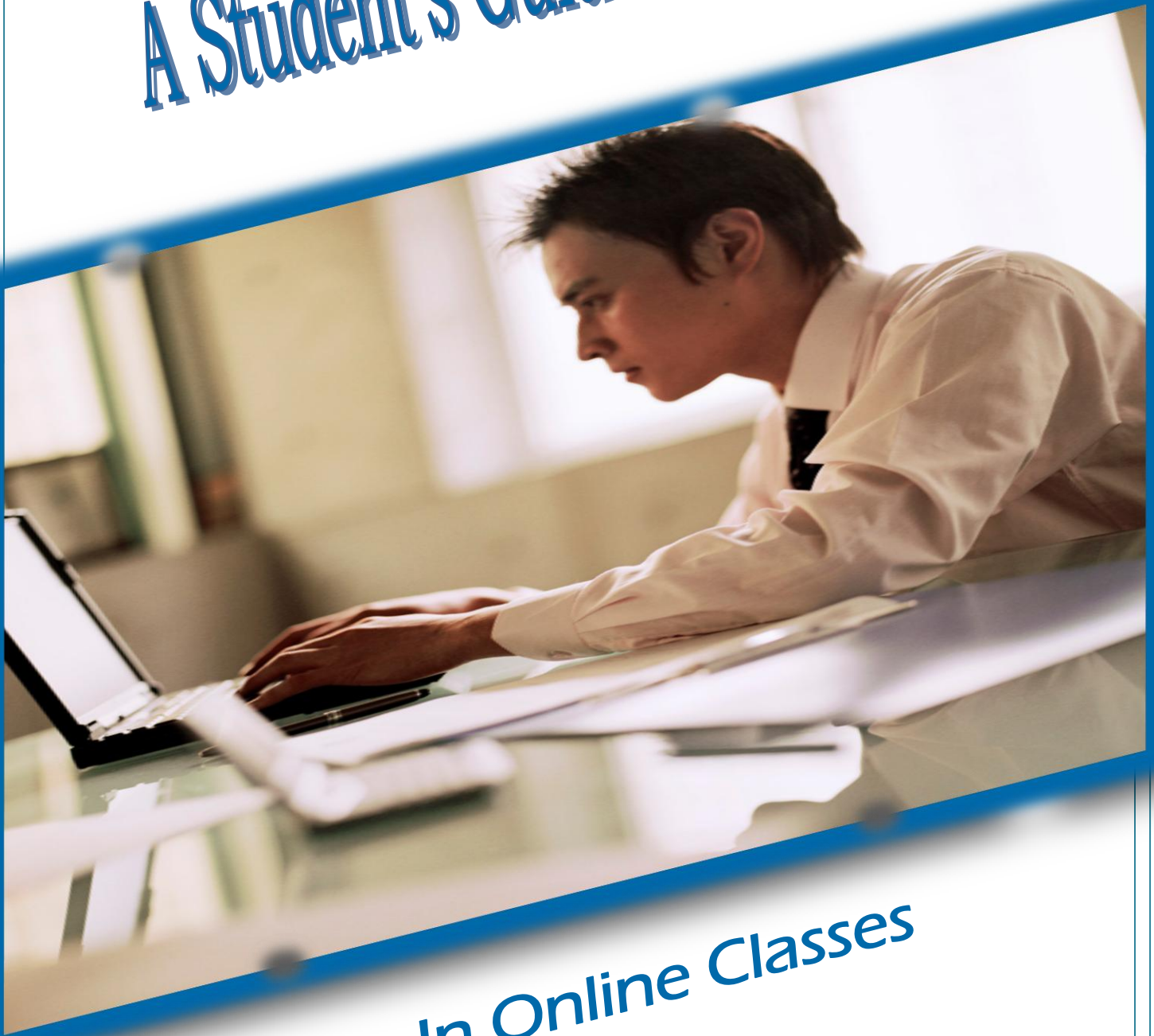


A Student's Guide to Success



In Online Classes

Index

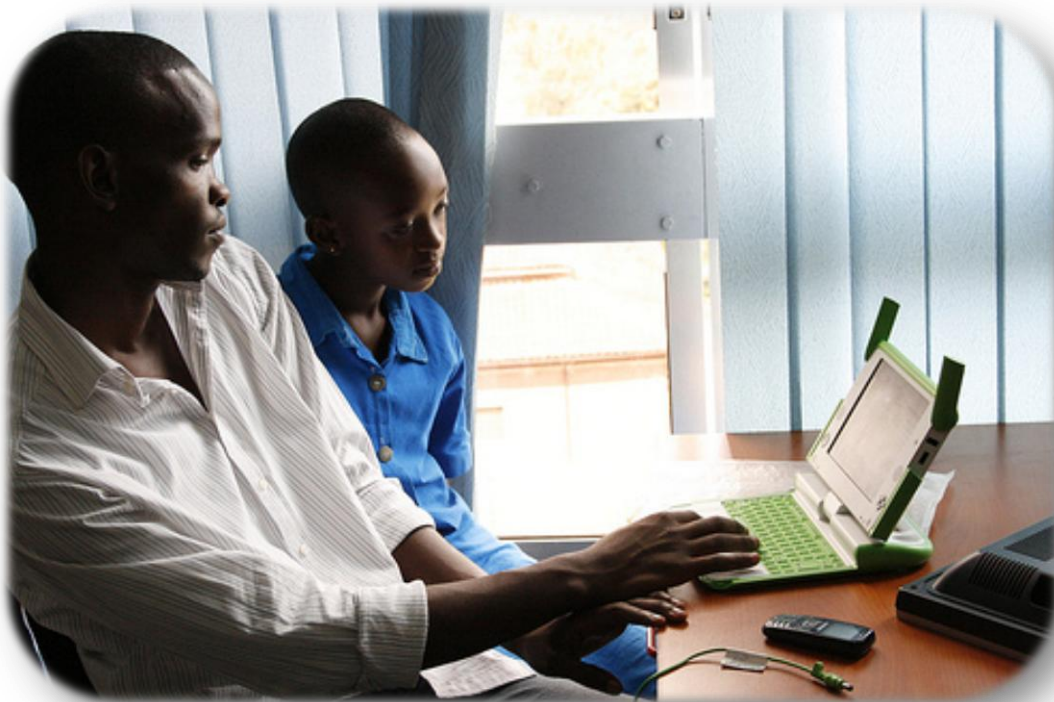
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Are you thinking about taking an online course?

Quinsigamond Community College offers numerous courses, certificate and degree programs online. If you need a flexible schedule or enjoy working independently, these courses may be for you.

QCC's online classes are taught by the same instructors and contain the same curriculum as their traditional counterparts. But because online classes allow students to work independently at home, the office or on campus they are flexible enough to fit your busy schedule.

Online courses offer unique opportunities, but they also pose some special challenges. Before taking an online course, complete this [survey](#) and use the tips in this booklet to make the most of your online classes.



Section 1

Characteristics of a Successful Online Student

Online students . . .

- communicate well through reading and writing.
- are self-motivated and self-disciplined.
- ask for help.
- have good computer skills.

Communicate well through reading and writing

Nearly all communication in online courses is written, so you should feel comfortable reading and comprehending written material, following written instructions, thinking ideas through, and expressing yourself in writing.

If reading and writing aren't your strong suit, you may want to factor in some extra study time to complete your readings and assignments. You'll find strategies for improving your reading and writing skills at the back of this booklet.



Are self-motivated and self-disciplined

In online courses, no one is standing over your shoulder to make sure you do the work. You have more freedom and more flexibility—and more responsibility! You need to be able to devote 6 - 12 hours a week to each online course for which you register, plan ahead for deadlines, set your own priorities, and effectively organize and manage your time.

Sometimes, studying is the last thing we want to do. The TV, social activities, the laundry, the dog—something else always calls. As a result, studying—especially in online courses—requires extra discipline. The following tips can help:

- Make yourself accountable. Ask a friend, a family member, or mentor to help you. Tell them what your goals are, and ask them to check in to make sure you are sticking to your goals.
- Study in chunks. For example, study for 20 to 50 minutes, then take a 5 to 10-minute break. You'll feel refreshed, and you'll avoid eye strain from looking at your computer too much. Make the most of breaks by doing something entirely different.
- Vary what you're studying to avoid boredom or fatigue.
- Identify the times of day when you learn most effectively. For most people, it's best to study during the day or early evening. Remember that it may be harder to concentrate right after eating, after coming in from the cold, or after exercising.

