What Makes a Successful Online Student

Like the facilitator, the online student possesses unique qualities. The online students of today consist primarily of working people who are trying to better their opportunities. This however is changing, as more and more young and older people become aware of the online model. The traditional school will never go away, but the virtual classroom is a significant player in today's educational community. Corporations are using the online model to train technical professionals while private and public universities redefine the world as their markets. The market for students is expanding rapidly. In general, the online student should possess the following qualities:

Be open minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process.

Introverts as well as extroverts find that the online process requires them to **utilize their experiences**. This forum for communication **eliminates the visual barriers** that hinder some individuals in expressing themselves. In addition, the student is given time to reflect on the information before responding. The online environment should be open and friendly.

Be able to communicate through writing.

In the Virtual Classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing. Many students have limited writing abilities, which should be addressed before or as part of the online experience. This may require remedial efforts on the part of the student.

Be Self-motivated and self-disciplined.

With the freedom and flexibility of the online environment comes responsibility. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the flow of the process.

Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.

Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether students are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the online paradigm. If a student is experiencing difficulty on any level (either with the technology or with the course content), he or she must communicate this immediately. Otherwise the instructor will never know what is wrong.

Be willing and able to commit to 4 to 15 hours per week per course.

Online is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many students will say it requires much more time and commitment.

Be able to meet the minimum requirements for the program.

The requirements for online are no less than that of any other quality educational program. The successful student will view online as a convenient way to receive their education – not an easier way.

Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process.

The learning process requires the student to make decisions based on facts as well as experience. Assimilating information and executing the right decisions requires critical thought; case analysis does this very effectively.

Have practically unlimited access to a computer and Internet Service.

The course content and interaction are engaged by computer through the Internet. Some content and activities may be accessible by "dial-up" or mobile services but most online learning will be best accomplished with broadband service. The student must have access to the necessary equipment.

Be able to think ideas through before responding.

Meaningful and quality input into the virtual classroom is an essential part of the learning process. Time is given in the process to allow for the careful consideration of responses. The testing and challenging of ideas is encouraged; you will not always be right, just be prepared to accept a challenge.

Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom. If the student feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, they may be more comfortable in the traditional classroom. Online is not for everybody. A student that wants to be on a traditional campus attending a traditional classroom is probably not going to be happy online. While the level of social interaction can be very high in the virtual classroom given that many barriers come down in the online format, it is not the same as living in a dorm on a campus. This should be made known. An online student is expected to:

- Participate in the virtual classroom 5-7 days a week
- Be able to work with others in completing projects
- Be able to use the technology properly
- Be able to meet the minimum standards as set forth by the institution
- Be able to complete assignments on time
- Enjoy communicating in writing.

The online learning process is normally accelerated and requires **commitment** on the student's part. Staying up with the class and completing all work on time is vital. Once a student gets behind, it is almost impossible to catch up. Basically, the student needs to want to be there, and needs to want the experience. The instructor may have to contact students personally to offer assistance and remind the student of the need to keep up.

This information is courtesy of the University of Illinois