

Online Learning FAQ's: IS ONLINE LEARNING RIGHT FOR ME?

What is an online course?

An online course is one delivered through the Internet and web-based software. Students interact with the instructor and other students via email and course discussion boards. This class format is very flexible for busy schedules due to the fact that you can log on to the course at any time of the day (or night). Through Wisconsin's technical colleges, students can access online courses at home, work, or school via the Internet. Most online courses are offered 100% online in an asynchronous mode, anytime from anywhere with no on-campus requirement. Some online courses may be hybrid and require some on-campus sessions. A hybrid online course will have a note on the course schedule informing the student of the required on-campus sessions.

How do I know if I am a good fit for online learning?

[Self Assessment](#)

What is a "typical" online student like?

[Student Profile](#)

What technical skills do I need to be successful with online courses?

- You must be familiar with the basic operation of your computer and your computer's operating system (i.e., Microsoft Windows, Mac OS). The fundamental skills you need include use of the mouse, copy and pasting, printing, and toggling from one window to another.
- You should have some experience and familiarity with navigating and using the Internet as an information and communication resource. Knowing how to download files, attach document files to e-mail, use word-processing software are necessary skills to achieving academic success in an online course environment.
- You should have a good working knowledge in the use of email such as opening attachments you receive in your messages, printing messages, sending replies to your messages, forwarding messages to others, originating new messages, adding attachments to messages and deleting messages.

What Internet browser software will I need to take an online course?

Any of the major Internet browsers will work. Some suggestions might include:

- Internet Explorer: <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.htm>
- Mozilla Firefox: <http://www.mozilla.org>
- Netscape: <http://www.netscape.com> \

After I register for an online course, what do I do next?

You should go through the Online Student Orientation to review procedures and tools used while taking an online course.

How long do online courses last?

Online courses are offered on a semester basis beginning in August or January.

How do I "attend" an online course?

You will receive a message on or before the first day of class describing how to access your course web site. Attendance in an Internet course is not based on "seat time" as it is in regular classroom-based courses. You will be involved in a variety of learning activities both on and off the Internet which will all count toward participation.

How much time will I spend on this course each week?

This depends on each individual and their learning style, plus other factors. You should plan on logging in

online a minimum of 4 different days per week to stay current with course announcements and discussions. Students generally spend 8-10 hours per week for each online class (this includes reading the textbook, participating in course discussions, completing homework assignments, and taking tests).

Please remember that you will not have commuting time or in-class "seat time" with an Internet class.

Do students have to work in groups?

Most courses do have one or two required group projects, however most homework assignments are completed individually. Collaboration will take place primarily through the Blackboard course platform itself and email.

How do students interact online?

Students usually interact using email or the discussion boards. Each discussion board is organized into "discussion threads" so you can see what the original question was, what the response to the question was, and any additional responses from other students. The instructor will post questions for response, monitor the discussion, and help to summarize and clarify as needed. The discussion board is the key element to classroom participation grade in BTC's Blackboard online classes.

Do online courses have tests?

Some courses have tests. Most exams are taken online; but your course syllabus will inform you if you need to take the exam on campus. Most online courses evaluate you on the quality of your assignments, projects and quizzes. The evaluation process of the course will be noted in the course syllabus.

How will I be evaluated?

This depends on the class. In some classes, you complete projects to demonstrate your learning. In other classes, you may take tests over the Internet. In other classes, there is a combination of both projects and tests used to evaluate your learning. Your instructor will outline the course expectations in the course syllabus.

Is there a standard format to use for writing papers and assignments?

No. Just as in on-campus classes, the instructor will determine the format based on the learning activities required in the course. For some courses, you will complete assignments by typing in the body of an e-mail message. Other assignments will require that you use a word processor and attach this document to an e-mail message or upload it to a specific area within the course.

How do I use the library?

There is a library button directly in the online classroom which links you to the online library resources. BTC subscribes to several online databases so students can search and access articles and reference books at no charge. If you are enrolled at the BTC Online campus and wish to check out hard-copy books, you can search the online database of all the books in the BTC system and put in a request. Students are also provided the telephone and emails of librarians in the BTC system so they can ask for reference and research assistance.

How do I contact my instructor?

You will be able to contact your instructor via email and/or phone. Each instructor has posted office hours, and students may also email the instructor at any time. In addition, students may request an appointment afterhours with the instructor to discuss issues by phone.

What happens if I have a technical problem?

Technical support is available 24/7 through the support provider, so you can call them anytime for support for a variety of computer and technical issues. In your Blackboard course, there will be a link to the support provider. You will be able to access them by phone or by sending in a help ticket. You should inform your instructor if a technical problem causes any delays in your classroom participation.

I don't have a computer at home, but still want to look at online learning as an option. Is this possible?

Computers are available for access at local libraries, community centers, and other public areas, depending on where you live. Each district also has open computer labs on campus for students to access.

Does the online format provide the same quality of education offered by face-to-face classes?

Both online and classroom courses offered by the Wisconsin's technical colleges are accredited college level courses. Both require registration in the class and completion of the assignments at regular intervals. Both require students to understand the concepts, read a textbook, turn in assignments, and take exams.

However, online students may complete a course from the comfort of home, work, or campus; classroom students must attend classes on campus. Online students have the option of going ahead in their work; classroom students must all follow the same pace. Online students interact with fellow students and with the instructor primarily online; classroom students interact in person with fellow students and the instructor during each class.