

# So You Are Thinking About Taking Online Classes

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Are you self-motivated? If the answer is “yes”, then online education may be a good fit for you. Choosing a college or university to attend is a big step in planning your education and career goals, and you want to make sure you find a good fit. While the information you learn in a face-to-face classroom on a college campus and the information you learn in an online classroom should be the same, the learning experience will be different. Before you jump right in to taking online classes there are several things that you need to consider about your time, personality, learning, and goals.

## What are your career and educational goals?

You may want to enroll in online classes because it is more convenient for you, you prefer an online environment, or any number of reasons. In either case you believe that online classes may be the right place for you. Consider what you want to do after college and select a school that provides an online program for your dream job. Many schools offer online degrees or certificates in client service careers such as medical assisting, computer repair, and counseling. When considering these types of careers remember to investigate whether or not the school offers an internship (sometimes called practicum) while you complete your degree. You'll want to know what it's really like to work in the field and be in the environment before you finish the degree...trust me.



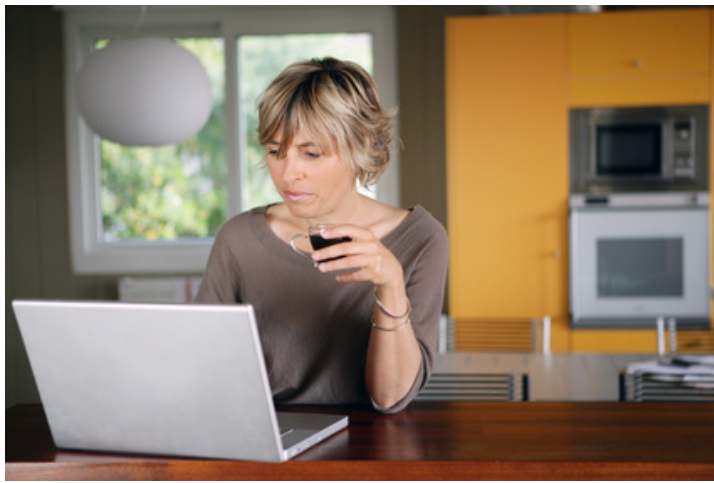
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## How much time do you have to dedicate to school?

Many students new to online learning believe that an online class means self-paced learning. This is a huge myth! The reality is that online class formats, like face-to-face classes vary. You may have a class that just requires reading, quizzes, a midterm, and a final. Or, you may have a class that has weekly discussion forums, assignments, and no tests at all. However, most classes will more closely resemble the format and amount of homework that you are used to in face-to-face classes. With this in mind, you must make sure you have enough time to dedicate to your class.

What is “enough time?” This will depend on the number of credits you are taking and the length, in weeks, of your course. Traditionally, in a 16-week, 3-credit, face-to-face class students spend 6 hours per week on homework in addition to the 3 hours they spend in class. The amount of time spent in class and on homework is higher or lower depending on whether the course is more or less credits. Online classes, which are usually shorter in length, must still account for the same material that would have been taught in a 16 week class. With all of this in mind, you can expect to spend about 9 hours per week on one class if you are taking a 16 week online course. If the length of your class is less than 16 weeks, expect to dedicate more time per week.





## How would you describe your personality? In person? Online?

Some people may find it easier to communicate online versus in person. Do you find that you spend much of your time social networking, blogging, chatting, or posting pictures? Many schools now offer some element of social networking as part of the total educational experience. This can help you feel more connected to other students and the school.

You might like the collaborative nature of the face-to-face classroom, and you won't miss the experience in an online classroom. You will likely have a similar exchange of ideas in discussion forums. Discussion forums work much like reply posts or comments you may have made to status updates, blogs, or other online updates. Be CAREFUL! Discussion forums are graded and you will want to write in full sentences and use proper grammar and punctuation.

## In what environment do you enjoy learning and retain the most information?

At the beginning of this document you were asked if you are self-motivated. Online education requires more self-motivation than a face-to-face class. You will need to stay focused and take notes while reading or watching lectures and textbooks. It is less likely that you can ask a classmate for their notes or form a study group. You may even need to seek tutoring for difficult subjects. Taking online classes that are shorter than 16 weeks makes it more difficult to catch up when you get behind. Remember, it is the same amount of work in a shorter amount of time.

Consider how you learn to help you maximize the time that you have. Do you like to spend time in silence when you study or listen to music? Do you need the instructor to talk you through a topic? Can you easily read and retain information with little practice? Do you learn better from hands-on experiences? A good online class will account for many learning styles. You should be aware of how you learn best, so you can plan for your success and ensure you have what you need.

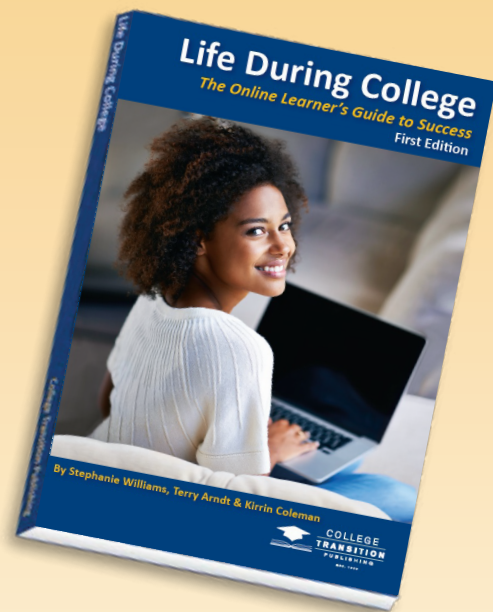
## What's Next?

Many students need structure and someone to remind them of assignment due dates. You may be surprised how effective that weekly class meeting is once it is entirely up to you to remember when your homework is due. In online classes you don't have to drive to school or take the bus in the rain, but you do have to meet deadlines, prioritize, and work hard. Your professor is there to guide your learning, but as always, it is entirely up to you to be the architect of your education. So, take the lead.

Make a list of questions to ask the school representative. Oh yes, you will interview them first. Ask questions about the school, the type of programs they offer, length of classes, total cost of tuition and fees, extracurricular activities like student clubs or study abroad, the length of time it will take you to graduate, and the job and salary outlook after graduation. Remember your goals... The convenience and innovation of online classes should not be the only thing considered when you make the decision to be an online student.

## Want to Help Students Transition Into Online Learning?

Consider using:



**For more information, resources and tools on assisting students with the transition into college, read**  
**Life During Community College,**  
**Your guide to Success**  
**and also find additional resources at:**  
**[www.CollegeTransitionPublishing.com](http://www.CollegeTransitionPublishing.com)**

