

Don't Tell Them

The Top 10 Tips for Student Success in Online Courses

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This column is for online instructors only. If students get a copy of these 10 tips, they will know our secrets. On the other hand, it might be a good idea to share these 10 suggestions with everyone—just to keep things fair. These tips are ways to meet the challenge of being an isolated learner. They help students build a learning community—so they really are for students.

- **Tip 1:** Get to know your instructor and try to help him or her get to know you. An e-mail or even a short note mailed using the postal system is a good way to start. Send your introduction at the start of the term.
- **Tip 2:** Since discussions are a very popular tool used in most online courses, be one of the first to post in order to get your name at the top of the listing of student postings, and always, *always* read instructor posts and respond to them. Instructors like this.
- **Tip 3:** Be one of the last, if not *the* last, student to post. This puts your name at the end of the thread where it is very obvious to the instructor. This also gives you a chance to “have the last word.”
- **Tip 4:** When synchronous online instruction is scheduled using Skype,

Elluminate, or some other VoIP (voice over Internet protocol), be one of the first to sign in, as soon after the instructor signs in as you can; this way your name appears early when the instructor is paying attention to see who is participating.

- **Tip 5:** Get organized; the syllabus, semester schedule, and list of assignments are the most important documents that provide structure to an online course. Read and understand these documents. Instructors get annoyed if it seems that students have not read the syllabus or met assignment requirements.
- **Tip 6:** Anticipate! Be an attentive student, and be on time. But, fight the urge to be early. If you complete assignments early this may give your instructor the feeling that his or her teaching is not important. Certainly, never be late, but if you are, be sure to inform your instructor that you will complete the tardy assignment as soon as possible.
- **Tip 7:** Get to know your classmates: collaborate, cooperate, and meet (really or virtually). Offer to get together regularly to talk about assignments or to discuss tricky concepts; build your own learning community.

- **Tip 8:** Create an academic profile that includes a professional photograph and academic information. A little personal information is okay, but not too much; keep things professional.
- **Tip 9:** Never use social media for academic activities; social media such as Facebook are for personal, not professional activities. Meet classmates in Facebook, but do not friend your instructor; they want to be friendly, but not be friends.
- **Tip 10:** Never copy, never cut and paste, and always write in your own words. Use the old trick of *closed book* note taking. Read, then close the book or shut

the computer, then take notes. If you want, return to the book or online resource to write an accurate citation and to check details, but do not be tempted to cut and paste; you will forget that you copied and the instructor will catch you!

And finally, online classes require a great deal of self-discipline. George Washington said, "Discipline is the soul of the army." For the online learner, discipline is the key to success. Remember, your professors want you to learn so they will prepare challenging courses. They also want to help you meet the challenge.

MOST IMPORTANT—ONLINE COURSES REQUIRE A GREAT DEAL OF SELF DISCIPLINE.