The Online Learning Environment

Let's compare how you would normally participate in a classroom setting and how you might accomplish the same activities in an online learning environment – this will help you decide if online learning is for you.

Classroom Environment	On-line Learning Environment
Attend class to keep abreast of course information	Read course module notes Read e-mail messages and postings to discussion area Read course outline and review calendar information
Research and read specific information	Research and read specific information through the Internet
Participate in discussions	Participate in discussions: read, respond and post to discussion area or chat room
Collaborate with other students	Collaborate with other students: read, respond and post messages via e-mail, discussion topic, chat room, and/or whiteboard
Participate in role plays and case studies	Participate: read, respond and post messages via e-mail and/or discussion topic
Ask questions	Ask questions: send e-mail and/or post question in discussion area
Hand in assignments	Submit assignments via e-mail or the discussion topic with or without attachments
Complete quizzes and exams	Complete online self tests
Network / socialize with classmates	Network and socialize with classmates: read, respond and post messages via e-mail and/or discussion topic

The exciting thing about the online environment is that you can still do many of the usual 'classroom' activities - and at a place that is convenient for you.

On-line learning activities:

Let's explore in more detail how you might complete learning activities online.

1. **Attend class**

The online learning environment is primarily an *asynchronous* environment – that is, you don't have to log on to the computer at exactly the same time as your instructor or classmates in order to attend class. You will however, have specific deadlines to meet for the reading assignments and learning activities. How do you attend an on-line class? It is suggested that you access the course on a daily basis in order to read e-mail messages, read and respond to postings, and keep up with course information. There is an online learning tool in this course that tracks the number of postings you have read and posted. It also keeps a record of the pages you visited while accessing the course. This information is valuable for the instructor and student help in case you experience any difficulties during the course.

2. **Read and research specific information**

In an online course, some course content is provided within the course. You have the option of reading this information while online, or printing the information and reading it later. Additional information may also be provided to you in the form of links to other valuable web sites, articles or your textbook. You may also be asked to research additional web sites on your own.

Just as in a face-to-face classroom setting, your comprehension of information will be assessed. Assessment may be accomplished through the use of discussion questions, self-tests, case studies, role plays, etc.

3. **Participate in discussions**

In a classroom setting, the instructor may often pose a question. In many cases, the question leads to a serious discussion and/or debate with other students. This occurs in the online classroom through the use of discussion topics in the discussion area. One of the best features of an online discussion is that you don't have to be present at exactly the same time in order to communicate with other members of this course.

The online discussion environment uses topics and threads to organize conversations. A linked series of comments is called a discussion thread and each topic can contain several threads. You may be expected to submit assignments, post a brief biography, and collaborate with group members in the appropriate group discussion topic. When an activity requires you to use a topic, the directions will let you know which discussion topic to use.

4. **Collaborate with other students**

There is so much information on the Internet and so little time to read everything! Fortunately, online learning gives you an opportunity to share your discoveries with others, and learn from them. There will be times when you may need to work in small groups. Each member of the group will research and read specific information and share this with the other group members. The instructor may assign you to a specific group however, it is up to your group to determine how it will work on the assignment.

Discussion topics are one way to collaborate online . Most topics are public meaning that all class members can see what you have posted and have an opportunity to respond to your posting. Your instructor may also set up private topics. These topics will be used for collaborating with other students during small group activities and will be limited to only those members assigned to that group. Any postings made to this private topic will only be seen by those three group members unless the instructor has specified that a posting will be made available to all.

You can also use e-mail to collaborate. Online courses have their own e-mail package built right in so that only the students enrolled in the course can send and receive an e-mail message.

5. **Participate in role plays and case studies**

Role plays and case studies may be used in online courses in order to provide you with real-life problems. Often, the discussion forum will be used to enable you solve these problems individually and with other classmates.

6. **Ask questions**

In a classroom setting, the instructor usually knows when you are confused or frustrated simply by your body language. In the online environment, the instructor cannot see this type of body language. This means that you must communicate when you don't understand! Use the e-mail within the course to send questions to your instructor or post your question in the discussion area for all to see.

You can also ask other classmates questions just as you would in a classroom setting. Your classmates come with a wealth of knowledge from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise. Use the discussion topic to post a question for all to see or send a private email to a specific individual. Either way, communication is key!

7. **Network / socialize with other classmates**

In a classroom setting, classmates typically meet before or after class for a cup of coffee and a bit of socializing. This can still occur in the online environment using e-mail, the discussion area or chat rooms. Everyone likes know a bit about the people they are studying with. One of your first activities may be to post a profile of yourself which includes things such as your work experience. Sharing personal profiles makes the class more enjoyable and enables you to feel more connected while learning at a distance.