STANCE LEARNI



INTRODUCTION

100-PLUS YEARS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

1892: The first university-level correspondence study is introduced at the University of Chicago.

1910s-1920s: New continuing education and distance learning associations and institutions form as correspondence courses grow in popularity. Schools begin delivering courses over radio

1940s-1950s: After World War II, many students enroll in mail-based correspondence courses

1960s: The baby boom influences states to expand and create regional colleges and universities, making higher education possibile for millions of students. One-way TV courses emerge

1980s: The number of community colleges expands. Programs that offer 2-year associate degrees in technical areas grow particularly rapidly. Many other community college students seek to complete their first 2 years toward a 4-year bachelor's degree from another institution as "2+2" agreements expand. The first online undergraduate courses are offered in 1984; the first online degree programs are offered in 1989

1990s (early): the laying of cable and T1 lines across the U.S. makes possible 2-way television use. Videoconferencing improves thanks to advances in data compression technology. Students and faculty enjoy the 2-way communication opportunities and learn to deal with videoconferencing's "2 second delay."

1990s (late): Course platforms like WebCT and CourseInfo's BlackBoard help educators pack age a college or training course on to the Internet. Prior to this period, many experimenting and sayvy instructors had built their own educational websites, but these websites rarely included functions such as chat areas, discussion boards, and white boards.

THE FUTURE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

As the 21st century progresses we should expect current media to become easier to manage and integrate. For instance, Tegrity and other companies have begun combining live video once only available with videoconferencing—with BlackBoard-type online learning platforms. While some predict that face-to-face education will vanish, it might be instructive to remember that the theater didn't disappear with the introduction of radio; radio didn't disappear with motion pictures; movies didn't disappear with the introduction of television, and so on. Historically the introduction of a new medium just means more media choices. This is what will likely happen with distance education and education in general. We will likely see all of the previous approaches continue even as new approaches develop

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO LEARNING

Technology has enabled schools, colleges, and training centers to expand upon traditional approaches to learning. Here are some of the theories or approaches that can be used in distance learning classes:

- 1. "Student Centered" Learning: Since learning takes place in the student, the most effective learning environments are geared toward the student's needs rather than the instructor's. The student seeks the material from multiple sources instead of being limited to the lecture of the instructor.
- 2. Constructivism: Each learner is unique and therefore constructs a unique and personal under standing of subjects and ideas. This understanding is influenced by the learner's perspective, personality, and background. There is more than one way to know about something. When a student studying English literature encounters the terms "Romantic" or "Gothic," he will understand them in an individual way by relating these terms to books he has read during his lifetime, as well as to the example given by the instructor.
- 3. Cooperative or Peer Learning: Instructors are not the only people who can help students learn; fellow students can help as well. For instance, research has shown that students who study in groups perform better on tests that students who do not. Tutoring programs are another example of the success of having a student help another to learn.
- 4. Active Learning: Face-to-face lectures (where only the instructor talks) are a passive approach to learning. In-class exercises and activities and lively discussion can involve the learner and move them from passive to active, which improves learning.



Research finds no significant difference between distance learning and traditional face-to-face learning.

THE INTERNET AND EDUCATION: **ASTONISHING FACTS**

College students use the Internet far more than the general public. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reported statistics in 2002. The statistics at right are extrapolated, following the trends in prior years, and some other intersting facts are also included.

TYPES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

1 Enhancements to Face-to-Face Courses

Some distance learning approaches (e.g., web assistance) are incorporated into a traditional face-to-face classroom course. At some colleges, 75% of all courses now include a web component. In these "web assisted" courses instructors might post only a syllabus, or they might add PowerPoint study slides, useful links, additional readings, sample guizzes and other study materials. Some instructors' websites even include a section where they post answers to students' questions.

2. Videoconferencina

Two-way video and audio, sometimes called "2-way ITV," are used. Like traditional face-toface courses, videoconferencing is a synchronous (occuring in "real time") approach to learning. Videoconferencing differs from traditional courses in that students and instructors can be anywhere so long as technological links can be established (by satellite, T1 lines, or some other technology).

3. Online Courses

The Internet and local servers are used to establish a course site on a user-friendly platform such as BlackBoard or WebCT. Students use the course site as their "classroom." Student-centered learning is the dominant philosophy—this means the instructor acts as a facilitator and coach. This contrasts with the instructor-centered learning philosophy, where the instructor is the "sage on the stage" and mainly lectures while students remain passive in the classroom.

4. Correspondence Courses

The essential difference from an online course is that in a correspondence course, there is no interaction among students. Even student-instructor interaction is limited and highly structured. The instructor controls the learning. Although correspondence courses were originally printbased, today any technology may be used for this noninteractive format. For instance, some courses have made videotapes of lectures available. Students view the lectures and then mail in answers to questions from an accompanying textbook. Courses offered on public television are also generally correspondence courses in format.

5. Mixed

With today's advanced technology there may be no reason to limit the media used, and many trainers and educators are experimenting with multiple media approaches. For example, some executive MBA programs use all 4 of the approaches listed above. The program may involve weekend meetings (either face-to-face or in videoconference), online interaction, and online assignments.

ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

The No Significant Difference Phenomenon by Thomas Russell cites 355 pieces of research and concludes there is no significant difference in the auglity of learning between distance and face-to-face learning approaches. Here are some possible advantages and disadvantages you might notice

ADVANTAGES

- Geography isn't a limiting factor. The best courses and teachers are available to you, no matter where you live
- Schedules tend to be more flexible. Since many DL programs are not "time bound," busy students can study on their own time.
- Student-based learning is the dominant educational philosophy. This means you can learn in the way that best suits you, instead of the way demanded by a particular instructor. In a student-based learning course, students will be encouraged to seek additional resources and read additional information, following their own unique interests and finding "bridges" between those interests and the course material. In this way the student learns the material and connects it to her own background and interests
- A mix of media enlarges the scope of your education. Videoconferencing and the Internet facilitate all sorts of new encounters with other students, instructors, and learning materials. To keep the face-to-face contact traditional education provides, it may be best to make online courses only one component of your overall education

- 1. Social needs are better fulfilled in-person. Distance learning classes cannot fulfill needs such as friendship in the same way that face-to-face classes can
- 2. It may be harder to create a network of contacts with fellow graduates. Networking is a key to some of the best academic and professional programs and the success of their graduates. Knowing others who have graduated from the same program creates a bond between graduates, which serves as a social network. This special network can be of great help in getting jobs and advancing one's career.
- 3. Face-to-face interaction is encouraging. Traditional classes share some aspects of the "12-Step" programs like AA, in that coming to and being called upon in class can help motivate you to complete your reading and other assignments.
- College is more than a classroom. Life skills simply cannot be part of a curriculum, and extracurricular learning is not likely to take place at home, in front of your computer. For this reason, distance learning is particularly well-suited to those who have had the opportunity to learn life skills, but who feel they need to enrich and expand their knowledge of a particular subject, or their ability to learn itself.

According to the statistical trend, about

• 95% of college students have gone online (compared with about 66% of all Americans)

- 4 out of 5 college students check email everyday.
- 20% of college students started using computers between the ages of 5 and 8. More than 2.5 million students took distance learning courses in 2003, while about 710,000 did five years earlier.
- The "E-learning" market is growing about 100% each year. More than 1,400 colleges offer online classes
- Almost all college students own their own computers (95%).
- 1 in 4 students communicate more with their professors using email than face-to-face.
- . More than 50% of students say email helps them express ideas to their professor they would not have expressed in class.

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DISTANCE LEARNING

TOP TEN BEST PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS

These tips will help you succeed in online, videoconferencing, and other types of distance learning courses.

Count the (time) costs

- Many DL students have a choice of either a DL or a face-to-face course. NEVER take an online
 course assuming it will save time—it will probably take more (perhaps much more) "class"
 and study time.
- On the other hand, you may save commuting time with a DL course. A videoconferenced course may be at a center located close to home. With an online course you can choose the hours during which you interact with the online course site.
- In the traditional face-to-face setting, a 3-credit hour course typically meets 2 1/2 hours per week. That means you spend 40 hours per class during a typical 16-week semester. Counselors suggest spending 2 hours of study time to prepare for every 1 hour you spend in class, so that means you should spend 80 studying per class per semester. All this adds up to 120 hours of your time for each three credit class! Few DL instructors are going to think you should devote less total time just because you are taking a DL class. So, if you work 30 hours a week, and/or have a social or family life, be careful before you sign up for 12 hours of online courses (or any other kind of courses, for that matter). Including study time, the "cost" of 4 (3 credit hour) courses would be around 30 hours per week. Can you pay that price?
- TIP: Only sign up for the number of hours that suits your situation

Make a "regular" study schedule

- Once you have decided to take only a reasonable number of courses, devise what a normal
 week will look like and create a plan.
 Decide when your mind is most efficient. One test is, "When do I type the fastest?" You may
- Decide when your mind is most efficient. One test is, "When do I type the fastest?" You may
 like to stay up late, but your mind (and fingers) may be best for learning early.
- Some students go to their computer early in the morning and put in an hour or two before breakfast. Distractions are often fewer and Internet service (especially dial-up) is often faster.
 Some students work on class at their computer during lunch at work (if it is allowed). Others devote Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons.
- Make a study calendar and mark the 7 1/2 hours you plan to work on each class each week.
 (In the case of a videoconferenced course, you have to be available at a specific class meeting time and then schedule 5 additional hours of study time). DON'T just "make time" as you go; schedule specific hours for yourself instead.
- TIP: Set a pattern for devoting enough time to each class to be successful.

Read class materials carefully

- Determine expectations up front. Read the syllabus, schedule, and other documents that
 might be found on the class site more than once, and make notes.
- The earlier you read this material the quicker you can form accurate estimates of the expectations of the instructor. All instructors are different, so LOOK for what might be a unique demand from the instructor.
- Some instructors want weekly "busy work" uploaded, others want thoughtful discussion on discussion boards or chatrooms, and others want you to do frequent web or library research. Most have a combination of assignments. Determine what applies to each specific course.
- You will be most successful if your work matches the instructor's expectations.
- TIP: Ask questions about the syllabus in the first week, and about any assignment as soon as it is given—NOT near the deadline.

