How to Succeed in an Online Course

Welcome to online learning at Northwest Vista College (NVC). If this is your first online course, then the following information will be extremely helpful. If this is not your first online course with NVC, please review the following information to ensure you are aware of how this course may be different from others you have taken.

☐ *What should I expect?*

First of all, let's clarify some common misconceptions.

✓   **FALSE**: Online classes are "self-paced."

✓   **TRUE**: Online courses follow the same academic schedule as on-campus courses.

- In other words, it is not an open-entry/open-exit environment where you can start and finish when you please.

✓   **FALSE**: You can complete your work anytime you want.

✓   **TRUE**: You should expect "due dates" throughout the course.

- You will probably be required to accomplish certain tasks and assignments *by* specific dates and times. For example, if you are required to post a reply to the weekly discussion *by* Thursday at 11:59 PM, you may do so anytime *before* that due date and time.

- Some quizzes, exams or assignments may be timed. You will have only a specified amount of time to complete the item once you have started it.

- In some courses, you can submit work early—ahead of the due date. Check your syllabus for your instructor's policies.

- Make sure you are aware of time limits and deadlines for all graded items.

- Use the syllabus, the calendar, and the weekly modules or folders to help you determine when items are due to be completed.

✓ **FALSE**: Everyone is online at the same time.

✓ **TRUE**: Usually, you will not be required to be online at specific times.

- On rare occasions, your instructor may ask that you watch a live event via streaming video or online.

- On some occasions, you may be assigned to a group discussion or project during which you and your group members may agree to meet virtually at an agreed-upon time for a chat, conference, or other type of online meeting.

✓ **FALSE**: You have to take an online class on campus.

✓ **TRUE**: In most cases, you will not be required to come to campus.

- However, there are some courses that require students to come to an orientation, take a test, conduct a presentation, participate in a lab, or complete some other on-campus activity. If this is a requirement in your online class and you are not able to come to the NVC campus, the instructor *must* make alternate arrangements available to you. And *you* must let your instructor know that you are not able to come to campus.

- For example, you may be able to take a proctored test at a location in your local area, you may be able to participate in a group project via webcam or phone, or you may be able to create and post a video presentation of your activity. Your instructor will work with you if an on-campus visit is required.

✓ **FALSE**: A textbook is not needed because all course material is provided online.

✓ **TRUE**: Most courses use the same textbook as the equivalent on-campus course. Some courses use an online book (e-book).

- Although some course material will be provided through Canvas (the system used for online classes) or a publisher's website, be sure to check the syllabus for any textbook and other required materials.

❑ I'm not sure if I would do well in an online class. Is there any way to tell?

Who would have better ideas about what kinds of skills online students need to succeed than actual online students? The Is Online Right For Me? page contains both text and video responses to help you decide of online learning is a good fit for you.

Also, please look at the Canvas Quick Guide to give you an idea of what online tools will be used.

Finally, if this is your first online class, please enroll in the free, fully online **Orientation to Online Learning (OLRN-0001)**. You can sign up for this course through ACES—the same way as you registered for your other courses. OLRN will introduce you to the best practices of online students and what to expect in an online class. If you need help finding or enrolling in OLRN, please contact Adela Gonzales at agonzales2@alamo.edu or 210-486-4232.

❑ Are online classes easier than face-to-face classes?

No. In fact, in many cases, students report that online classes can be *more* challenging due to the online environment itself. Online classes are *not* easier or less time-consuming than face-to-face courses.

❑ The importance of good time management.

To be successful in an online environment, you must be a good time manager. You should plan to commit at least as much time to each online course as you would to a traditional, face-to-face course. This includes the time you would spend in the classroom plus time spent studying, researching, writing papers, taking exams, and so on.

❑ How much time should I plan?

Expect to put in *at least the same amount* of time and work both in and outside of the classroom as you would in a face-to-face class. For example, if a face-to-face class meets for 2½ hours per week, plus requires reading, homework, and studying that comes to about 3-5 hours per week, you should plan to spend that same 5½-7½ hours per week (or more) for your online class.

❑ When should I work on my online course?

Think about your time commitments and daily/weekly schedules. Are you planning to do your online class work while you are at your job? Are you hoping to do it when you get home at the end of a long day of on-campus classes or work? Are you planning to spend your Friday or

Saturday evenings working on your online classes instead of enjoying some social time with friends or family? Are you planning to study at the same time you are taking care of children? You must consider whether these are realistic plans.

