

10 Most Important Things You Can Do During Your First Week in an Online Class

From [Jamie Littlefield](#),
Your Guide to [Distance Learning](#).
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The first week in an online class can be a little disorienting. New students must learn to navigate a virtual "classroom," interact with their peers and professors without actually seeing them face-to-face, and balance their assignments with their everyday lives. These ten tips can help you succeed in your online class from the moment you begin:

- 1. Determine if you're in over your head.** Take a look at the course requirements and your personal schedule – then, decide if you can really handle the workload. Can you balance the course work with your family and career? Are the required assignments at your level? Are you really dedicated to finishing the online course? Too many distance learning students enroll in online courses and drop out after a month or so. Don't blemish your record with an "F" or a "W." If you decide to dropout before your online school's withdrawal deadline, you can usually get a full or partial refund of your tuition, as well as a clean record.
- 2. Buy any required texts.** If your online course requires textbooks or other materials, buy them early so you won't fall behind on your assignments. Don't feel that you have to pay full price at the online school's bookstore. There are plenty of ways to get your required readings at a fraction of the price. See: [Find Your Textbooks for Cheap or Free](#).
- 3. Update your computer.** Check the course syllabus to see what software or hardware you will need. You may need to install programs (such as Acrobat Reader or Real Player) in order to access the multimedia components of your course. Using this week to make sure your computer can run the necessary programs will save you from being surprised when you're under a deadline. See: [Software Suggestions](#).
- 4. Introduce yourself to the teacher.** If you're in an online course with a lot of students, the teacher may never get to know you unless you take the initiative. Use your online course message board or email your teacher with a brief introduction. A teacher who knows a little bit about you will be more likely to help you through the course (and be a little more lenient when it comes time to dish out grades).
- 5. Participate.** Sometimes it's difficult to jump in and participate in online class discussions. But, don't hesitate. Speaking up early will help you establish yourself as an active member of the course. You'll start to make new friends and will end up with a better grasp of the material.
- 6. Trade email address with your peers.** Make the other online students your allies. They can help you study, answer your questions, and remind you of any upcoming deadlines. Best of all, they can act as a sort of support group. Online courses can be grueling, especially if you're already involved in a career and family activities that make up a large part of your day. Sometimes it's nice to just chat with someone who knows exactly what you're going through.
- 7. Acquaint yourself with the class structure.** Each online course has its own structure. Spend a few minutes exploring the course webpage before jumping into the lessons. Make sure you understand how you can access all of the necessary online class components (lessons, lectures, chat rooms, message boards, multimedia presentations, assignment submission forms, etc.) Take note of any optional components that can be used to help you with your coursework.
- 8. Record tests and assignments on your calendar.** Don't expect your online class professor to give you regular reminders. Many instructors only mention big assignments at the beginning of the online course. As soon as you receive a syllabus, record all of the assignments, tests, essays, and projects on your personal calendar.
- 9. Establish a regular study time.** Figure out how much study time you will need each week and set a regular schedule. Let your friends and family members know that you'll be unavailable during that time. If you establish this routine early on, you'll be more likely to stick to it. See: [4 Ways to Balance Family and School](#).
- 10. Get a head start on the assigned work.** Jumpstart your online course by beginning upcoming assignments and papers during your first week as a student. When the assignment deadlines draw near, you'll feel confident knowing much of the work is already completed.