Be interactive

- Correspondence courses are low on the interaction curve; online courses are most interactive.
 Though it's surprising, face-to-face classes are where many students "hide" by sitting in
- Intoger it's surprising, race-to-face classes are where many students inde by sitting in the back or remaining silent, with their eyes lowered. There is **no hiding** in online courses.
 Research finds more instructor-student and student-student interaction in online courses.
- Interactions are almost as active in a videoconferenced class as in a face-to-face class.
 Identify how your instructor wants interaction (through use of assignments, discussion board participation, chatrooms, or otherwise), then comply. Often the interaction your instructor requires takes a short amount of time.
- TIP: If you are among the earliest to fulfill participation requirements each week, it wil
 take less time (since everyone else will have to read MORE discussion).

Impress your instructor by "adding value" to the course

- Instead of repeating material from the book, relate your assignment to the world around you.
 Give examples of the topic under discussion to show your understanding.
- Your instructor will form an opinion about you from your writing, so "manage" your instructor's impression.
- Grade your own input: do your comments add something? Are you being careful to NOT
 repeat what another student has already said (a real time-waster for everyone who needs to

- read the discussion)? Have you found a good article that updates the discussion or moves it up a notch?
- TIP: Most platforms allow students to build a small web page for the class. Establish yourself by uploading a good photo (.ipg file) and tell things about yourself that will establish you as both an interesting person and good student.

6 Create a "study zone"

- Just as you need to create a habitual time for studying, so will you benefit from having a
 habitual place, or "zone" in which you study, one that tells you that you are "at school." This
 could be a desk, an end of the dining room table, or a spot out on the deck.
- The real challenge of a DL course is self-discipline. Colleges and training centers provide
 the structure—time, place, fellow students—that helps in learning. As an online student YOU
 have to provide the structure for yourself, and a place that signals "study zone" can be a key.
- TIP: Even the small area around your laptop or desktop can be your "designated study zone."

Identify personal support

- Taking DL courses is a challenge, so you need your family and friends helping, instead of hurting, your chances for success.
- Tell your supporters about your regular study schedule and your "study zone." You may even have a friend, parent, or child who will help you stay on schedule and keep your spirits on the positive side.
- TIP: Listen to those who want you to succeed in your classes.

8 Check your work

- All word-processing programs can check your spelling. ALWAYS check.
 If you are poor at spelling you may want to spell-check even your discussion comments. Write
- If you are poor at spelling you may want to spell-check even your discussion comments. Write them in a word processing program and then cut-and-paste them into the discussion area.
- A grammar check by a word processing program might also help improve your writing. Be careful, though, for some of these programs are unsophisticated.
- Follow whatever document formats your instructor specifies. For example, your instructor might want all documents in Word (.doc), or Rich Text Format (.rtf) or 12-point Arial font.
- TIP: Spell check just before turning in an assignment.

Have the required equipment

- Some people sign up for an online course without owning a computer or having access to the Internet! Ask about minimum requirements when you enroll.
- Minimum computer hardware requirements should be established. These might include minimum processor speed, RAM, connection speed, hard drive size, CD or DVD capabilities, sound card and speakers, and video card.
- Determine all software you will need for the course. Is any old word-processing software
 acceptable, or do you need access to a specific program? What about spreadsheet and graphic
 software? You might ask how familiar you need to be with various software programs.
- Make sure that you have a current edition of one of the better **antivirus programs**. You will be both adding (uploading) and getting (downloading) many files in any Internet-assisted DL course, which makes your computer vulnerable to viruses and worms. Since there are new viruses and variants almost everyday, make sure that you have a current and regularly updated virus control program running on your computer. Norton, McAfee, and PC-Cillian are a few of the main companies that offer help against downloading a dangerous virus or worm.
- TIP: For online courses buy the fastest Internet available (typically cable or DSL). Consider this investment part of your commitment to succeeding online.

Take responsibility for your own learning

- The key philosophy in online learning is that it must be **student-centered**. Therefore, you are the one responsible for what you do, or don't, learn. Even if you somehow get the worst instructor in the world, who knows nothing about the content of the course, YOU can still learn by directing your attention to the materials and exploring the subject matter. The model for online learning is not the "gas station" model, where the instructor "fills up" your tank/brain as you passively sit there. Instead, since the instructor is not there with you generally, you pull the text, assignments, and the opportunity to explore resources yourself into your new knowledge set. In other words, "I learn myself," because the instructor cannot "learn me."
- TIP: Instead of thinking, "What is the instructor going to do to help me learn?" ask your self, "What am I going to do to learn a great deal in this course?"



ETHICS, HONESTY, AND FAIRNESS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

- Cheating and dishonesty aren't specific to education, but they are particularly important to address in educational, character-forming settings (and especially in distance learning programs).
- Technology has given cheaters and people with low ethical standards more options for dishonesty. Via the Internet, one can buy term papers, look for old tests and answers, and even find someone to act as an impersonator throughout an entire course.
- No one feels good about cheating, and most regret having damaged their character and cheated themselves out of an education. The notoriety of being a dishonest person doesn't wash away easily, so don't exchange your values for a grade in a class.
- Don't believe the spin that cheaters try to sell you everybody is NOT cheating or lying. It is always just a few. It shouldn't be you.
- A school, college, or training program will have a code of ethics. This set of policies informs you that you can be thrown out of your program if you are caught doing anything dishonest.

