

ONLINE STUDY – SO WHAT'S INVOLVED?

When you study online at NMIT, you enter your course through the NMIT Online website. After logging in, you can access your course materials such as readings, learning activities and assessments. Online communication tools like discussion forums and chat, let you interact with your teacher and classmates. You will be supported in how to do this and receive relevant training for specific software. Many students find that online learning offers them the flexibility to study when, where and how they want.

In this booklet:

- Why learn online?
- So what does an online course look like?
- What makes a good e-learner?
- E-learner hints
- Sharing and collaborating
- Is online learning for me?

Why learn online?

- Courses taught through the Internet or 'online' provide opportunities for student-centred learning. Online, learners are empowered to learn by themselves and to teach each other. Online, you have the opportunity to share, collaborate and critique each other's work.
- You have an opportunity to write more online. Because you have time to think before you write, and reflect on your and others' writing, your writing will improve.
- It's geared to lifelong learning - you will be learning for the rest of your life, and much of it will be online.
- You have access to rich content, including multimedia images that explain ideas better than text books and words. The Internet also provides you with rich and interesting resources.
- You can learn where and when you want—24/7. Help and support is available to you through online connections
- Through quizzes and interactive tests you can get immediate feedback, and you can see how you are doing.
- You will get to know your peers and colleagues through online discussions, and often get to know more about their ideas than if you were in a face to face classroom.
- Sharing, collaborating and discussing online helps you develop skills that you will need the rest of your life.

Adapted from: Kassop, M. Ten ways online education matches, or surpasses, face to face learning. Retrieved on May 6, 2003 from <http://ts.mivu.org>

So what does an online course look like?

Each online course will incorporate different combinations of learning materials and activities to suit the topic and a variety of learning approaches and student characteristics. Most courses combine reading materials (some online and some in print), references to web sites and discussion boards or chat rooms. Many include quizzes, videos and may also have practical workshops or workplace assessment sessions. An increasing number of our campus-based courses are shifting to a blend of some online activity mixed with regular classes.

You can view some sample online courses to get a better sense of what's involved at <http://ecampus.nmit.ac.nz/>.

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What makes a good e-learner?

- Practice and self confidence. Online learning can be quite frightening at first.
- Getting to know your other class members, either by attending any face to face sessions or by communicating with them online.
- Contacting your tutor when you feel the need or as negotiated with your tutor.
- Using technology to share, collaborate, discuss and practice.
- Breaking your work into meaningful chunks and rewarding yourself when you have finished.

Do you think you would make a good e-Learner? Try this online quiz from Pima Community College (<http://www.pima.edu/cgi-bin/onlineReadiness/quiz.pl>). It will rate your suitability for online learning and suggest areas you will need to may need to focus on to ensure your success. Alternatively, complete the form “Is online learning for me?” on the last page of this booklet for a quick self-check.

Regardless of whether you are studying online or in classroom-based courses you should be aware of study techniques that suit you as a learner. Try this online quiz from VARK (<http://www.vark-learn.com/>) to find out more about your personal learning style.

E-learner hints

- Use your experiences and share them. Think how much you know already!
- Concentrate on the ideas and don't worry about 'typos' (typing mistakes) when you write. Your tutor will inform you of the academic requirements for your writing.
- Practise your typing.
- Go online, do what you need to do and get off. You can spend many hours online 'just having a look'. Remember the sunshine, people....
- Allocate sufficient time to study online.
- Use the search tools to find information.
- Ask if there are any problems, say how you are feeling, let the tutor know what you think.
- Get to chat sessions on time, post things on the discussion board when you are meant to, get your assignments in on time.
- Share your work and ideas. Be aware that others may be feeling uncertain too.
- Think about what you are going to say and check that what you have written will be easily understood.
- Be academic - reference, refer to, quote....
- Make sure your work is your own. Plagiarism is unethical and unprofessional.

Sharing and collaborating

Online learning, while offering a way to deliver assignments and content to you, also offers you the opportunity to share and collaborate effectively. Two notions underpin the development of online courses: meaningful learning and scaffolding.

Jonassen, Peck and Wilson (1999) describe meaningful learning as: Active, Constructive , Intentional, Authentic, Cooperative.

