

# Online Learning Student Resource Guide

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## Getting Started: What is Online Learning?

### 1. What is Online Learning?

- Some schools may have different terms for online courses, including virtual learning, remote learning, or online learning. Online Learning classes are taught online, usually through a class website on a Learning Management System. Classes might be “synchronous”, where you meet online at a specific time, or “asynchronous”, where your assignments are posted online and you have a specific amount of time - usually a few days - to complete them. Some courses will use a blend of these two styles. [Technology requirements and expectations](#) will vary by school and instructor.

### 2. How do I interact with my instructor and classmates?

- Your online courses will use a Learning Management System (LMS) to connect you with your classmates and instructor. You can usually email or message your instructor through the LMS. You may also be able to email your instructor directly. Be sure to use your school issued email address so that your instructor knows that it's you. Your instructor is your best source of information about the course, so reach out if you have questions.
  - Refer to [Online Learning Etiquette](#) for more information
- Most online courses will also have a discussion board in the LMS that you can use to communicate with your classmates.

### 3. What are the expectations?

- A successful online student will have good time management skills. If your classes are synchronous, you are expected to log in at a certain time and participate in the activity. If your class is asynchronous then you should refer to the assignment due dates to complete all of your work on time.

- Refer to [Time Management Resources](#) below
- You should receive a syllabus from your instructor, which is a document that contains the course information, expectations, and schedule. Take note of the assignments and due dates.
- Participate! Be sure you are keeping up with the readings, discussions, and assignments. Check the course website and your email daily to make sure you are on track.
- Reach out with questions. In an online course, your instructor only knows you need help if you tell him/her. Reach out right away with questions or concerns.

#### 4. Benefits of online learning

- **Flexibility:** While your online course may have synchronous components, it is much easier to fit an online course into your busy schedule.
- **Convenience:** Save money and time by taking your courses in your home, rather than driving to a campus.
- **Technology skills:** Online courses will help you become more familiar with using technology, which is a useful and marketable skill.

#### 5. Are Online Courses safe? How is my information protected?

- Yes, as an online or face-to-face student, your information is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#)).
- Learning Management Systems are secure sites that are designed to safely handle student data. The privacy policy for your specific LMS should be listed somewhere within the LMS or you can contact your school's technology department for that information.

## Online Learning Etiquette

### 1. Etiquette for Video Conferencing

- Test your set up ahead of time. Make sure you have the necessary components (microphone, camera) and the right software downloaded. You will also need a strong internet connection to support video conferencing. If possible, test with a friend or classmate before the session to make sure everything works.
- Your instructor may request that you use your camera while on the video conference. Make sure your appearance is appropriate and the lighting is sufficient.
- Most video conferencing tools will allow you to use your microphone. Make sure that your audio is muted when you enter the video conference. You should only turn your microphone on when you are speaking and then mute it again when you are done. This helps prevent feedback and background noise on the call.
- Take turns speaking. Generally if two people try to speak at once, feedback prevents either person from being heard. Once you're sure someone is done speaking, you can turn on your microphone and talk. Some video conferencing tools have a button to allow you to raise your hand or signal to the instructor that you'd like to speak.
- Most video conferencing tools have an option to chat. You may wish to type your response into the chat box.
- If you experience issues with audio, video or internet connection let your instructor know by typing into the chat box. Try to troubleshoot the issue by turning your audio or video off and back on or reconnecting to the session. If your internet connection drops, try moving closer to the

wireless router and making sure there are no other devices using the internet at that time.

## 2. Communication Etiquette

- 'Netiquette'
  - 'Netiquette' is a term that refers to online communication etiquette.
  - Remember to remain respectful in written and spoken communication in the online classroom.
  - Your school may have a specific 'netiquette' policy.
- Email Etiquette
  - It's important to use your school issued email to communicate with your instructor. That way, your instructor knows who you are and is likely to respond faster. Remember to write professionally, and include all important information.
  - Refer to this video for more tips: [Email Etiquette](#)

## Technology Information:

### 1. Basic Technology Needs

Your technology needs will vary by school. Below are general requirements. Please refer to your syllabus or your school's IT help department for specific needs.