PLAGIARISM

- Plagiarism means using someone else's writing as your own, or presenting the ideas of others without crediting those people.
- The typical infraction is copying a term paper (or parts of a term paper) word for word and then not providing a footnote or other credit to the original author. There are websites and programs used by online instructors that can determine whether a student has quoted passages from the known literature without providing a citation.

SOLUTION: Limit any quotation to a phrase or a sentence or two; then provide a citation. Write the rest of the paper yourself.

 Copying a distinctive idea (something along the lines of the thesis of a book, essay, or article) also constitutes plagiarism. Even if you do not quote or copy word for word, single ideas as well as entire arguments must be attributed to their sources.

SOLUTION: If you use an argument or idea that you've read or heard before, credit the original author. Come up with your own, new argument to make your essay original.

You must cite factual information, unless it is well known.
 For example, saying, "France does not use a death penalty as punishment," is not plagiarism, since the information is commonly known. Saying, "In 1999 France prosecuted 78 people who were accused of homicide," would be plagiarism if the source of that statistic were not cited.

SOLUTION: When in doubt, provide a citation.

CHEATING ON TESTS

- In-person examinations: if your tests are live and in person or proctored, either on the campus of the class you are taking or at another designated site, then "cheat sheets," "crib notes," and sharing or stealing answers constitute cheating (just like in the traditional school setting).
- For "open book" and "take home" exams, the instructor will give you the details of whether you can use any other source other than the book for the test. If he or she doesn't ask

- With BlackBoard, WebCT, and other online platforms, multiple-choice tests can be taken online. Generally your instructor will tell you that you CANNOT use your text or notes for such a test. However, such online tests are not proctored. No one from your course will see you if you cheat. Only you might know if you have compromised your morels.
- One approach the instructor can use to help you stay honest is to put a time limit on the online test, so that those who know the material have enough time to perform well on the test, while cheaters might be able to look up only SOME of the answers, and therefore perform poorly on the test overall.
- Turning in work that is not your own AS your own (without giving credit) is always cheating. So, in an online course, you cannot have another person help you unless it is specifically allowed (an unlikely event). Your work must be entirely your own.
- If you and your friend are both taking the same class, do yourselves a favor by taking the test at different times, and don't cheat by talking about the test if such talk violates the rules of the course.

GROUP WORK

The group's work must come from the group, not from outsiders. However, most instructors carefully draw a line between those assignments you can work on as a group and those, such as tests, you must perform alone. You may be asked to report on a group activity, and such a report should be honest.

AVOIDING THE 10 DEADLY SINS

EMAIL AND DISCUSSION BLUNDERS

Depending upon your experience with email, chats, and discussion threads, you may or may not be familiar with the potential pitfalls of electronic communication. Here are a few practices of which you should be mindful when taking an online course.

When in doubt, press "Reply" instead of "Reply to all"

If you press "reply to all" when you mean to send a private message, you may accidentally send your email to many, many unintended recipients. Always double check the "To:" field when sending an email to make sure that only the intended recipients are listed. However, be aware that when you hit "reply all" in response to an email, you may be inadvertently including unwanted recipients. That's because any recipients who were sent a blind carbon copy or BCC (a copy invisible to other recipients) of the original email will also receive a copy of your reply to all, and you won't even be aware of it!

? Stay away from "flame wars"

Flaming means sending inflammatory or highly emotional messages that are likely to receive negative responses. Sure, you can get angry. But do not get into "virtual heated argument" with your fellow students or, worse, your instructor. It's a no-win approach. Any problem you have can be dealt with dispassionately and in an adult manner.

? Don't give your instructor a virus!

Neither your instructors nor your fellow students will appreciate you being the one that gave them a "social disease" that crashed their computers. Scan all of your papers and other assignments with a virus scan software such as McAfee or Norton. There are even many free products offered online. Protect yourself by scanning incoming files also.

Pause before hitting the "send" or "submit" button

Almost no platform allows you to recall your comments or email once you have sent them. Many of us handle so many emails and so much discussion that we forget to think about the reaction of others. One trick is to **leave the "To:" line empty** until you have reviewed your comments. People have lost jobs, lovers, spouses, and probably grades by making the mistake of sending an email too soon.

5 Don't pass around "forwards"

Most "chain email" warnings about what the author thinks is a real threat turn out to be about things that are not dangers at all, just scams and hoaxes. The other common forward is the funny story. Most people don't really appreciate (or have already received five times) the joke or story you find so funny or touching. Most important, your classmates and instructor may think you are a nut if you post lots of "warnings" and jokes. Stick to sending such forwarded emails to one best friend instead of to your class.

6 Don't be too casual

Spell-check your comments and emails if you lack confidence in your spelling. Some mail utilities allow you to check your spelling. Otherwise, you can write you comments in Word or WordPerfect, spell-check, then cut and paste to the discussion area or email. Watch your grammar also. Remember, you want to appear smart in an academic course.

