careers to rely on teachers and the school system to provide structure for their learning. They are used to daily or near-daily requirements that require them to check in and keep on task, even if it's as simple as attending class daily. Very few people find it natural to keep themselves perfectly on task when it comes to learning.



The trick to mastering this, the toughest element, is to set a regular study schedule. This sounds easy to do, but takes some thought initially. Students want to consider their own learning styles and understand how they work best. Some people work best in the mornings, others are night owls; some prefer to work in short bursts (or if that's all their schedule allows) and others take a little while to get into the material, then prefer to work for a longer stint while they're engaged in the learning. Students need to set themselves up for success. They should set a study schedule that gives them the best chance of learning effectively and being productive.

Students should be realistic when setting a study schedule. It may sound great to say they will study for three hours every weeknight, but that might be too much of a

commitment. Once they start missing their planned study times, it becomes easier to miss others and students start to lose their motivation. A better plan would be three dedicated nights that the student never misses. Using that study time effectively can also be a challenge. Minimize distractions by turning the TV off, logging out of any online instant messaging programs, and not checking email. Don't be trying to cook dinner and study at the same time. Students can get their family, roommates, and coworkers into their support structure by communicating with them about their distance learning plans. Students should let family, friends, and housemates know when their planned study times are so that people don't interrupt them unless absolutely necessary.

Setting goals is another important part of being successful in a distance learning endeavor. Classes will come with their own set of deadlines, but in some cases those may be few and far between. Students might be required to make a weekly forum post, turn in an assignment biweekly, write a midterm paper, and complete a final exam. Between the spaces of assignments, it's easy to get behind, especially on a large project that is due "later." Students need to set small goals for themselves, above and beyond their due dates. For instance, if a student has a midterm paper due in six weeks, they could set the following goals: week 1—review assignment and choose a topic; weeks 2 and 3—research topic; weeks 4 and 5—write first drafts of the paper; and week 6—edit and revise paper, turn in final draft. By breaking what seems like a daunting goal into a series of smaller goals, students will have an easier time staying on top of it. In addition, rather than waiting six weeks to meet a goal, they'll get a sense of accomplishment by reaching each of the smaller goals, and this will give them more motivation and encouragement to keep up the good work. Students can set up rewards for themselves when they meet goals, be they deadline driven, assignment driven, grade driven, or even something as simple as appearing on time to every live chat.

Despite the independent nature of a distance learning education, students are still part of a community of other distance learners. They have their fellow classmates and teachers to talk with about their trials and their successes during the distance learning process. Students can share their learning habits and strategies with each other and adjust their own strategies based on input. Classmates can offer valuable support, as can the instructors. Students should not be afraid to ask questions at any time. They can ask about the distance learning process, what the teacher's expectations are, and how their performance has been so far. Getting feedback from an instructor can make all the difference. Students can decide if they need to make changes to their study habits or the amount of time they are spending on schoolwork. They might find that they are right on track, which will feed into their momentum. Support, discussion, and feedback from teachers and classmates will help keep a student motivated and help him become an effective, efficient student who gets as much out of his distance learning experience as possible.

To assess your readiness visit the next section.