

Self-Motivation

One thing I have learned about taking online classes is that you have to be self-motivated. There is no one there telling you to go to class or do your homework. It's almost like the good angel on one shoulder and the bad angel on the other. One is saying you should really get your work done while the other one is saying oh just put it off, you can do it later. Well the truth is you'd better listen to the good angel.

An online class is going to be just as demanding of your time and energy as an on campus course if not more so. You have to be the one that makes yourself succeed.

If you're thinking about taking an online course I suggest that you decide what your goals are:

- Do you want to pass the class, make an A?
- Is this a class that you must complete for your major?
- Or do you want to take the skills and knowledge and use them later on, such as in an upper level course or at your job?

Whatever your goals are you should never lose sight of them because they will keep you focused and your goals will let you do what you have to in order to achieve them.

If you've never taken an online course I suggest starting with just one to see if you really like it and if it's a good fit for you.

So: do you have the motivation to achieve your goals? Can you commit the time and effort it will take in order to achieve them? Can you tell others when you are in school and working on your online course? Will you take the initiative to contact your instructor if you have a question or need clarification? Will you be able to listen to the good angel?

Time Management

I made the mistake the first time I took an online class thinking it wasn't going to be as hard or take as much time as an on campus class. However, I was really wrong.

I forgot about the times that it took to read my textbook, complete assignments, read the students discussions, homework, projects, and so on. It turned out that I should have been spending at least 6-8 hours per class each week. I don't know why I thought an online class would be less demanding, it's at least as demanding as an on campus class.

One piece of advice that I tell my friends when taking an online class is to make a schedule. One of my instructors had made us create a schedule. And what we would do is go in there and put when we went to school, when we had homework due, we also had to go in there and put whenever we had to pick up our children, or cooking, cleaning, that kind of stuff, because what it made us do was look at our schedule and see where we would have time for our online classes.

Now that was really helpful to me because I realized that I was trying to work around my class work at unrealistic times. For instance: whenever I came home from work, I was like, "Okay I'm going to do some school work!" But by that time I was hungry, I was tired, and all I wanted to do was rest. So I really had to look at my schedule and figure out what time worked best for me so I wouldn't be disturbed. It really helps that I had a schedule so that way if anybody came into the room I'd say, "Hey! No! Stop! I'm busy, I'm in class!"

Now I realize the importance of managing my time and committing myself to that schedule. Speaking of which, my schedule says I need to start cooking.

Keep an Open Mind

Come on! ... Help! ... Come on! ... Ugh! ... Just!

Oh, I'm practicing a new skill I learned a few semesters ago when I first enrolled into an online course: I'm taking a moment to step back and relax so I can try to solve this problem I am having.

You see, when I first enrolled into an online course it was an experience filled with new challenges, trying to learn in this digital format. I had to make sure I kept an open mind because things were definitely going to be different.

Here is a simple example: the classroom isn't in a physical place and the students aren't here with me in the same learning environment. Instead, my classroom is on a computer and the students are out there in virtual space. If I ever had a problem with an instruction, I would email the professor and expect a response immediately, but that wasn't realistic thinking. Because of this, I had to make sure that I organized my time so I wouldn't miss deadlines.

All of this was very new to me and sometimes something that's new can be frustrating because it is new. However, I did love the convenience of online courses, so I didn't give up. Instead, I learned to stop and identify when I'm frustrated.

If I was frustrated, it usually was because I was sad, mad, or possibly even worried, and this put me in an emotional zone. In order to solve the problem, I had to move myself away from that and move into a more rational problem-solving zone. In order to do this, I would identify what was making me mad, what kind of steps I could take to solve it, and then implement those steps. Or, if I still needed something else, I would ask for help.

One of the best ways to do this is to just put the problem aside, take a step back, and clear your mind. Now you do have to get back to the problem because it isn't going to solve itself.

You know, actually talking to you has put me in a better mood and into a more rational thinking state of mind. So, if you don't mind, I am going to get back to my class now. Oh! [Laughing.] That's what it was. See? Taking a moment to relax really helps.

Study Habits

I have a math test due next Friday, and an English paper by Sunday of this week. I need to add these two dates to my calendar and plan out my week.

I really enjoy online courses because I don't have to attend class on a certain day and time, but that does not mean that I don't have to plan when and where I am going to learn online and complete the course activities. There are still due dates.

I find it very important to log in to my course at least 3 times a week if not more. I definitely log in at the beginning of the week to make sure that I understand the requirements and questions and then plan accordingly.

As part of my planning, I need to be able to pace myself: I'm a good reader and writer, so I can zip through English and reading assignments, but I struggle a bit with math. So I pace myself slower on math-based assignments and try out as many problems as I can and make sure I understand the concepts.

I like being able to pace myself based on the course content; this is a great advantage to learning online. When I am not clear about an assignment or the instructions, I give myself enough time to ask for clarification from the instructor or even my classmates. My classmates are a great resource, too! I can use the course email and chat features to communicate with classmates.

In one class we formed study groups and used the chat features to study. If you need academic support or tutoring, the college has an Academic Support Center where you can get help. The bottom line is figure out how you work and study best, and then make a plan and commitment to yourself to achieve your goals. Remember that there is plenty of help available, but you have to be the one to seek it out, and don't forget those deadlines!

Now: back to that English paper.