7 Keep your comments short and on topic

Longwinded comments are hard on your instructor and fellow students. A paragraph or two should be your limit. If you must post a long message or email, put "LONG" on the subject line as a courtesy to your class. Never do so, though, unless you have read all the prior discussion—first see if someone has already said the same thing. If your instructor has a special discussion thread for "off-topic" comments, use it if your comment fits the bill. Otherwise, don't post off-topic material. Email it to your friends outside of the class instead.

Reset the subject line when you change the subject

Subject lines of email and discussion board comments help readers understand your short comment. Subjects also **allow others to search** (through email or message boards) for comments related a particular point. Too often an old subject line is used even when the topic has changed. However, you need not change the subject line when staying ON topic within a discussion board thread.

Make it easy for readers to place your reply into the context of the thread

In most programs, when a person replies to a message, the prior message is attached, often with ">" or other markings. Other programs strip the original message completely. You want to make sure that your reply includes enough of the prior message to **give readers context** for what you are saying, but you don't want to include so much that the message is cumbersome. You may want to include just a sentence or paragraph of the message you are responding to, so that a new reader can easily follow the discussion.

Add your name to your messages

Many email programs and most educational platforms do NOT automatically add your name to the messages you send and post. It is frustrating to receive an email that says it is from "mountain honey" or "Big Joe," or a post from "bj3342." Some email programs will automatically add a "signature" to every email you write—this is one way to make sure your name and email address always appear. However, Blackboard and WebCT do not automatically add your real name in discussions. So, get in the hobit of signing your name at the end of your comments—you probably type your name really fast anyway!

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

LEARNING STYLES

In student-centered learning, used in DL courses, instructors understand that every student learner is unique in personality and background. Each student also has a unique way he or she learns best—a unique "learning style." However, despite our individual preferences, any student can learn in all three ways.

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERENCE?

1. Visual

You tend to store memories in **picture** form. For example you can picture the design of a jet.

Most of the information (text, graphics) in today's DL environment is visual. DL tends to be in a format that is easy for visual learners.

2. Auditory

You tend to store memories as sounds. For example, you can "hear" a person's voice.

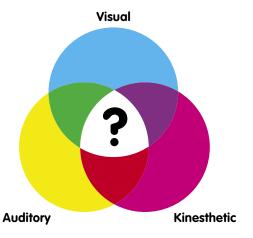
Auditory learners may get more from a class that uses videoconferencing or from an online course
that adds substantial sound files. Auditory learners also can learn from studying aloud with others.

3. Kinesthetic

You best remember things you learn through physical **activities**. For example, you learn about knots by actually tying a knot.

 Videoconferencing classes where students participate in in-class exercises (e.g., group exercises) and online courses where students are assigned outside activities (e.g., site visits) will help kinesthetic learners.

TIP: Focus upon your own personal learning style in approaching your material. Sure, everyone will need to read the assignments (visual), but auditory learners can listen to someone talk about the topic or record their OWN notes and listen to them in the car. Kinesthetic learners can create or try activities related to their course.



What kind of learner are you?

THE TRAUMA OF CHANGING FROM AN INSTRUCTOR-CENTERED COURSE TO A STUDENT-CENTERED COURSE

Most DL classes shift the responsibility for the learning necessarily from the instructor to the learner. This is true in part simply because the instructor is not present with the student. Some psychologists have suggested that when students are forced to cease passively receiving knowledge and instead take the major responsibility for their own learning, they go through a sort of "grief cycle." Here are the steps of the distance learning grief cycle, illustrated with typical student comments.

1. Shock

"I don't believe it—we have homework due and our instructor is not even going to go over the material!"

2. Denial

"I know we are supposed to do this team project, but if I just ignore it, it might go away."

3. Emotion

"I'm not going to do all this on my own. I'm going to complain to my instructor's boss!"

4. Withdrawal

"I'm not going to do this 'busy work'. She can fail me; I don't care."

5. Surrender

"This may be busy work, but if I have to do it, I should go ahead and get

6. Exploration

"Other students seem to be doing better than I am. Perhaps I should try some other approaches to these assignments."

7. Confidence

"This is starting to work. I am getting pretty good at these assignments."

8. Success

"YES! I am not sure why I thought this was so difficult. I am learning quite a lot and I like this freedom of learning my own way."

SIX

DISTANCE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

In a distance learning classes, more of the responsibility for learning is placed upon YOU, the student. Here are six keys that can help you learn. Find ways to use each of these.

- Participation: Don't be passive; get involved. Contribute to chats and discussion boards; be interactive in groups and other class activities.
- **Repetition:** Find ways to get important information into your long-term memory. Read it, say it outloud, write it down.
- **3 Organization:** Outline your notes. Use mnemonic devices to remember chunks of information.
- Feedback: Try to get responses to your work (including grades) from your instructor and fellow students.
- new concept, term, or model with something from your own experience.

 Motivation: Apply yourself. Make your class a priority in your life. Remember why you signed up for the course, and pledge to yourself that you will succeed.

Application: Relate what you read to what you already know. Try to match each

CONDUCTING RESEARCH AS A DL STUDENT

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Usually, an institution of higher education will grant you access to its library and all of its resources if you are enrolled in one of its courses. Don't forget that you can probably use the "bricks and mortar" library on campus. However, college and university libraries generally provide very helpful websites that are treasure troves of information. Online resources often include everything from online reference works and databases to entire works available for download or reading online (e-texts). You probably will need to obtain a user name and password to use the online site. Look in your admission materials or on the school website.

