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You CAN Learn Online

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McGraw-Hill Higher Education

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YOU CAN LEARN ONLINE

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 QPD/QPD 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-07-281761-5

Vice President, eMarket Development: *Craig Beytien*

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Cover design: *Ryan Brown*

Cover image: *Corbis*

Compositor: *ElectraGraphics, Inc.*

Printer: *Quebecor World Dubuque Inc.*

Lesson opener photos: *Wonderfile*

Library of Congress Control Number: 2002110093

www.mhhe.com

Preface

The intention of this book is to create a richly illustrated, web-enhanced book providing easy-to-follow examples and tools useful to students taking courses in the traditional and online classroom. It's more than a hands-on, step-by-step guide to online course-taking. There are easy-to-follow materials in each lesson that will reinforce the chapter objectives, including boldfaced terms within the body of text followed by definitions or explanations. There is an extensive glossary of terms and a powerful index. Each lesson features a rich inclusion of web links to related material that provide a specific function such as a links to a chatroom, downloadable plug-ins, graphic files, and much more. The book features the latest information in many areas not adequately covered in other competing texts. You will have essential information on what study skills you need to be successful, how to assess your personal learning style, how to know if online learning is meant for you, what ISP you might want to use, what browsers to use and how to configure them for your personal interests, what search engines and portals are available, how to perform efficient searches, how to use interactive online tools, what are the steps to becoming an "independent learner," how to think critically, methods of communicating effectively within a group, understanding testing online, and how to work with your online instructor. There is a dedicated website for the book with numerous features including access to a variety of self-assessment tests at <http://www.mhhe.com/ucanlearnonline>.

A very special thank you goes to Craig Beytien, Director of Market Development at McGraw-Hill. More special thanks to Gino Cieslik, Designer, and Susan Trentacosti, Project Manager, at McGraw-Hill whose specific expertise helped to fashion the appearance and drive the quality of this book.

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Lesson 1

What Is Online Learning?

The eruption of computers and online learning into the world of education has caused fear for many, while others have welcomed this new technology as a valuable alternative to classroom instruction. Many of the students using this technology have already accepted the idea of education on the Internet, and many have welcomed the World Wide Web for taking courses completely online or for supplementing their courses taught on campus. However, they represent only a very small proportion of the potential student population in the world. The success of students in the online environment and their satisfaction with the process are most often identified with how much preparation they have had. This book and its electronic edition will make this transition easier for most. This book has been prepared by those who have stepped into the game, suffered the bruises, and now tell their story of the successes and failures, the technical issues, and the problems. We hope that this proves helpful in your journey.

Unit 1

Unit 2

Unit 3

Unit 4

1.0 Student Narrative: What Is Online Learning?

1.1 An Introduction

1.2 Where Does Online Learning Take Place?

1.3 Who's Doing It?

1.4 What's in It for Me?

1.5 How Do I Know if Online Learning Is Right for Me?

1.6 What Study Skills Do I Need?

1.7 What Is My Personal Learning Style?

1.8 What Are the Pros and Cons of the Online Classroom?

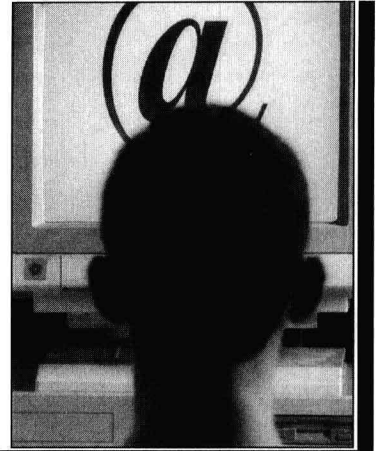
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Lesson 1

What Is Online Learning?



LESSON OUTLINE

- 1.0 STUDENT NARRATIVE: WHAT IS ONLINE LEARNING?**
- 1.1 AN INTRODUCTION**
- 1.2 WHERE DOES ONLINE LEARNING TAKE PLACE?**
- 1.3 WHO'S DOING IT?**
- 1.4 WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?**
- 1.5 HOW DO I KNOW IF ONLINE LEARNING IS RIGHT FOR ME?**
- 1.6 WHAT STUDY SKILLS DO I NEED?**
- 1.7 WHAT IS MY PERSONAL LEARNING STYLE?**
- 1.8 WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF THE OF THE ONLINE CLASSROOM?**
- 1.9 LAST THOUGHTS**
- REFERENCES**
- WORKBOOK SECTION**

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS LESSON

YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- 1. Define what is meant by the term "online learning."
- 2. Describe the growth of online education and identify some of the growth factors.
- 3. Determine your personal learning style and determine what study skills you need.
- 4. Measure your readiness for online learning.
- 5. Discuss and evaluate the pros and cons of the online classroom.