☐ *So how do I plan for my online class?*

Usually, it is best to create an actual schedule that takes into account all of the activities you participate in each day. Be sure to include school, work, social time, family time, time you spend traveling to destinations, and time spent on homework, reading, and studying for all of your classes.

☐ Make sure that you can work uninterrupted.

- ✓ Turn off distractions such as your phone and TV.
- ✓ Be firm with those who demand your time, and be willing to tell others, "Please don't bother me. I am in class right now."
- ✓ If you plan to do your coursework while you are at work, consider staying an hour after your shift or working on your class during your lunch break.
- ✓ Use a calendar—on paper or online—to help you plan and schedule your time.
- ✓ Decide your own priorities. Only you can determine what takes precedence in your own life. Plan your time accordingly.

☐ Find a good place to work in peace.

Many students enjoy working in the NVC Open Computer Lab, the library, or one of the many other student labs on campus. (See list below.) You might also want to consider taking your laptop to a private place on or off campus, working in a local coffee shop, using another college library, or finding a quiet nook in a public library. There are many places with wireless Internet access that are good for studying and working uninterrupted.

☐ *What's "netiquette"?*

Your instructor will probably require you to use college-level academic writing in most or all of your online work. This means that "text-speak" is out. You will be expected to write as you would for an essay or classroom assignment.

☐ Can you give me some examples?

Sure! Your instructor may have other guidance, so be sure to check the syllabus, discussion guidelines, or course homepage.

- Compose your messages in Word or a similar word processing program. If you don't have Microsoft Office on your computer, you can get it FREE through the Alamo Colleges. Log into ACES, Student tab, and look for this image:

  or [click here](#).

- Spell-check and grammar-check your discussion messages, and then copy and paste them into your discussion postings. (This will also keep you from losing your work.)

- Use standard college-level grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In other words,
    - Capitalize proper nouns and the pronoun "I."
    - Spell out words (for example "before," not "b4," "through," not "thru," and "because," not "b/c").
    - Use punctuation as needed.

- Do not "SHOUT" by using all capital letters.

- Avoid vulgarity. Avoid sexist, racist, or other exclusionary or inconsiderate language.

- When you add a profile picture in Canvas, make sure it is professional and not sexually revealing or encouraging of illegal behaviors. (No bathing suits or underage drinking pictures, please.)

- Consider other people's gender identities and pronoun preferences.

- Keep any humor clean and non-offensive.

☐ *What else makes the online environment different?*

In a face-to-face classroom, you are a part of a social setting in which it is easy to communicate with your instructor and classmates. Sometimes, the online environment requires you to make a little more effort to ask a question, state your opinion, get a clarification, or help someone else. You should plan to use a public communication tool (such as a discussion board) rather

than a private message whenever possible. If you have a question, others probably have it, too. You should reserve private communication for private topics such as grades.

Also, when we see each other in a face-to-face setting, we tend to get to know each other by sight and personalities. This takes a little more effort in the online environment. You can start by creating an online presence by updating your Profile and adding a picture of yourself.

☐ *The missing "non-verbal factor."*

In a face-to-face classroom, the instructor can see the puzzled look on your face when you don't understand. The instructor can tell if the class is enthusiastic about a project or dreading it. Your classmates can tell when you're not feeling well, or when you've come into the room late, or when you are always the first one to turn in your assignments. In the online environment, the non-verbal factor is mostly missing.

For these reasons, it's important to communicate not only the message, but any important information about you, the sender. For example, here are some effective messages:

- I'm excited about this assignment and look forward to learning something new.

- I am confused about the requirements for this assignment and am not sure if I will be able to complete it on time.

- Can someone who has started this assignment help me pick a topic?

- Help! I don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing!

Put your "non-verbals" into words so that others will know "the whole story."

☐ *Ask for help when you need it!*

Stay in touch with your **instructors**. In a traditional class, it's easy to raise your hand to ask a question or to talk with the instructor before or after class. Online, if you're confused, if you have a question, if you need an extension on an assignment, or if you don't understand the material, you must take the initiative to contact your instructors. Their job is to help you succeed!

In **Canvas**, click **Help** in the left gray menu, and you will see the first choice is "Ask My Instructor a Question." That will send a private message to your instructor in the Canvas Inbox. Your instructor's other contact information such as phone number, email address, and office location will be listed on the course syllabus.

Also, remember that your **classmates** are often valuable sources of information. Just as you might lean over to ask the person next to you for clarification in a classroom, you should "talk

to" your online classmates, too. Use the general discussion boards, your group pages, and the Canvas Inbox to contact your classmates.