THE INTERNET

- Online libraries: The Library of Congress (the world's largest library) is online (www.loc.gov). There are many other libraries online, such as LibrarySpot and Berkeley Sunsite (www.libraryspot.com, sunsite.berkeley.edu).
- News: CNN and Yahoo have excellent news pages (www.cnn.com, www.yahoo.com) if you need news.
- 3. Search engines: Google, IxQuick (www.google.com, www.ixquick.com) and many other search engines can help you find websites containing the terms for which you might be looking. Remember, though, that you have to be the judge of the quality of the material you find. Just because it's on the Internet doesn't mean it's a reliable source to use in your research.

"The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect."

TIM BERNERS-LEE, INVENTOR OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB

THE INSTRUCTOR'S CORNER

Distance learning from the viewpoint of the instructor, facilitator, ringleader, manager, or coach

TOP TEN BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTRUCTORS

In the best DL and online courses, teachers, trainers, and professors provide students with the following resources:

1

Clear workload expectations

Make expectations clear for all the items found in a syllabus:

- · Course objectives
- · Grading scheme
- · Assignment schedule
- Reading expectations

<u>2</u>

Student participation guidelines

Communicate expectations for participation on discussion boards and in chatrooms, and for other online interaction (both synchronous and nonsynchronous) such as group page-work and online exercises or quizzes.

3

Guidelines for student-teacher communication

- State how you (the instructor) prefer to be contacted. Professors generally have one or two favorite contact approaches among all of the possibilities, such as email, office or home telephone, discussion board posting, or instant messaging. Many instructors prefer class questions to be posted to the discussion board, with more personal communications sent by email.
- Clarify what types of comments and questions are appropriate. A professor might forbid students to make comments that are repetitive, off-topic, obscene, and hostile, or that contain personal attacks.

4

Guidelines for teacher-student communication

- Estimate how much time it will take you to respond to student questions. Students are particularly anxious about responses when they upload questions. Explaining the normal furnaround time for answering questions will help students keep their expectations in line with your schedule.
- Schedule a time and day of the week for "virtual office hours." when students can "meet" with you.
- You might post your appointment schedule. Many instructors share their schedules so that DL students will better know when their professors are in face-to-face classes, at regularly occuring meetings, away at conferences, and in their office for traditional office hours. This helps anxious students, or those who have questions that might require multiple exchanges.

Distance learning isn't the future of education. It's the present.

5

Appropriately communicated feedback

- Post answers on a discussion board available to the whole class. That way, all students read the same information and may access it later, for reference. Some instructors use a "café," which is just a discussion thread created by the instructor for class questions.
- Acknowledge assignment submissions with emails (e.g., "I received your test..."). These comfort students who are apprehensive about using a "dropbox," attaching a document, or using other uploading functions.
- A phone call or personal email tends to be most appropriate for more individual or personal concerns. In such situations, this is the most effective communication approach. Make sure to get contact information from all the students in your class.

6

Clear testing procedures

Testing is particularly tricky in online classes. Here are some options:

- On-site proctored tests are given at a defined physical locale
 at a certain time (synchronous). For instance, a DL course
 may require students to physically show up for a test at
 6:30 pm in a particular classroom (or classrooms). If such
 tests are required, the instructor must make it absolutely
 clear no later than the beginning of the course.
- clear no later than the beginning of the course.
 Other DL courses, including online courses, allow students to take proctored tests off-site but still at a physical location. Generally there is not a specified time for such tests, but there is a deadline for taking the test. Sylvan Testing Centers, or an institution other than the one sponsoring the course, might be used to proctor in-person exams. All such approaches demand clear procedures specifying the day when or by which tests must be completed and what testing locations will be acceptable. Such arrangements require that the instructor have the tests available at such testing sites prior to the arrival of the students. Students may be required to pay a fee to such testing service locations.
- WebCT, BlackBoard, and other online learning platforms offer timed online tests using multiple-choice examinations. This testing format solves some, but not all, of the security and ethical issues surrounding testing in online courses. For instance, if students are given 25 minutes to answer 20 somewhat complex multiple-choice questions, the time limit will make looking up all of the answers impossible and force the student to either take the test in an honest manner or look up only a couple of questions. However, because of the complications of non-proctored testing, many online courses use essay exams and other "original thinking" assignments that can be uploaded to the site.

Posted deadlines

Deadlines are especially important in online education, since

- they help students discipline themselves and stay on track.
 It is best to post all deadlines on the first day of class.
- A typical online course may have 3 or 4 major assignments, but it helps to add other "mini" deadlines. For instance, instead of giving one deadline for a term paper, give a deadline for an outline and another for an annotated bibliography.
- However, the student may lose the element of time flexibility or feel lost if the instructor creates too many unhelpful deadlines.