LESSON 1: WHAT IS ONLINE LEARNING?

1.0 Student Narrative: What Is Online Learning?

—Bea Jennings

Recently, I became the head of an instructional design unit for Regis University, focusing on curriculum development for classroom-based courses. Since the early 1980s I have been involved in adult education, completing my own master's degree in an accelerated degree program for working adults, and then managing classroom-based and distance delivery instruction for higher ed institutions. But I realized that I never really had understood or appreciated the potential of online learning. Given its boom over the past few years, I felt it was crucial for me to learn instructional design using multimedia and web-based approaches. I thought about training and then looked at several academic programs offered locally in the classroom. But it quickly became clear to me—if I was going to learn about online instructional design, then what better way to do it than by going online.

I was fortunate to find a doctoral program in online instructional design offered by Capella University. I am currently in my third course and, as I thought, have learned so much more than the required course content. The program is my own “learning lab.” I talk to my virtual classmates about what does and doesn't work, filtering the online tools, techniques and instructional approaches that I am learning about through their eyes, the eyes of students. This can't help but serve me well as I begin designing online curricula.

As an online student, I have gained real world experience participating in team projects, threaded discussions, conducting research using a library several states away, and completing technology-based projects without a faculty member directing me in a classroom or lab setting. I have discovered that the anytime/ anyplace feature of online programs is invaluable. Several business trips and an emergency family out-of-town trip would have caused me to drop out of a classroom-based program. I was able to keep up with my course work because I was always able to gain Internet access to my online program. I have the ability to complete my course work whenever it's convenient for me, not at pre-determined times.

I see my potential effectiveness as an online instructor only increasing each time I am an online student. Though I have taught classroom-based courses for many years, I have always held back from teaching online courses. I hadn't given my resistance to teaching online much thought, until now. I realize that I could never quite grasp how a community of learners could really learn when they weren't face to face. I know now that though the ways of communicating and collaborating online are different, they are just as valuable and effective. I have experienced myself how faculty members, who I might never see, really can teach and guide students online, interjecting new information when needed, summarizing and facilitating online discussions and chats. I have noticed too that far more thought must go into an online response to a question or problem than when sitting in a group and having to respond on the spur of the moment.

One of the unexpected pleasures has been making virtual friends with classmates. We exchange business ideas as we collaborate on course work, our varied professional

experiences and perspectives coming from all over the globe. This has greatly enlarged my own learning community.

—Bea Jennings has worked in the field of adult education for over 20 years, holding leadership roles in start-ups and restructurings of accelerated, adult degree completion programs. She serves as faculty at several area universities, teaching undergraduate and graduate business and management courses. Bea's focus is on higher education program and curriculum design developed for working adult students.

1.1 An Introduction

This morning when you rolled out of bed, dressed, shocked your system with some coffee, and either stumbled your way to class or fought morning traffic just to get on campus, an estimated 2.23 million students didn't.¹ Instead they stayed at home, studied, listened to and spoke or wrote to their teachers, chatted with their classmates, did research in a library, took exams, and turned in their assignments—all without ever entering a classroom for that matter. Sound intriguing?

Distance Learning Wired

Distance learning is nothing new. Written correspondence courses, telecourses, and video-conferencing courses have been mainstays of the geographically remote, the home-bound, and the working parent for decades. But what an increasing number of students have discovered, both on-campus and off-campus, is online learning. The technologies of the computer combined with those of the Internet allow for real communication between students and instructors, both in immediate “real” time, and “virtual” or staggered time. Connection to the Internet can break through the classroom wall, and deliver worldwide resources and interactive, multimedia learning activities. The isolated distance learner once waiting forlornly at the mailbox for the weekly enveloped word from his or her teacher is no more. Instead, the online student is part of a viable, daily-evolving learning community, the kind of community recognized as essential to effective learning.²

The Growing “Net”

This realization that the distance learning course does not have to mean academic purgatory or inferior education when Internet technology is involved (we'll get into the effectiveness of online eLearning a little bit later) has galvanized both instructor and student to such an extent that online eLearning is fast becoming the light bulb of our time. Here are a few statistics:

- According to the 2000 Campus Computing Project national survey, 59.3% of all college courses surveyed use electronic mail, as compared with 20.1% in 1995.