Your tutor will provide opportunities for meaningful learning, through chat rooms, e-mail links and discussion boards and internet searches. These opportunities offer guidance through

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carefully constructed activities that lead you from the known to the less well known. This is called 'scaffolding'. In order to use these activities effectively, consider the skills you may develop:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• language/content skills• negotiation and problem solving• reaching consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• synthesizing/summarising• observation/analysis, identifying• giving feedback
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We encourage you to use every opportunity to share and collaborate, so that you begin to construct a body of skills, information and knowledge that you develop, hone and share with your classmates.

How do you do this?

- Use **the discussion forum** – attach or paste updated word processed documents, allocate someone to synthesise your work, share URLs, share and comment on readings, new information, opinions. *Your tutor can set up private discussion groups.*
- **email** - send each other your updated word processed documents, allocate someone to synthesise your work. Use the email to set up chat sessions.
- **chat rooms** - note the rooms that are private. Use these to discuss your work, plans and to allocate tasks.
- **the Internet** - use the Internet to search for information, making sure you carefully evaluate sites and avoid plagiarising.

Computer requirements

Students planning to study our online courses will require access to:

- A computer capable of running the following software, accessing the internet and playing audio and video files (i.e. has a sound card with speakers or headphones).
- An Internet connection – while the courses can be accessed via a 56 kbps modem we strongly recommend a broadband connection to take full advantage of video and audio resources provided.
- An email programme (e.g. Outlook or Thunderbird) or online email account (e.g. Gmail or Hotmail).
- An Internet Browser equivalent to Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or above (e.g. Firefox 2+ or Safari).
- Media player for playing common audio and video files either as a standalone software (e.g. Windows media player, iTunes, QuickTime, VLC media player) or plug-ins to your internet browser (e.g. Flash).
- Adobe Acrobat Reader (version 7 or above) for displaying PDF files.
- A word processing programme - either Microsoft Word 97 (or above), Open Office (free), Google Docs (free) or some other equivalent.
- Students should also be comfortable with using the computer including, basic file management, email and word processing skills. Access to and familiarity with using a digital camera and uploading pictures would also be an advantage.

Reference: Jonassen, D.H., Peck, K.L., & Wilson, B.G. (1999). Learning with Technology: A Constructivist Perspective. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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Is Online Learning For Me?

The best way to determine if online learning is for you, is to understand what it takes to be successful. Answer Yes or No to the following statements to see if you might be a successful student in an online course:

1. Essential

- I like to work independently and have enough self-discipline to learn without face-to-face classes.
- I have reliable access to a computer and an internet connection. (A broadband connection is preferred, but not essential).
- I know how to use a computer to browse the web, do word processing and send email (Training is available at EIT to gain these skills).
- Typing is not a problem for me; I may not be fast but I'm usually accurate.
- I don't mind reading.
- I can set and complete goals on my own and on time.
- I will be able to attend scheduled exams and workshops.
- I am willing to dedicate the same amount of time and effort to an online learning course as I would to a traditional course.

These **Essential** statements focus on the very basic needs of online learning. You really need to answer **Yes** to all eight to be successful. If you did, continue...

2. Important

- I can plan my time on a weekly basis for an online course (EIT's Learning Services can provide assistance if necessary).
- I'm confident about downloading files or installing a program.
- Exploring new things appeals to me.
- Asking questions doesn't worry me.
- I am happy to work at a computer for extended periods of time.
- Learning with other students through online individual and group communication tools sounds like fun.

If you answered **No** to one or two of the **Important** statements you're doing fine. More than that and you may need additional support to become an online student.

Finally, continue with this last set of statements...

3. Bonus

- Having the freedom to choose when I study, matches the way I like to work.
- Sometimes I find that when I write, I can organise my thoughts better than when I speak.
- I have wanted to take courses in the past, but was unable to combine them with work or family responsibilities.
- I enjoy exchanging ideas with my classmates.
- Direct, personal teacher feedback is something I value and benefit from.
- Attending class without worrying about transportation & parking sounds great!
- I like to communicate through email or chat channels.
- In class, sometimes my best answers were the ones I thought of just after the one I gave.
- Sharing a class with people from all over New Zealand sounds like a great opportunity.

Any of the above is a bonus. The more **Yes** answers you have, the better online learning will suit you.