

Tips for Those Who are New to Being Online Learners

1. **Your instructor is as nervous as you are.** Yes, this might be your first time learning online, but it also might be your teachers or professors first time teaching online. Cut them some slack. *Help them when you can.* Be patient. Expect some hiccups, they are trying to cope just like you. Being forced into online learning with little or no notice is not ideal for anyone—you, the instructor, your parents, no one. Relax and do your best to make good out of this tough situation.
2. **Your Professor has taken their preparation seriously.** This is the first time major colleges and schools have shut down across the country. Your teacher will not have all the answers in terms of when you are going back to class, when things will return to normal or even what the school intends to do about room and board. It's alright to ask some questions but getting angry or upset at the faculty member who is trying to teach you in this crisis won't help. Reach out to support entities if you need assistance.
3. **Have Realistic Expectations.** If your teacher or professor had six to twelve weeks to prepare to carefully move their content to an online environment and the wise counsel of an instructional designer, your classes would have had the potential to be high-level, well-polished multimedia and pedagogically sound extravaganzas. But that's not the case. This is being done on an emergency basis, under difficult and uncertain times at the last minute. Understand your instructors are doing the best they can and trying to help you with some sense of continuity of your normal life. So, they may not be the best online instructor and the slides might be boring and the activities might feel weird but participate, engage and work with them to create a learning environment. We all need to pull together and do what we can.
4. **Do some Advanced Planning, too.** If you get an email or message about class being held using a certain virtual classroom software tool, log in early and do a test run. Do this way before your first online class. Most software has a way to test audio and video on your own. It's a good idea to do that. It really helps to have some idea of what the instructional space looks like before class starts. It's like an orientation day where you can walk around the school or campus and see where your classrooms will be. Online is the same way, take a walk to the virtual classroom before the actual class. Also, once you find the software you will be using (i.e. Blackboard and Zoom.), if you can, go to [Blackboard's](#) or [Zoom's site](#) and review some of their tutorials. Taking ten minutes or so to check out the tutorial will make it a better learner experience for you.
5. **If you can, be hard wired.** If not, move close to the Wifi router. Most people who have internet have wifi which is great, most of the time. But for the best connection with Wifi, the closer you are to the router the better and, even better, is to directly connect from the router to your laptop or computer. Hardwire your Ethernet cable into your computer's Ethernet connection if you can and if you have the cable (often a wireless router will come with a short cable, if you hoard like me, it will be around somewhere.) It's not always possible but, if you can, it's helpful in terms of internet speed.
6. **Consider Your Phone.** In some cases, if a computer is not available, a smartphone will be able to download an app from the virtual classroom software vendor and you'll be

able to participate on your phone. It's not ideal but, in some cases, it might mean the difference between getting the instruction or not, it can work. Be wary of data usage issues and costs.

- a. Download Zoom - Apple - <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id546505307>
 - b. Download Zoom Google Play
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=us.zoom.videomeetings>
 - c. Download Blackboard- Apple <https://apps.apple.com/app/blackboard-app/id950424861>
 - d. Download Blackboard- Google Play
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.blackboard.android.bbstudent&hl=en>
7. **Don't Panic When You are Disconnected.** At some point, for whatever reason, you will be disconnected from your virtual class or your instructor will suddenly disappear. It happens in pretty much all virtual environments. The important thing is not to panic but to just log back on calmly. When you are back, just drop a short note in the chat. The more calm and collected you are, the faster you will get back online and, don't worry, most virtual classrooms have recording functions so if your instructor records the session, you can always watch what you missed later. Get a glass of water while you wait for the reboot.
8. **Be Aware of Your Surroundings:** What can Others See. If you are using the camera or audio from your computer to speak back and forth with the instructor, be aware of what is behind you. For example, I once had a student who had an inappropriate poster behind his computer. I had to let him know that everyone could see the poster and to cover it up. Do a quick check of your surroundings to ensure that anything fellow classmates and instructors can see with your camera is appropriate. Or, don't use your camera. Once you find a great space, see if you can set it up as your permanent learning space.
9. **Be Aware of Your Surroundings:** What Can Others Hear. You need to be careful with audio as well. I once had a guest speaker in class who lived in a tiny apartment and they had a friend who decided to use the restroom just as the speaker was talking about a really important point and the door was not closed and everyone in the class could hear everything. (I muted as quickly as I could, but the damage was done.) It was embarrassing for everyone so let others know not to interrupt you when you are online in class. Put up a "Quiet Online Learning Taking Place—Others can See and Hear You" sign or two so you can avoid embarrassing sounds.
10. **Minimize Distractions.** The computer presents great opportunities to be distracted. Messages, internet pages, games. So please, shut everything down and make the instruction full screen, it will help reduce the seduction of the distractions. Also, turn off your smartphone or, better yet, put the smartphone in another room. Once instruction is underway, you don't want the temptation of the phone. And, no TV either. The less tempting distractions, the more likely you will be to focus.
11. **Take Notes.** Ok, so it's an online class. You get to watch from a distance, but you still need to be engaged. So actively take notes, even if you don't normally take notes in class. Note taking is a great way to engage with content. Also, don't take verbatim notes,

instead, use something like the [Cornell Note Taking System](#). Taking notes will make the online lesson, no matter what format (live or recorded) more engaging and interesting. Also consider using a concept map while taking notes. Do something that actively engages your mind as you participate in the online instruction (especially important if it's pre-recorded or video-based).

12. **Participate.** If the class is a virtual classroom, ask a lot of questions. Think about the content and when the teacher/professor asks a question or asks for discussion or asks for participation, participate. Learning is a two-way process and, in fact, more of it's on you to learn the content than the instructor, so work to learn the content. This is a great time for you to take command of what you want from the instruction and leverage it for learning.
13. **Be Patient.** In a classroom the instructor can moderate a little more easily than in an online environment, so you'll need to wait your turn to make a point or to "chime into a conversation" which is usually moderated by having you raise your virtual hand and then the instructor will "call on you." In a classroom, you can see when another person is about to talk or hold up a hand to show you are not finished with a point or a dozen other social cues but not online. It needs to be a little more orderly, the learner process will work best if turns are taken. If the mics are open for everyone and they are all speaking, it's chaos.
14. **Write Stuff Down.** Yes, most of your class is moving online and, hopefully, that includes information about due dates, assignments, and such, however, it's helpful to take out a good old fashioned paper and pencil and write down assignments, due dates and other information. That way you don't need to log into your computer every time to check information. You have it on a handy piece of paper. This will help you stay organized which is helpful as an online student.
15. **Take Responsibility.** Ultimately, you are responsible for your own learning. A good faculty member can get you a long, long way toward a desired learning outcome but, in the end, you've got to step up and be responsible for your own learning. As they say, no one can "learn" you anything, you've got to learn yourself. The teacher is a guide, mentor and helper but ultimately, it's your responsibility to learn.

Adapted from Karl Kapp, Ed.D LinkedIn Blog Post, Tips for Those Who Are New to Being an Online Learner, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/tips-those-who-new-being-online-learner-karl-kapp/>