42.7% of all college courses surveyed use web resources, and 30.7% of college courses use a web page, up from 9.2% in 1996.³

- Over 85% of two year colleges and 84% of four-year institutions are expected to offer distance education courses in 2002.⁴ Most of the growth in distance learning is attributed to Internet technology rather than video conferencing.⁵
- Just one institution out of a sampling of hundreds that can be found through an online search for online degree programs, the University of Phoenix Online, which touts itself as the nation's leading online university, serves over 29,000 students, offering 24 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs that can be obtained completely online.⁶

Why the growth? Partly it's an extension of what is going on in our own homes. Now more than 50 percent of the 100 million homes in the United States have at least one personal computer (PC), and more than 4 million households are being added to the list every year.⁷ Many of these people purchasing computers are doing so because of the Internet,⁷ using their connections to communicate with family and friends, research jobs, and make purchases. Instant messaging, as any wired parent can tell you, is the newest saving grace for the bored teenager at home, and last year, America Online reported 7 million people logging on every day to their chatrooms and staying logged on for an average of two and a half hours, suggesting that building communities is the norm for Internet technology.

But what technological advances have enabled educators to even presume that learning experiences online could equal the traditional classroom experience? Significantly, it is the speed through which information can be transferred on the Internet. Attracted by the potentially enormous customer base, cable and phone companies are aggressively marketing high-speed Internet access with cable or digital subscriber lines (DSL).⁸ Such high-speed access greatly increases the sophistication of technologies available to the general public, including virtual reality and video conferencing. New software and improved server capabilities are making streaming video and audio available to current users with 28.5k modems. Faster connect speeds, new software, and improved computer technologies are opening up a vast new world of interactive distance learning opportunities.

Learning Online

The online learning environment, at its most basic, has been used to post a syllabus on a web page and to facilitate an exchange of emails that simply allows students and instructors to send assignments, questions, and course materials to each other electronically over the Internet. Other forms of communication over the Internet, which can intensify the online learning experience, include: virtual chats that allow students and instructors to type messages back and forth or even speak to each other in synchronous (real)

time over the Internet, and discussion boards or threaded discussions that allow students and instructors to post virtual messages and responses to each other. Full online courses contain downloadable course materials, interactive tutorials, streaming audio and video media pieces, and virtual libraries and research data banks. Traditional face-to-face classes can incorporate one or all of these online components.

1.2 Where Does Online Learning Take Place?

Pure Distance

Back in the early to mid 90s when changes in computer and Internet technologies were making the unimaginable imaginable, the mantra of the first educators and students exploring this realm was “Anywhere, Anytime Learning.” Online learning was seen as the panacea for those students unable to physically attend class because of their geographic locations or crazed work schedules. All online students needed were a computer hooked to the Internet and they could “attend” class at will. Rest assured that even the early online classes had specific due dates for assignments that all students had to abide by. This emphasis on “will” determined that early online classrooms were purely asynchronous in nature. “Asynchronous” simply means that no one specifically has to be online at the same time with anyone else in order to communicate. Assignments, course materials, and discussion were permanent printed fixtures online that could be accessed and responded to at anytime. More often than not, instructors and students never met face to face, and if real time conversation was necessary, the phone was the tool. This was the black and white of the online learning course as distance learning course. But now the online course can contain all kinds of gradations of gray, thanks to the hybrid, as can the traditional classroom course that makes use of the technology.

The Hybrid

The hybrid course mixes components of the traditional and the online. As more and more educators experimented with computer and Internet technologies in education, they recognized that the Internet offered extensive readily-available resources, and alternative ways to present those resources to appeal to different learning styles; they discovered additional ways to communicate with their students, to manage a class, to help students become actively involved with each other and the materials available to them. All of this was deemed good, but some instructors felt that their particular disciplines, the activities that had to occur in specific lessons, and their own teaching styles necessitated a face-to-face component. Gone, then, were the worries about students cheating in online exams, feeling alienated and disconnected from the rest of the class, and being unable to engage in hands-on, monitored learning activities.

