

# Distance Learning Today

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## Is Online Learning Right for You? Certain personal traits predict success online

By Andrew Gansler

Online courses can be a terrific way to both pick up the education you need and still be able to work, parent, or juggle the many commitments that define most adult lives. But is it right for you?

One way to find out is to think through some of the issues you may confront as an online student. eLearners.com®, a leading resource for connecting students with online education, has studied the characteristics that define successful online learners.

- How important is face-to-face interaction with your teacher and classmates? Some students find that they learn better in the social dynamic of a physical classroom, and for them, a campus-based course is a wiser choice. Many others, however, find that they are comfortable learning independently, or enjoy the genuine, though virtual, camaraderie that develops among online students. These are the students who thrive while learning online

- How good are your computer skills? The best-case is that you're comfortable using word-processing software and the major Internet browsers, and you easily share information electronically. This will often include zipping and uploading files, unzipping and downloading files, and dealing with attachments. Although many online students are able to fix technology issues on their own, most online providers assume students may need a bit of coaching when learning new computer skills. The key for students is to not become frustrated by occasional technology glitches or challenges.

- How willing are you to ask for help when you need it? In a classroom-based course, your instructor can usually recognize

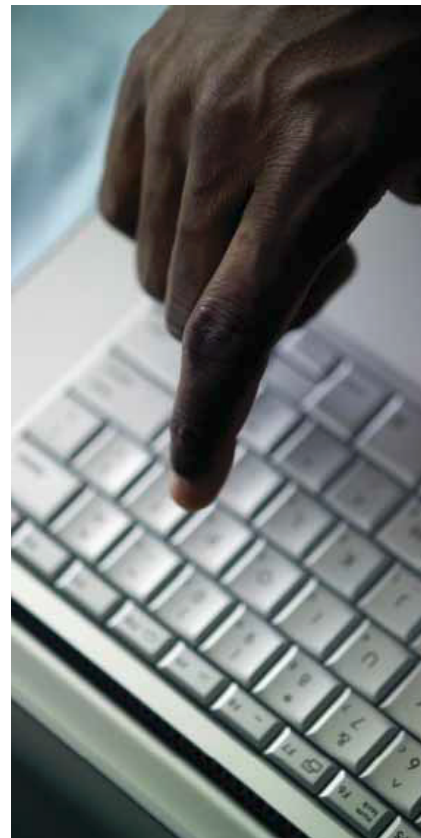
when students understand a lesson by simply reading their facial expressions. In an online course, it's necessary for you to let your teacher know immediately when something is confusing or needs further clarification — otherwise you can quickly lose your forward progress. It's important that you're able to ask for the help you need, as soon as you need it.

- How much time can you devote to your course work? Most online students find that committing at least twelve hours a week to course work and study time works best. Although some online learners can succeed with an average of eight to ten hours a week, these are usually individuals who have taken a number of online courses and have learned how to maximize the effectiveness of every hour spent

- How good are you at organizing and managing your time? Online learning works best for those who are well-organized, self-motivated, and able to manage their time well. If these skills don't come naturally to you, you can still succeed as an online student, but you might want to pick up a few books on how to improve these skill areas as part of your learning plan.

- How do you handle project deadlines? Part of managing your time well is developing and following an action plan for completing your assignments. You'll need to set a realistic timeline that reflects both the amount of work to be done and the time you have available to complete it. Most of us procrastinate some of the time; the important thing is that "deadline pressure" isn't your primary means for completing assignments on a regular basis.

- Do you enjoy (and are you good at) reading and writing? Online courses are



based on students' ability to read, reflect, analyze, and write. Assignments will include writing about course lectures, assigned articles and research materials. You'll be asked to provide written comments about classmates' comments and contributions. Test questions will often require essay-length answers. In addition, you'll have online "conversations" with your teacher, your classmates, and your virtual project team members. Since generally all communication is written, the stronger your skills in this area, the better off you'll be.

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and multimedia content at the push of a button. Students have on – demand access to archived class lectures and supplemental information for enhanced course understanding.

“Digital video is playing a key role in shifting how students and faculty communicate with one another, access vital academic resources, and support an enriched learning environment,” said Marshall Allen, director, The OSU Institute for Teaching and Learning Excellence.

### **Patient Examination “Instant Replays” Improve Medical Student Training**

Medical schools continually update their courses to teach the latest medical advances for diagnosing illnesses and treating patients. Many medical schools are also incorporating technology to provide an added dimension to traditional classroom and training sessions. In Toronto, the University Health Network’s Paul B. Helliwell Centre for Medical Education is expanding traditional classroom and standardized (simulated) patient exams by enabling students to record, replay, and critique these exams using video on demand. These new digital video applications provide additional methods of teaching students important nuances of high-quality patient care.

### **“Gradcast” Provides Troops Overseas with Front-Row Seats at Graduation**

Samuel Clemens High School is committed to its students and its community. Nearly one – third of the students attending the San Antonio – area school are from Randolph Air Force Base and Fort Sam Houston Army Base. School officials recorded and posted the graduation video online in May – making this important student achievement available to friends and family across the globe, including Afghanistan and Belgium.

### **Removing Distance Hurdles from Learning**

Today’s wired society enables students and teachers to obtain information instantly – sidestepping traditional barriers of time and distance. As we forge new global connections and always – on connectivity, digital video will transform how we learn, work, and interact.

Henry Ford’s legacy began with the Model T and grew as he applied new technology to drive broader innovation. Similarly, today’s educators and students have the opportunity to use vast access to data and global collaboration to redefine how we approach business, science, education and the other critical pillars of modern society.

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- Do you feel comfortable voicing your opinion? While it’s possible to sit in the back of a traditional classroom and avoid active participation, online instructors expect you to contribute meaningful comments to the class discussion on a regular basis. Although this means that it’s a lot tougher to be invisible, many previously passive students discover the value of their own voices in the “anonymity” of an online classroom.

- What are your expectations about online courses? A well-done online course can be fun, stimulating, engaging, and a great learning experience, but rarely is it going to be easier than a classroom – based course. While online instructors expect a high level of participation and lots of hard work from their students, they also tend to reciprocate with high levels of responsiveness and engagement.

These questions should serve as a good place to start when considering pursuing online education. For a more personalized assessment, you may want to check out the eLearners Advisor ([www.elearners.com/advisor](http://www.elearners.com/advisor)), which will give you comprehensive results on whether online learning is right for you, including feedback and suggestions about how you can be more successful as an online student, access to resources to help you, and assistance in finding an online degree that meets your needs.

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*Andrew Gansler is the CEO of eLearners.com., a leading search engine for locating and evaluating online courses and degrees.*