Ask for help

Your instructors can't see you scratching your head, or hear your exasperated sighs. With online learning, you must remember that your instructors can only help you with problems they're made aware of. If you don't communicate the difficulties you are having, your instructor will never know something is wrong. If you encounter a problem, get confused, or have any questions, be sure to let your instructor know—the sooner, the better!

If you email your instructor, but do not get a response, phone your instructor. There may be a temporary technical problem with the email system. Your instructor might not know that you have been trying to reach him or her.



Have good computer skills

Skills you will need to successfully complete an online course include

- Basic skills in using a keyboard and mouse.
- Familiarity with your Web browser and Microsoft Word.
- The ability to save and find files on your computer's directories.
- The ability to enable cookies on your Web browser (please see your Web browser's Help files for specific instructions).
- The ability to turn off popup blockers on your browser and/or your antivirus program
- The ability to download and install needed applications and plug-ins.
- The ability to ask for technical support when needed

If you're afraid of—or completely new to—technology, you might not be ready for an online course just yet. That said, if you know how to use word processing, know what an attachment is, know what a Web browser is, know what information you need for technical support and are pretty patient with yourself, this is as good a time as any to jump in!

The secret with using technology is to stay calm, be patient, and to ask for help when you are stumped. By all means, don't let frustrations with technology cause you to procrastinate on your course assignments!



SECTION 2

Navigating Your Online Course

So you've registered for your first online course—congratulations! If you are like most first-time online learners, you're probably sitting there thinking, "Now what?"

Just as with any course, your first order of business should be to review your course materials. Get a feel for the course expectations by looking at each lesson's objectives and activities.

Don't wait to get started—the sooner you start with lesson 1, the better. Sign in as soon as the course becomes available to you, usually the first day of the term.

Be sure to complete the tutorials on using the online classroom *before* your course begins. These tutorials cover important topics such as:

- How to take a quiz
- How to submit an assignment
- How to email your instructor from Blackboard
- How to post to a discussion group

The tutorials and videos will help you succeed in your online class.

Create a schedule and organize your workspace

An online course takes time to complete. You'll get the best results if you establish a schedule and create a study area where you can focus and concentrate.

Manage your time carefully

- Set aside specific days and times to work on your courses. In setting up a schedule, weigh your other activities and responsibilities, and think about when you do your best work. Use a personal planner if that helps, and by all means, avoid the temptation to skip your regular study time.
- Determine when you need to complete your course. Refer to the course syllabus and work backwards from there, identifying the dates by which you need to turn in assignments and take exams to meet your goal.
- Work at a consistent pace rather than in starts and stops. It's important to establish routines and dedicate the time necessary to complete your course in a timely manner. Work steadily, but don't rush through the course. Turn in well-thought-out assignments, and learn from your instructors' comments.

Find a study spot conducive to learning

Try out a few different spots in your home for studying to identify the environment that works best for you. Some people do better with background noise, while others require total silence. Some can handle disruptions, and some are put off by them. Knowing and creating the environment that works best for you will give you an advantage in completing your online course.

Communicate with your instructors

You've heard it again and again. Make sure your instructors know who you are. Make the most of online office hours.

If you have a documented disability, you qualify for reasonable accommodations. Contact your instructor or advisor for more information. For disability contacts at Quinsigamond Community College, visit http://www.qcc.edu/pages/Disability_Services.html .

Just because your instructors aren't physically present doesn't mean they don't want to hear from you. The sooner you contact them, the better!



Know and use your learning style to succeed

Not everyone thinks or learns the same way. Knowing how you learn can go a long way towards helping you succeed.

One way to discover your learning style is to visit <http://www.vark-learning.com> and take the VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic) Learning Style Inventory. This inventory not only helps you identify your learning style, but also provides some tips in how to use the information from the inventory to glean the most knowledge from your courses.

Other strategies exist to help you study and learn course material effectively. Be sure to review the study tips we've provided at the back of this booklet.



Appendix A – Reading Tips

To read successfully, you need a strategy. Try the following techniques to improve reading comprehension:

- **Preview.** With previewing, you skim the material, looking at titles and headings, the first few paragraphs of each chapter, chapter summaries, boxed or highlighted information, and pictures, charts, and captions.

