Online Course Basics

Is online learning right for me?

When registered for an online course, you should expect equivalent content and opportunity for learning as students who take the course on campus. Online courses are not "easy" replacements for on-campus classes, and they are not for everyone. If you need the discipline of meeting in the classroom several times a week and you enjoy the in-person interaction between other students and your instructor, you may be more likely to succeed in an on-campus class.

How does communication work in an online course?

Communication tools will be available within your online course. Rio requires that students, faculty, and staff use their RioNET email account as the primary method of communication, but phone calls and in-person office visits during appropriate hours are also acceptable.

Communication preferences and expectations will be outlined on the course syllabus, or within the course information and guidelines provided by your instructor. Keep in mind that many online instructors do not have an office on campus, so it is very unlikely that you will be able to meet face-to-face with some of your online instructors. Knowing how to communication with your instructor should be one of the first items you get comfortable with in your online course.

Are there deadlines in an online course?

There will be very clear and explicit deadlines for all work in your online course. This includes written submissions, communication on the discussion board or other interactive tools, and tests/quizzes. Typically, course work is assigned in weekly modules where deadlines are communicated in advance. Once you see what work is due for that week, you can complete it at a time convenient for you and submit your work by the posted deadlines.

Do online courses use e-books?

Textbooks for your online course should be obtained the same way you purchase books for face-to-face courses. While e-books are available from the bookstore, you could still be required to use a traditional textbook for your online course, and it is your responsibility to obtain the book before the online course begins. Contact the bookstore on campus to check and order what is required for the course.

What do faculty expect from online students?

When you enroll in an online course, you will be expected to...

1. Very carefully review the syllabus and all other information provided by the instructor. It will answer most of the questions you have about the course upfront.
2. Understand how to navigate the course in Blackboard. It is very important to become familiar with each link located on the Course Menu.
3. Complete your work on-time and submit before deadlines.
4. Actively participate in course discussions or other interactive activities designed by your instructor throughout each week. Failure to do so is reflected in attendance reports.
5. Ask questions you have about assignments well before the deadlines. Don't wait until the last minute to get clarification on assignments. This will give your instructor time to respond and give you time to complete your work before the deadline.
6. Act with academic integrity. Never have someone else complete your online work. It is extremely important to cite the sources in your written assignments to avoid plagiarism.
7. Be patient and polite in all online communication and correspondence. It is easy to misinterpret tone in emails, messages, and discussion posts without the ability to speak to someone face-to-face.
8. Understand how to use computer software, including saving and uploading files to the web. If you cannot use a web browser or basic software applications included in Microsoft Office, you should consider taking on-campus and face-to-face courses until you become more proficient.

Technology for Online Learning

Computers or mobile devices with supported Learning Management Software (LMS) are typically used in support of Online Learning. It is difficult to dictate what students use, but the basics are still worthy of outlining. Online learning can involve the use of email, the Blackboard LMS, publisher websites (sometimes reached through Blackboard), and various video conferencing technologies. Each Online Learning modality comes with some requirements for device and Internet connectivity (type and bandwidth). Video applications and movement of large files will have a higher demand on Internet capacity/bandwidth.

Mobile devices, desktop computers, and laptops are acceptable. Keyboards are highly recommended over touchscreen text entry. Windows, MacOS, and Chromebooks can interact with Rio's Blackboard system. Some browser restrictions apply, and a Browser Check tool is provided in Blackboard. Mobile devices offer specific Blackboard apps which are provided for iOS and Android platforms.

Broadband access is a must. Internet data connectivity comes in many access formats such as: Cable, DSL, Fixed Wireless, and Cellular are among the many services that provide Internet connectivity. Blackboard is generally tolerant of satellite Internet, except for video conferencing due to the delay factor called "latency". More information on this topic is available on https://www.rio.edu/myrio.

RioNET Information Sheets – Troubleshooting & Assistance Guides

Using technology does not always come easy. What is easy for some, may offer challenges or technical issues for another person. Please reference our Guides for more assistance: https://www.rio.edu/myrio

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