Instructors of the hybrid may do any of the following and more:

Ten Reasons to Take an Online Course

1. **Anytime/Anywhere Learning:** I need to be able to check into class wherever I am and whenever I need to.
2. **Family and Work Obligations:** I need to accommodate my work and family schedules; otherwise, I would not be able to pursue my education goals.
3. **Courses/Degree Programs Unavailable Locally:** None of the schools in my area offer on-campus the courses or degree programs I need/want.
4. **Career Advancement:** In order to advance in my career, I need to increase my skills and knowledge while at the same time maintaining the same level of performance in the job I have now.
5. **Preparing for the Work Place:** Computer and Internet technologies are staples of the workplace. An online class will help me become more adept at using these technologies.
6. **On-campus Scheduling Conflict:** Some of my required courses are scheduled on-campus at the same time, but there are online offerings of these same courses available, which will free up my schedule.
7. **Racial and Gender Biases in the Classroom:** I want to feel that my work is being judged solely by its own merit. The physical anonymity of the online classroom can inhibit race and gender biases.
8. **Physical Challenges:** I find it difficult to attend class on-campus because of personal, physical challenges.
9. **Personal Learning Style:** I find contributing to a class to be much more comfortable when I have time for reflection before responding to questions and don't feel "put on the spot" in front of an entire classroom of people.
10. **Innovations in Classroom Teaching:** I am looking for a collaborative learning experience beyond the traditional lecture hall that will allow me to take an active part in my own learning and give me the skills that I need to continuing learning long after class time is over.

- Post all course information on a web page
- Post lecture notes, student reminders, assignments, test reviews, student work samples
- Post discussion questions prior to classroom discussion
- Post student grades (private and secured for each student) online with feedback
- Supply links to primary and secondary resources on the World Wide Web
- Require group work online
- Lecture online through technologies such as Horizon Live, which allows for real-time audio, video, chatroom, and PowerPoint presentations
- Invite guest experts to participate in online discussions
- Hold office hours online
- Deliver online exams
- Use Internet resources to conduct in class lectures

Ten Reasons Not to Take an Online Course

1. **Online classes are easier than on-campus classes:** Online classes are no easier or harder than on-campus classes. The workload depends upon the individual instructor. However, online learning does demand independence and self-motivation, traits not typical of every student.
2. **There's no instructor to bug me:** Adequate interaction with online students is a number one concern for most online instructors. Online technology actually makes it easier for instructors to maintain close relationships with all of their students.
3. **I like playing games on CDs:** Online education is still in its infancy. Instructors are still learning how to create interactive online courses that go beyond text posted on a web page. Neither students nor instructors have the money or the resources to access the kinds of technologies needed to create the highly hands-on interface of the CD Rom game.
4. **I can do what I want whenever:** Communities formed around common learning goals have been found to be most effective in helping students to achieve those goals. Most online instructors have course schedules with assignment and assessment due dates.
5. **I won't have to do a lot of work:** Many online students are surprised at the workload of an online class. Most online courses expect all students to engage in discussion and group work and complete individual assignments.
6. **Online courses aren't recognized as having the same value as on-campus courses:** Online courses undergo the same accreditation and collegial scrutiny that traditional courses undergo. Research that looks at identical courses being taught online and in the traditional classroom continues to indicate that learning outcomes for the online student are equivalent to the learning outcomes for the traditional student.
7. **The technology is too much for me to learn:** Commercial software programs that focus on ease of use have become the mainstay of the academic online world. Most programs share the same kinds of communication and assessment tools that make the technology "transparent" to the student.
8. **I dislike working with other students:** Online classes are distinct from distance learning correspondence courses of yonder years because there is so much emphasis on student participation. The online class is not a private tutorial between instructor and student. It is a highly interactive class of student exchanges and collaborations.
9. **I'm too disorganized to get to class:** If you're disorganized, unmotivated, and dependent upon teacher-interference, don't even go online. You're only asking for sure failure!
10. **I want to try out my new computer:** Despite the "transparency" of new technologies, the online classroom is not for the faint-hearted nor the computer "debutant." Software incompatibilities, download disasters, and just general "computer attitude" can complicate the life of the online student. It's best to learn the basic functions of your computer and explore its relationship to the Internet before signing up for an online course.

