

## Tips for Taking an Online Course

While online learning provides greater flexibility, it also requires more attention to time management skills and self-motivation. When taking an online class, keep these tips in mind:

### 1. Confirm the Technology

Before deciding on an online or hybrid course, be sure to explore the digital technologies that will allow you to submit course material as well as participate in discussion boards. Clarify with the instructor whether course technologies are compatible with mobile or tablet devices and whether podcast/screencasts can be streamed efficiently in these environments. If you do not own a computing device (computer or tablet) or have access to high-speed internet, be sure to locate the nearest [computer lab at UCLA](#). If you are not already comfortable with the following technological skills, be sure to inform the professor at the start of the course:

- a. UCLA CCLE
  - i. Access and log in to CCLE
  - ii. Navigate to and within course websites
  - iii. Post messages to the course website discussion board
- b. Word Processing
  - i. Create and save a Word document in different formats, including as a PDF
  - ii. Copy-and-paste from one source to another
  - iii. Add page numbers, headers and footers to a document
  - iv. Use a printer
- c. Email
  - i. Send and receive emails with attachments
  - ii. Forward and reply to emails
- d. Internet
  - i. Visit sites and open browser tabs from hyperlinks or URLs
  - ii. Create and access bookmarks / “favorites”
  - iii. Watch streaming video or download files from the Web
  - iv. Update and install Java and flash players

If you require training in one of these areas, please visit UCLA’s [Learn IT website portal](#). With your UCLA credentials, you can access the extensive training database of [Lynda.com](#). Lynda offers essential training in Microsoft Word, Excel, iMovie, InDesign and many other programs.

## **2. Have a Backup Plan**

In any online course, have backup technology ready! Online courses require you to have reliable tools for completing and submitting your work online. To avoid the stress of computer and internet mishaps, be sure to have a backup plan for any type of accident or unavoidable internet downtime. Save your documents often and backup versions on a flash drive or through a cloud-based archive program such as [Dropbox](#) (which also includes a free app for mobile devices), [Google Drive](#) or [Box](#) . You may alternatively consider investing in the purchase of [real-time, cloud-based backup software](#) such as [Backblaze](#) or [Sugarsync](#) (which syncs selected files across multiple computers and devices). These types of programs backup selected folders continuously in the background. Second, ask a friend or relative whether you could use their internet connection if yours is unavailable and locate the best [UCLA](#) or [community](#) computer labs (and their hours) in advance.

## **3. Read the Syllabus Carefully**

Be sure to read the syllabus carefully and clarify any vague instructions at the start of the course. The syllabus will provide the guide for not only the structure of the course, but how to best contact the instructor, interact with your peers and seek help in the event of technological problems. Read the policies on how to submit work and the schedule of assignments/exams.

## **4. Know Your Professor**

Although you may never meet your professor in person, we encourage you to reach out to him/her early in the course. Find the professor's biography and view any materials she/he posts online about themselves. Consider sending the professor a short email or schedule an appointment on campus to introduce yourself and share any personal interests in the course material. Be sure to take advantage of opportunities to chat in virtual office hours or through course message boards.

## **5. Log On *Every* Day**

The best way to stay engaged in an online course is to log on to the website daily (or at least 5-6 times a week). You will be able to see who has posted in course forums, check for updates and keep informed of upcoming deadlines. Use these visits to check your progress in the course and stay on track.

## **6. Find a Quiet Study Area**

Because your experience in an online/hybrid course takes place entirely outside the classroom, you should consider creating your own workspace in which to view videos and complete assignments. It is necessary to have a place where you can shut the door and work undisturbed. Be sure to turn off cell phones, email programs and instant message/chat programs. If you do not have this type of space at home, visit the campus computing centers or the library with headphones.

## **7. Set Weekly Goals and Deadlines**

Set deadlines for your work in the course and stick to them! Remember that one unit represents three hours of work per week at UCLA. If you are taking a 4-unit course, faculty will expect you to be viewing and completing course material for 12 hours every week. Because this time takes place on your schedule and not in the lecture hall, one week of missed work will be difficult to make up in following weeks. Identify times when you will be most productive during the day/week and, if necessary, schedule a set number of hours per week that you devote to the class. You can “reserve” these times on a paper or online calendar (such as Google calendar) to avoid interruptions.

## **8. Ask Questions**

If you have a question, do not hesitate to communicate with your professor or your peers. Course message boards are particularly useful for creating online study or peer support groups as well as asking substantive questions of course material.

## **9. Become an Active Discussion Leader**

In an online class, it isn't enough to just show up for lecture! Active participation is central to succeeding. You are not graded on attending a discussion section, but rather on your course work and contribution to collaborative online exercises. Treat blog or message board posts as important contributions to course discussions and pay particular attention to the etiquette (what we call “netiquette”) guidelines provided by the professor.

## **10. Take Advantage of Anonymity**

Take advantage of the anonymity offered by the online format. An online course gives you the chance to contribute to class discussion with the benefit of added time to compose your thoughts. This could give you the chance to reference the assignment and check for any spelling errors. The greater your level of engagement or activity in the course, the more you will gain from the online learning experience.

## **11. Find a Buddy in the Class**

If the instructor does not facilitate this, take the time to locate a classmate in case you have questions about the course or materials. You can ask the professor to set up a message board for this type of activity or post a request on the course website.

## **12. Take Advantage of UCLA Resources**

Although online courses take place in the virtual environment, do not hesitate to take advantage of resources available on the UCLA campus. If you interested in improving your writing or research skills, make an appointment with a Peer Learning Facilitator at the [Undergraduate Writing Center](#) and/or visit a librarian at the [UCLA Libraries](#). Contact your professor for resources on campus that would be most useful to your subject area.