- Ideally, you will have access to a **computer with a webcam and microphone**
  - If you do not have access to a computer with a webcam and microphone, you may be able to use a computer without a webcam and microphone.
  - You may be able to use a Chromebook to complete coursework. Keep in mind that Chromebooks may not allow you to download many types of software.
  - It is possible to complete some types of coursework on a smartphone and/or tablet (iPad). However, these do not usually provide full functionality and are not recommended as your only device to complete coursework.
- You will need access to the internet. See [Resources for free/low cost internet access](#) below.

### 2. Basic technology troubleshooting

- Many technology issues with your computer can be resolved by restarting your computer. If possible, save anything you are working on and shutdown your computer. You may also want to check for updates and make sure your computer is running the latest update. If a website doesn't seem to be working correctly, try using a different browser. Unless

directed otherwise by your instructor, you will probably have the best experience using Google Chrome or Firefox.

- If your technology issue isn't resolved by restarting your computer or using a different browser, you can try reaching out to your school's helpdesk, IT support, or Online Learning Department. If the issue is with a website or program linked to your online course, you may also reach out to your instructor for guidance.
- Here are resources that can assist you with technology troubleshooting
  - [Technology for Teachers and Students playlist](#)
  - [Goodwill Community Foundation Technology Resource](#)

### 3. How-to tutorials for programs that you may need to use as an online student:

- **Google Docs**
  - [Using Google Docs](#)
  - [Saving a Google Doc as a Word docx](#)
  - [Saving a Google Doc as a PDF](#)
- **Attaching a document to email**
  - Attaching a document to email in [GMAIL](#)
  - Attaching a document to email in [Outlook](#)
  - Attaching a document to email in [Yahoo](#)
- **[Basic Microsoft Word](#)**
  - Microsoft Office is provided by most schools for free. Ask your school's IT help for more information.

### 4. Resources for free/low cost internet access

- PA Public Utility Commission: [Access and Programs](#)
- [Pennsylvania Broadband Investment Incentive Program](#)



- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development [Broadband Funding](#)



## Help & Support

### 1. Academic Resources at Your School

- Your instructor is always a good contact person to go to if you have questions about how your course works, due dates, and how to submit assignments. You should find your instructor's contact information on the course syllabus, in the online classroom, or on your course registration information.
- For technology issues, contact your school's IT helpdesk and/or online learning department, or see the [Technology Resources](#) we've listed
- Need some help developing study skills or reviewing the course content? Your school may have a tutoring department that you can access virtually. It might also be called a Learning Center or Academic Support.
- Have a big paper due and need help researching your topic? Your school's Library is a great place to start.
- Questions about your program, next courses to take, or just general questions about your school? Start with an academic advisor or program director, who can usually point you in the right direction.
- If you are experiencing issues with an instructor, please contact the program director, chair, or dean of the department.

### 2. Financial Support

- Check with your school's financial aid department for information about grants and scholarships that may be available to you.
- The COVID-19 stimulus package included substantial relief for people with student debt. You can find more information at [StudentAid.gov](#).
- Visit the [T.E.A.C.H. website](#) for potential funding opportunities

### 3. Time Management

Every semester, students are encouraged to perform a time audit to identify time management strengths and limitations. For example, create a weekly schedule and include everything you do within a week (i.e. sleep, eat, laundry, engage in on-line learning, complete assignments, social media scrolling etc.). Review the audit to identify areas where you can optimize time. The audit tends to resemble a monetary budget but instead of money think to yourself... “where am I wasting time and how can I make more time?” You may even be able to identify household responsibilities that others can temporarily help with in order to optimize your on-line learning time. Additional time management tips to be successful at on-line learning include creating a routine, prioritizing your to-do list, and limiting distractions. Avoid procrastination and cramming by splitting your homework and assignments into sections. Plan ahead and prioritize by using tools like a calendar and/or to-do list to manage due dates. Check out apps available for free to assist you. Limit distractions by putting your phone on do not disturb, removing distractions from your on-line learning space, and reducing the tendency to multitask. Lastly, take frequent breaks to avoid fatigue and improve concentration. Consider using a timer and taking breaks every 30-60 mins.