8

Easy access to course materials

- Instructors must be trained to use online resources and platforms. If there is not formal training, seek a fellow instructor who has taught online before. You can also seek information on the internet that might be helpful.
- Bandwidth has been an issue, since not all students, or instructors, will have "broadband" (DSL or cable modem) access. DSL and cable connections allow huge files to be accessed and downloaded without taking hours or "freezing" your computer. However, many students and faculty are still using "dial-up" modem connections, with a slow connection of 56, 28, or even 14 bps. These slow connections make it very difficult to upload larger media, such as sound and movies files. There might be other ways to provide access to such larger media files if they are needed. For instance, movie (.mpg and .avi) files can be provided on CDs and mailed to student or added to textbook purchases.
- Links and URLs to resources on the Internet must be checked frequently, since URLs change and are sometimes eliminated ("broken")
- "Fair use" under copyright laws and guidelines for electronic use of the materials from others need to be checked.
 Check with your office of distance learning or equivalent office for information about "fair use."

9

Technology troubleshooting resources

- Most instructors are unqualified or unavailable to deal with technology questions. Therefore, instructors must provide students with resources (URLs, FAQs, email addresses, telephone numbers) for technical support.
- Students and instructors should post relevant notes from the technical support staff to the class site.

10

A back-up plan for widespread technology failures

- Specify at the beginning of the course if there is a back-up website or alternate assignment in the event DL technology fails.
- Specify what should happen if a videoconference fails due to loss of electricity and half or more of the students cannot attend. Videoconference technical support ranges from having a facilitator physically present with the instructor to having only a telephone number to call. You will want to check upon what arrangement you will have. However, severe weather is possible and you need a backup plan to communicate to the students. Many instructors tell students that in the case of a "blackout" for weather or technical problems materials will be placed on the Internet course site (like BlackBoard or WebCT).
- Specify a back-up website to be used if the institution's sites and/or servers crash for longer than a day. WebCt and BlackBoard have demonstration "low-use" freebies available. You may want to create your own website with minimal content for posting new reading assignments.
- Specify a backup way for students to turn in tests. For instance, instead of using a digital dropbox at the course site, you might have students send email attachments to your personal email account.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S FEAR:

SHIFTING FROM AN INSTRUCTOR-CENTERED TO A STUDENT-CENTERED COURSE

1. "I'll lose control of my class."

True, DL students don't sit quietly in neat rows adoring the oratorical skills of the instructor, but that was never the goal of education. Instructors need to keep a light, but frequent hand in student-centered learning activities. The role is more "facilitator" than "sage on the stage."

2. "We'll never complete everything on the syllabus."

Active and cooperative learning activities do not have to be long assignments. You may want to rethink your syllabus. For instance, if you are worried about team projects taking too much time, you might want to include some team-building training at the beginning of the term

3. "My students don't learn well from reading on their own."

One of the best ways to help students learn on their own is to test material about which you have not lectured. The students are then on notice that their learning is not supposed to be limited to repeating the words of the instructor. The shift is one of responsibility—it is really always the student's responsibility to learn.

4. "I've tried active learning and student-centered learning before, and it didn't work." Student-centered approaches need feedback, adjustment, and repetition. After teaching your first student-centered class, collect feedback from students and other faculty members. Adjust your approaches based upon that feedback, then repeat your course including

5. "Many students don't want to work in teams."

vour new approaches.

True, but cooperative learning maximizes learning for many students. The workplace expects employees to have good team skills. Make the students transcend their problems working with a team

6. "I have been using student-centered learning for some time and some students complain that they learn more in the instructor-centered environment."

We all learn differently, and some students might learn certain material best in a lecture. This is worth remembering as you decide which set of approaches to MIX into your classes.

IMPORTANT TERMS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Asynchronous: Occuring not at the same time. Not "time bound." Most online "discussions" are asynchronous, because students read and leave discussion comments at different times and different days. This asynchronicity is one of the advantages and conveniences of an online class.

Chat (online): A synchronous opportunity for the class or part of the class to meet together in "real time." For instance, a chat might be scheduled to take place between 4 and 5 p.m. Comments are made "live" and responded to "live." Chat rooms are somewhat like a conference call, except that they are text-based.

Diploma mill: An unaccredited institution of higher education that is in the business of selling degrees without educating students. Online education has given these hucksters another chance to scam unsuspecting students. Beware of: colleges whose names sound almost like famous schools, addresses that are rented mailboxes or suite numbers, and tuition charged "by degree" instead of by course.

Discussion (online): A forum where a first posting (from the instructor or a student) is responded to by a second at a different time, and so on. Communication on discussion boards is asynchronous and visually divided into "threads," which are conversations organized by topic. Posting on discussion boards requires reading all prior comments in a thread before posting a new comment or response.

E-learning: The prefix "E-" or "e-" means "electronic." "Electronic learning" means learning by using a computer (typically, one that is connected to the Internet). E-students get their books from e-bookstores for their e-classes.

Emoticons: Pictures expressing emotions that can be "drawn" by typing letters and symbols found on the keyboard. For instance, a colon plus a hyphen followed by a right parenthesis makes the ubiquitous happy face, :-). The point of the happy face emoticon is to convey that the writer is happy or smiling. Emoticons are most accepted when writing is a substitute for informal speech (mostly in real-time chats and discussions), because type lacks many of the cues we use in everyday face-to-face communication (facial expression, tone of voice, and physical gesture).