During the pre-reading phase, be sure to read your section or lecture notes so that you know what your instructor thinks is important. Also, think about what you already know about the material. Enter the reading using your own experience and knowledge.

- **Read thoroughly.** Question as you read. Don't take items at face value. Highlight what you think is important. Don't highlight facts—you can review them later. Rather, highlight arguments, examples, and those things that jump out at you.

Highlight vocabulary, and look up any words you don't know. Also highlight examples or case studies, that is, the content that makes the material relevant to you and that enhances your comprehension.

- **Review and study.** Do it after you've completed your reading—maybe several days later. Don't try to do everything all at one time. As you study, use the learning guide to remind yourself what the learning objectives are.

Review your materials periodically throughout the course. Periodic review helps you build your knowledge and eliminates the need to cram before exams.

Appendix B – Writing Tips

There are few things as daunting as facing a white, empty sheet of paper or computer screen and trying to find the right words and ideas to fill it up.

Keep it simple! It's unnecessary—and often counterproductive—to use big words and long sentences. Varying sentence structure and length *can* reduce “choppiness,” but when in doubt, opt for shorter, simpler messages. Get to the point. If your main point doesn't appear until paragraph four, you have a problem. Get to the point, then lead your reader through your supporting information.

Read it out loud. After you complete a written assignment, read it out loud to check whether it makes sense and flows well. If you trip up while reading it, rewrite your assignment to fix the problem.

Do a double take. When reviewing what you've written, put your grammar and spell check functions to work. Also, make sure that your response answers the question you've been asked. If you're using words you aren't sure of, check their meaning. It's nice to use impressive words here and there in writing, but your efforts fall flat if you use the words incorrectly.

Look it up! The Internet is full of resources that you can use to improve your writing. Resources include

- the Elements of Style Online, www.bartleby.com/141/
- www.dictionary.com
- the Purdue Online Writing Lab, owl.english.purdue.edu/

Appendix C – Study Tips

Memory is learning that persists. In order to combat forgetting, develop the habit of reviewing your course materials regularly and purposefully.

- Before you attempt to learn new material, look over previous chapters or notes. Think about what you already know.
- After you've learned something new, order and organize what you learned using stars, arrows, additional comments, and so forth.
- Integrate new material with what you already know.

In preparing for an exam, remember that this isn't the time to be cramming unlearned material. It's the time to synthesize what you already know.

- Keep your review sessions brief. Set a time limit for the review and stick to it.
- Outline and organize from memory.
- Recite key points and concepts in writing or out loud to yourself or to a friend.

Appendix D– Online Resources

Study Skills

Muskingum College Learning Strategies Database
<http://www.muskingum.edu/%7Ecal/database/>

Virginia Tech Cook Counseling Center - Study Skills and Self-Help
<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdyhelp.html>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

Online Education Database - 150 Resources to Help You Write Better, Faster, and More Persuasively
<http://oedb.org/library/features/150-writing-resources>

Online Readiness Skills

University System of Georgia - SORT
<http://www.alt.usg.edu/sort/html/sortlau1.html>

California State University - Online Readiness Self-Test
<http://www.csun.edu/~vcpsy00i/150/fa03/readiness.html>

New Mexico Junior College - Online Learning Success
http://www.nmjc.edu/distancelearning/coursescourseschedules/howto_succeed.aspx

Additional Resources

The Internet Public Library
<http://www.ipl.org/>

Contact Information

Quinsigamond Community College Library

<http://www.qcc.mass.edu/library/>

Quinsigamond Community College Financial Aid

https://confucius.qcc.mass.edu/ics/Financial_Services/

Quinsigamond Community College Disability Services

https://confucius.qcc.mass.edu/ics/Student_Services/Disablility_Services.jnz

Quinsigamond Community College Bookstore

<http://bookstore.qcc.mass.edu/home.aspx>

Quinsigamond Community College Communication Skills Center

<http://www.qcc.mass.edu/csc/index.html>

Quinsigamond Community College Online Tutoring

<https://www.smarthinking.com>

Quinsigamond Community College Technical Support

http://www.qcc.mass.edu/qconline/Technical_Support.htm

Quinsigamond Community College – Is Online Learning for Me?

<http://www.qcc.mass.edu/it/instructionaltechnology/DESelfAssess.htm>



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*This brochure was adapted from one created by
the Indiana University School of Continuing Studies*