Source: *Andrea Marcolla, Licensed Social Worker*

- View this video playlist for more information: [Time Management Tips](#)

### 4. Focus and motivation tips for on-line learning

In order to improve focus and motivation when learning on-line, find an on-line learning space that works for everyone within the household. If multiple people utilize the same workspace create a visible and shared schedule to improve communication surrounding usage of the space. Upon identifying an optimal space perform a learning needs inventory. Reflect on what you need in order to

stay focused and motivated within your space. Begin by asking yourself questions such as: “Do I focus best in a quiet space? If so, how can I limit distractions in the learning space? Am I most motivated in the morning, afternoon or evening?” Next, if you have unique learning needs, communicate early on with your instructor and household members for support. Review your syllabus for expectations and get to know the college resources that may be available to support you (i.e. counseling, tutoring, library, accessibility services etc.) Participate in class and engage with classmates on-line in order to remain focused and improve overall retention of material. Finally, do not forget to celebrate big and small successes that you achieve while engaging in on-line learning.

*Source: Andrea Marcolla, Licensed Social Worker*

## **5. Self-care tips**

Self-care does not need to be extravagant or costly. It needs to be accessible and practical to meet your needs. Routine self-care may prevent stress from becoming unmanageable. Recommendations include: taking 10 deep inhales and exhales and stretching at various times throughout the day. Pay attention to how your body feels and identify areas within your body that you can relax (i.e. jaw, forehead, shoulders etc.). Visualization is another great self-care tool. Within your learning space hang a photo or bring an object of something that brings you joy—such as a photo or memento from a place that brings you comfort. Every so often, especially when feeling overwhelmed or stressed, mentally and emotionally travel to that space. Practicing mindfulness and grounding techniques will help you remain in the present moment. You can use mindfulness to manage difficult feelings and/or when distracted. Plant your feet on the ground and feel the ground beneath your feet. Identify what you can hear, see, feel,

taste, and smell in this present moment. Repeat until you feel focused and present.

Self-care tips to engage with after learning include but are not limited to: journaling, practicing yoga, exercising, drawing, listening to music, talking with friends/family and finding some healthy way to have fun. Lastly, do not forget about your basic needs. Make sure you are adequately rested and nourished. Talk kindly to yourself and listen to the sensations of your body. If you need to take a break or need help, ask.

Source: *Andrea Marcolla, Licensed Social Worker*

## 6. Mental Health Resources

Going back to school, especially while trying to manage other priorities, can be tough. If you need to talk, there is help available.

- For mental health/counseling needs, you may be able meet with someone from your school's counseling or advising department.
- Below is a list of community mental health resources.
  - [PA Department of Human Services \(DHS\)](#)
  - [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
    - [Find Your Local NAMI](#)
  - [Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania \(MHAP\)](#)

## Additional Resources

### 1. Academic Skills Review

- Looking for a refresher? The resources below will provide a review of Math and Writing skills:
  - [GCF Core Skills - Math, Reading Review](#)
  - [Khan Academy Math](#) and [Khan Academy Grammar](#)
  - [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

### 2. Early Childhood Education (ECE) Professional Development Organizations (PDO)

- ECE PDO at PASSHE (Central, Northeast, Northwest and Southwest Regions of PA)
  - [ECE PDO at PASSHE website](#)
- Southeast Region ECE PDO at PHMC (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery & Philadelphia Counties)
  - [ECE PDO at PHMC website](#)