Finally, ask your instructors for help managing and scheduling your time. Remember that every one of them has been a college student, too, and they often understand your situation better than you may think. ☺

☐ *What are the technical requirements for success?*

Keep your computer equipment in good working order. Too often, online students fall behind when their Internet connection is weak or discontinued, or when they have trouble with tools, programs, or hardware. Make sure you know what you will need at the beginning of the course, and then have two plans—a primary plan and a backup plan—for how you will be able to accomplish the course requirements. Computers with Internet access can usually be found in places like public libraries, military bases, the YMCA, or maybe even your employer.

Be sure to keep your browser and other online software up to date.

Remember that computers are available on campus Monday through Saturday, and that any computer with Internet access will allow you into your online class. You can complete *most* (but not all) of your online course work on a mobile device, too, such as a tablet or smart phone.

☐ *What software and hardware do you recommend for me to be a successful college student?*

For the best possible learning experience while at NVC, here is a quick list of requirements and recommendations to ensure you have the needed computer tools to succeed. As a minimum, you should have, or have access to, the following:

> 1. **A desktop PC or laptop computer**. We recommend your operating system be the latest version of Windows or the Mac equivalent.
>
> 2. You should have an **Office Suite** that includes a Word Processor, Spreadsheet, and Presentation software. Microsoft Office is recommended and is available free of charge to students. Log into ACES and look for this image on the Student page:

Technology Deals

or click here.

3. You need a **web browser** (access to the Internet) on your Desktop PC or laptop to access tools for registration, financial aid and course materials. No matter which web browser you use (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Edge, or Safari) make sure you use the *most recent version* and that your pop-up blocker settings will allow your courses to open. The Technical Information page will help you find out if your browser and other tools are up to date.

4. If you do not have access to broadband/high speed Internet at your home (for example, if you have dial-up), please plan to use student computers on campus or another location such as a Public Library.

   NOTE: If you plan to use your computer at work or one in a public library, be aware that there may be firewalls installed that prevent unrestricted access to the Internet.

5. **Anti-virus software** such as Symantec/Norton, McAfee, Kaspersky, Bit Defender, G-Data, Avira/AntiVir, etc. *PC World* magazine and PCmag.com review and recommend various programs.

6. **A removable device** (such as a flash drive) for storing your files.

7. **Online cloud storage.** Good news! You already have *free* access to OneDrive with **1TB** of cloud storage through your Alamo Outlook account. Install Office 365 on your computer as shown in 2. above. Click the icon in the upper left corner next to the words Office 365, and then click the cloud image to access your own, free cloud storage.

8. **Speakers, headphones, or ear buds**.

9. Some classes may require you to have a **webcam** in order to create videos.

☐ Where can I go on campus to use a computer?

Library
Redbud Learning Center (1st floor)

Open Computer Lab
Juniper Hall, Rm 106H (across from the library)

☐ Where can I find a tutor?

Tutoring Services
Tutoring labs with computers are available in numerous locations on campus. Click the link above to find out more about on-campus tutoring and lab services in writing, reading, math, science, ESL, and speech.

Online Tutoring is also available from Brainfuse in all classes using the Canvas tools menu. If you do not see Brainfuse displayed in your Canvas class menu, ask your instructor to enable the tool in the navigation settings.

☐ Can I bring my laptop to campus? Where can I use it?

Students are welcome to bring laptop computers to campus. The wireless network (WiFi) is available in all buildings and outdoors campus-wide.

☐ I need to print something.

NVC students use the Go Print system which allows you to pay for copies in advance and print from specified computers on campus. More information is available in the Student Computer labs and the Library.

☐ How do I access my online or web-enhanced on-campus class?

1. First, log into **ACES**.
   a. Go to the NVC homepage.
   b. Click the login to ACES tab.
   c. It's a good idea to bookmark the ACES login page.
   (Add it to your Favorites.)