Higher education institutions report that helping faculty to implement information technology into their teaching is their “greatest technological challenge.”⁹ The pressure to do so comes out of the growing recognition that technology in education holds much promise for all involved.⁹ This is true whether it is for the non-traditional adult student in need of the pure distance learning course or the traditional 18-22 year old in the dorm on campus. An increasing number of institutions, both public and private, are requiring on-campus students to have desktops or laptops, modems, and Internet connections so that their traditional classroom teachers can use the technologies of the Internet to benefit their students. This is not as shocking a requirement as it may sound. More and more students have computers on campus. It has been reported recently that 71.5% of all students in 2001 owned computers on-campus. Twenty-two % in private institutions and about 20% in two- and four-year public institutions owned laptops.¹⁰ In some cases, the cost of a laptop or desktop is figured into overall tuition fees and incoming freshman are “given” computers by the institution.

1.3 Who's Doing It?

The growth of online education in the past few years has been phenomenal. The U.S. Department of Education cited 70% growth in distance education offerings from higher education institutions between 1997 and 1998¹¹ and this growth has been attributed to “asynchronous computer-based technology (primarily over the Internet) rather than two-way or one-way video.”⁵ In another survey in 1998, 1680 institutions attested to offering about 54,000 online-education courses with 1.6 million students enrolled. At that same time, another 20% of institutions surveyed indicated they would be offering distance-education programs in the next three years.⁸

Though the data of these studies is a couple of years old, they indicate the kind of fervor that has been taking place in the realm of online technology-enhanced instruction, bringing truth to the 1999 prediction that “Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail usage look like a rounding error.”¹³ But who actually are these online students?

The Non-Traditional and the Life-Long Learner

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 14-70 million adults are enrolled in some type of continuing education, whether that is degree-seeking adults or life-long learners looking to enhance their lives.¹¹ Given the anywhere/anytime nature of the online environment, it is only natural that many of these adults who have responsibilities of job and family would make up the majority of online students. A study done by eCollege, an online learning software vendor, across its 230 institution client body,

mirrors the general consensus on the demographics of online students. They tend to be adults—25 years (71%) with a mean age of 32 years; predominately female (64%), employed (75%); and working more than 30 hours per week (68%).¹⁴ A recent study done by the American Association of University Women echoed these demographics, citing 60% of online students as women over the age of 25. Most of these women had the same reasons and aspirations for attending class that the traditional student on-campus had: obtaining a degree.¹⁵ Universities are also recognizing the potential of the Internet for attracting their graduates back to programs and course offerings and the number of alumni online is growing. These offerings can appeal to the degree or non-degree seeking adult student. Possible offerings, outside of the full-length course, extend from videotaped classroom lectures to online tutorials to electronic discussion groups.¹⁶

But the demographics are shifting. Presidential initiatives such as Clinton's "Getting America's Students Ready for the 21st Century: Meeting the Technology Literacy challenge," and Bush's "No Child Left Behind" push for equal access to education and technology on all levels and all fronts. As a result, K-12 institutions are implementing technology into their curriculum and offering students opportunities to learn with computer and Internet technology. Traditional college-age students, graduating from these kinds of programs, are expecting the same kinds of opportunities at institutions for higher education. The National Education Association reports an emerging balance between traditional and non-traditional students in the online classroom.¹⁷ and many institutions continue to worry that online courses will cannibalize on-campus courses as more and more of the dorm students recognize the time flexibility of online courses and the potential to earn more credit hours per semester because seat-time in the traditional classroom can be converted to study and work time online.

The Employee

Cost-realities, geographical-realities, and temporal-realities have all contributed to the surge in online corporate training. It is estimated that technology-assisted training will represent half of all training methods by the year 2002.¹⁸ In 1997, Internet-based training accounted for \$197 million dollars, and this figure is expected to reach \$5.5 billion in 2002 because of its effectiveness and flexibility.¹⁹ Globe-spanning industries recognize not only the cost benefits of offering training online, but its time-efficiency for training world-wide employees on new product releases and modifications. There is also the recognition by corporations that increased technology use in the workplace demands increased technology skills and knowledge. Many online students in the industrial world are known as "knowledge workers," employees who possess the ability to continually learn and grow within a dynamic environment. Online technology becomes the most feasible means for educating these individuals as they continue to work full-time.