

Top 10 Tips for Navigating Online Courses

As you may know, the University of Iowa has decided to move to all classes to online formats for the two weeks following Spring Break (March 23rd-April 3rd) due to COVID-19 related concerns. While you may have taken an online course previously, these modifications to the in-person format may be much different than the more structured styles students are typically accustomed to with traditional online courses. To help ease this transition, here are 10 tips to help you succeed in the virtual class format moving forward.

- 1. Evaluate and prepare for technical requirements.** It is likely that your online course will largely be administered through tele-conferencing technology and your course ICON site. This means that you will more than likely need some form of computer or tablet to complete work and stay up to date. Experienced students in online courses recommend taking time to get acquainted with the platforms and the means through which you will need to complete work and meet requirements. Having a reliable internet connection and operating system is crucial to staying on top of deadlines. If you do not have access to these resources, be sure to reach out to your professors as soon as possible.
- 2. Manage your time.** Students find that planning ahead and staying on track are the hardest aspects of online courses. At the beginning of the online change for each course, write down all important dates in your planner if you have not already done so (focus on finding potential new assignments & responsibilities or changes to the syllabus due to the change to the online format).
- 3. Make time in your schedule.** If you are not required to “attend” class at a specific time while it’s being held virtually, create time in your planner that is exclusively dedicated to working on each of your classes (differentiating between lectures, readings, and assignments for each course). You should be spending as much time working on your virtual course as you do when it’s offered in person. For example, if you take a 3-semester hour course, you should devote 3-4 hours each week to learning the material, and about 5-6 hours each week studying and committing the material to memory.
- 4. Finding your pace and self-responsibility.** The most successful students in online courses typically realize that not having an instructor in person means that they must be responsible and accountable on their own regarding pace of work and other responsibilities. Keeping proper pace with assignments and exam deadlines will provide you with enough time during this period to complete required work with the same level of attentiveness and quality that you typically would, while also providing enough time to ask questions and get help if needed.
- 5. Consider your personal learning style.** Online courses require a lot of reading and listening to fully grasp the material as much of the learning will now be self-managed. If you are someone who can only focus when it’s quiet, consider working in a personal space or isolated location that may be different from your normal public study spaces or other quiet places away from campus.

- 6. Actively Participate.** Be sure you are staying engaged in your courses and participating as instructed. Also, be sure to complete all assignments in a timely manner and keep up with the relevant materials and instructions from professors as the transition is made. Try to make the format as engaging and interactive as an in-person class if possible.
- 7. Check Online Testing Options.** Double check the expectations of test taking during this period. If you can use your notes, treat the exam as a closed book exam and prepare well in advance whether it is open note or a proctored exam. Also, try to identify a secure internet connection before the exam and communicate with instructors if you need accommodations or technical support.
- 8. Identify professor expectations.** Instructors will expect that you fully participate in the course and that you remain courteous and considerate towards your classmates. Emails, discussion board posts, and assignments should be appropriate, relevant, and demonstrate your knowledge of the material as you would in any typical online or in-person course format. While this will likely be a different experience and will vary across courses, be sure to avoid inappropriate comments, cyber bullying, and plagiarism like you would in the course normally.
- 9. Communicate with the professor.** If you feel that you are struggling with the material or managing the course load during the transition period, reach out to your professor. They will be able to offer you support and guidance and potentially accommodate and support you in any challenges you may be having. It is also important to communicate concerns clearly as soon as they occur to ensure you can keep up with requirements and can receive appropriate help.
- 10. Find a 'course connection' to help ease the transition.** This transition period may be a difficult process, especially changing from the in-person format, so it is important to ensure that you are on top of all updated and important information for your courses. An effective way to do this is by establishing a connection with another student in the course and exchanging contact information, so that you have a way to share updates and make sure you are both meeting deadlines and expectations while not in physical classes. It is also crucial that you check for updates on email and ICON regularly to ensure that you are not missing any important information regarding the online format and transition overall.

While we are moving to online courses, it is also critical to plan for future developments and the return to in-person coursework starting April 6th. Utilizing these tips and planning for the transition back to physical class meetings will ensure you are ahead of the game and prepared for success during this temporary shift. If you have any questions or would like additional support, please contact tutoriowa@uiowa.edu.