d.   Log in using your ACES user name and password. If you have forgotten your user name or password or need help, please call 210-485-0555 or 210-486-4777.
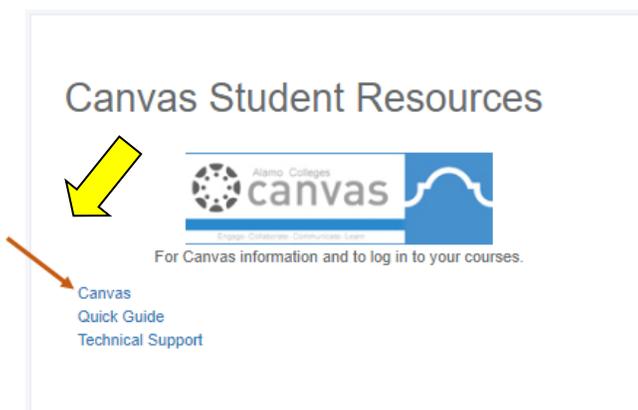
2. Click on **My Courses** on the left.
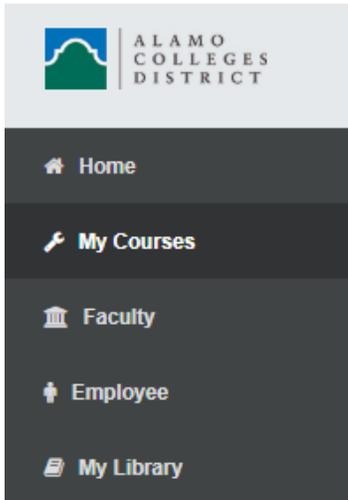
3. Be sure you're seeing the current semester from the drop-down menu next to Select Term.

4. Click on the "home" (house) icon to enter your course.

Home Page	Course Title ⬍	Course Id ⬍
🏠🔧	Composition I	ENGL-1301-333

5. You can also go straight into Canvas from the ACES home page by clicking the Canvas link in the right column:

◻ What if I can't get into ACES?

Please call the **IT Support Central Help Desk** at **210-485-0555, opt. 4** for assistance. Hours of operation:

Mon – Fri   8:00am – 12:00 am (midnight)
Sat   9:00am – 9:00pm
Sun   11:00am – 8:00pm

You can also contact the **NVC Help Desk** at **210-486-4777**. Hours of operation:

Mon – Fri   7:30am – 6:00pm

◻ Is my computer's web browser compatible with ACES and Canvas?

Please visit the [Web Browser Checklist](#) or call the numbers above for assistance.

◻ Where else can I get help?

- o   Whenever you are using Canvas, you can click the Help icon on bottom left corner of the page for links to the guides, videos, Canvas Help Desk via phone or chat, and your instructor.
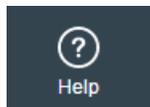
- o   In the left gray menu of every Canvas course, you will also see links to the Canvas Quick Guide (Canvas training), Technical Support, and College Resources.

- o   You can also call the Support Central Help Desk **24/7/365** at **210-485-0555, opt. 2, for Canvas help**.

◻ How can I find my instructor's phone numbers, email, and office locations?

 In ACES – My Courses, you can click the little envelope next to each instructor's name to send that person an email.

 In Canvas, click Help and choose the first option, Ask Your Instructor a Question.

 In Canvas, click Course Syllabus to be taken directly to the syllabus for the course. The instructor should have added contact

information near the top of the syllabus.

SYLLABI   At the bottom of the NVC home page, click SYLLABI to enter a searchable site containing all syllabi for the college.

MENU ≡   On the NVC home page, click the menu icon and choose Academics. Click the large + to the right of the word ACADEMICS, and then Find Your Program. Use the + icons to find the department you need. Office locations and phone numbers are listed at the bottom of each page.

☐ *Can I access and complete my online course on my smart phone or tablet?*

Yes, you can ***access*** your online class from your phone or other mobile device, but you should not plan to ***complete*** every task and assignment from it. Not all functions are available through a hand-held device; for example, you will probably not be able to create, upload and submit assignments. However, you will be able to access your course homepage, check messages, participate in discussions, take quizzes, and so on.

If you have a smart phone, iPad, iPod, Kindle, or similar device, you may also download the Canvas Mobile App. Here are the guidelines to download the Canvas app for iOS devices and for Android devices. **You will need this URL to set it up: alamo.instructure.com.**

⬚ *Still have questions?*

Email us at nvc-distancelearn@alamo.edu **or call 210-486-4232**

Canvas Help

Look in the left gray menu of every Canvas page for immediate 24/7/365 assistance via phone, chat, guides, and videos.
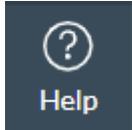
The Canvas Student Support Hotline phone # is 210-485-0555, opt. 2.

Canvas Student Quick Guide

Contains help using Canvas features, tools, navigating your courses, technical information, and more student resources.

Help with Other online resources

BioSig, Brainfuse, MacMillan, McGraw Hill, Pearson/MyLab, Respondus, Turnitin, and Zoom.

College Resources

Distance Learning, Library, Bookstore, Disability Support, Tutoring Services, Computer Lab, and other Online Resources.

Canvas Student Guides

Canvas Student Videos

Have a great semester!