Flaming: The writing of angry or antagonistic messages that are likely to create emotional and negative responses. As a general rule, never push the "reply" or "send" button when you have written a message and are still mad. Remember, you cannot stop a message once you have sent it.

Hardware: The physical components of your computer and computer accessories. Your computer's hard drive, RAM, CPU, monitor, CD and DVD drives, and sound and video cards are all part of the hardware. Your scanner, printer, and digital camera are also pieces of hardware. (Compare to software, defined below). Most schools will specify some minimum hardware requirements for taking online courses. It's advisable to exceed these minimum requirements, though. Think about it this way: a 1985 Yugo is probably the "minimum" car you can safely drive on the road, but owning something more recent, powerful, and reliable would make your driving experience considerably more pleasant!

Lifelong learning: The idea that you cannot go to school for 12 or 16 years and then simply stop learning. Job descriptions change quickly, and discoveries take place continually. Therefore, almost everyone needs to continue to learn even after a graduation. Some learn professional skills to help them advance or stay abreast of changes in their career fields. Others learn skills and ideas to enrich their lives (or their families' lives). Lifelong learning can be formal—taking place in classes—or informal, through books, television, video, conversation, and experience.

Media "richness": In communication, the more cues available, the "richer" the message. Face-to-face conversations are the richest communication medium, because they use multiple senses and cues. Videoconferencing is the next richest, followed by voice alone (such as telephone conversations). Text is the "leanest" or least rich medium. The leaner the medium, the more likely it is that misunderstandings will arise. However, we all seek the leanest medium that will accomplish the task at hand. For instance, you leave a written note about remembering to take out the trash, but hold a face-to-face family meeting about where to go for vacation. This has implications for learning: it is important to realize that misunderstandings are more likely in the less rich media of online learning, for instance. We have to be more careful and often explain ourselves in more words than we wouldd in a face-to-face class.

Media Richness



Search engine: A website that searches the Internet for a given term or terms. Some of the most popular are www.google.com, www.inktomi.com, www.askjeeves.com, and www.ixquick.com.

Software: The programs you run on your computer. Most schools require that you have word-processing software like Word or WordPerfect, spreadsheet software like Excel or QuatroPro, a web browser such as Netscape or Internet Explorer, and free "viewers" like the PowerPoint viewer and Adobe Acrobat Reader. Viewers cannot create files, but can view the .ppt files which Microsoft's PowerPoint uses. Such viewers can generally be downloaded from the software company's website for free. Look for the requirements for your course.

Synchronous: Occuring at the same time. "Time-bound." Traditional and videoconferencing classes require synchronous communication—everyone must meet at a specific time.

Video streaming: The displaying of a video without that video being downloaded to your computer (since downloading can be a time-consuming process). Many websites and educational software programs stream video. Videos can also be viewed from CDs and DVDs, which is usually even faster than streaming. Videos are played using media software such as Windows Media Player, Real Player, and QuickTime Player.

Virtual: The term "virtual" means "occuring on the computer." So, a "virtual classroom" and "virtual office hours" do not involve face-to-face contact, but the experience is similar to a traditional classroom and traditional office hours. A virtual library is one that is accessed through the Internet.

Virtual classroom: A synchronous, chat-capable utility used for online courses. Typically, virtual classrooms feature a screen or drawing board ("white board") upon which the instructor can draw, upload graphics, or do other things that he or she might use in a face-to-face classroom on a "high tech" chalkboard. Online learning platforms such as WebCT, BlackBoard, and Territy each have their own version of a virtual classroom.

EMOTICON

Emoticons add verbal and physical nuance to your typed communication. They tend to be used for humor, irony, and other tones that are hard to convey quickly through the written word.

0:-)	Angel	:-*)	Kiss	=:-)	Shocked
1-1	Asleep	:-D	Laughing	:-)	Smiling
				or:)	
:-0	Bored	:-II	Mad	:-()	Talking
:'-(Crying	:-\$ or :-X	Not Talking	B-)	Wearing shades (being cool)
}-)	Evil	:-P	Razzberries	;-)	Winking
:-(Frowning	:-@	Screaming	:-Y	Whisper
{ }	Hug				

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations enable faster chat and convey emotions. There are hundreds, so you might need to explain them (or ask) from time to time. You may find there are some abbreviations that are specific to the course you are taking. Here are some of the most common abbreviations.

A mile	access from leavily a and	10.00	livet on lides	
AFK	away from keyboard	JNI	just an idea	
A/S/L	(what is your) age, sex,	K	ok	
	location?			
MTA	at the moment	L8R	later (see you later)	
BAK	back at keyboard	LOL	lots of laughter (or laughing out loud)	
BBL	be back later	MYOB	mind your own business	
BCNU	be seeing you	QT	on the "quiet" (indicates a secret)	
BRB	be right back	SNAFU	situation normal, all fouled up	
BTW	by the way	TIA	thanks in advance	
DIY	do it yourself	TWFW	too weird for words	
FAQ	frequently asked questions	TTFN	ta ta for now (goodbye)	
	(a common resource on		,	
	websites)			
FYI	for your information	ZZZ	boring, hurry up	
IMHO	in my humble opinion	<g></g>	grin	
ннок	ha ha, only kidding	<s></s>	smile	
J/J	just joking			

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