



Important Information for On-line Students.

This year, to help with the learning process, we are asking all students to answer the questions in this document, honestly, and to spend a few hours touring, “WebCT Learners Guide”. The “WebCT Learners Guide” will help you become familiar with WebCT and help us with the registration process.

Guidelines for Students

You may be wondering what to expect from a web-based class. Online classes are not all that different from regular classes. You'll have an instructor and classmates, and will interact with them during the semester. You'll have homework and participate in class activities. In some ways, the experience will seem very familiar to you.

Still, online classes are different from regular classes in some important ways. Communication with your instructor and other students will take place online, not in person. Without an instructor reminding you what is due in class each week, you'll have more responsibility for your own learning. You will need basic computing skills and convenient access to the Internet.

The skills you need most to be a successful online learner are the same ones you use in any class: preparation, organization and self-discipline. The difference is in how you apply them. This handout is designed to help you get the most out of your class by suggesting ways to apply existing skills and develop new ones.

As a new online learner, there are things you can do to make yours a successful, rewarding experience. Some are common sense, like being prepared and getting your work done on time, while others are less intuitive but important. The following tips, based on advice from experienced online instructors and students, should help you get the most out of your online learning experience.

Spend some time at your computer and on the Internet everyday, getting comfortable with your equipment and surroundings. Practice your computing skills until you feel confident that you can complete class assignments. Try uploading and downloading files, and exchanging documents via email.

Read the syllabus and other course materials carefully. What are the class requirements? When are assignments due and in what form? How can you contact the instructor and your classmates? How can you get help if you need it? Mark important dates on your calendar.

Download and install software that you need for class early, then practice using it. Software programs take time to learn, and the time is not the night before an assignment is due.

Set aside a significant amount of time each week for class work. Distance education classes require as much time and effort as instructor-led classes. Develop a schedule and stick to it. Without the structure of weekly class meetings, you may be tempted to put off class work until the last minute. Instead, you should give yourself extra time to do your work, because technology can slow down the process.

Without an instructor and fellow students nearby to offer help and support, you'll be relying on yourself more than ever. One way is to use the resources that are available to you, including online help, tutorials, manuals and the Internet. Another is to monitor your own progress by knowing where you are in the course; which assignments have you completed? Which lay ahead?

One way to be a successful online learner is to develop good habits early. Email will be your main form of communication during the semester, so get into the habit of checking it at least once a day. This is particularly important if you're working on a group project, where timely communication is essential. Another good practice is to send copies of all project-related mail to the whole group, so that everyone knows what is going on.

Online classes require some communication with the instructor and fellow students for assignments and class activities. But without regular face-to-face meetings, it's hard to develop personal relationships. In fact, it's easy to get isolated and feel lonely. Get to know your instructor and classmates by sending email, participating in discussions, and joining chat rooms. You'll find that just like in regular classes, people are your greatest resource. They can give you help, advice and support when you need it, and help get you through the rough spots. You'll also have a richer, more rewarding learning experience if you reach out.

Online classes require technology skills, which develop over time. You may, for example, need to make a Table of Contents using Microsoft Word. It seems like a simple task, until you try to do it. Many frustrating hours go by and you're still not done.

If you're stuck or find yourself spending too much time trying to figure something out, ask for help! There's no such thing as a stupid question. It's a lot better to ask for help than to waste hours searching for the answer. When you do ask for help, provide as much detail as possible. Include a description of the problem, error messages, your platform or operating system, browser and version, etc. Keep in mind that the instructor has other students who need help, too, so don't expect an immediate response.

Some people drop out of distance education classes because they feel disconnected and lonely. They don't reach out when they need someone to talk to, feel frustrated or need help. They forget that while they don't meet their instructors or classmates face-to-face, they belong to a group. Make yours a successful learning experience by "talking" to your instructor and your peers. Remember that you are not alone. If you're struggling with an assignment or have a problem, you can be sure that someone else is, too. Communicate! You'll be glad that you did.

Technology is not all that we would all hope. Servers go down, computers crash, programs freeze and work may be lost. That's why it's not a good idea to put things off until the last minute. Instead, expect and plan for glitches and delays by starting assignments early, backing up your work regularly and making contingency plans for chats or online exams.

Before you register for an online class, be sure you're up to the challenge. How are your technology skills? Are you a self-starter, or do you need people around to feel motivated? Be realistic about what you can and can't do. You may need to develop new or hone existing skills, take a class or do some reading before you take an online class. Our self-assessment quiz will help you decide if you are ready to become an online learner.

Will On-line Learning Work For Me?

1. Do you feel that high quality learning can take place without having face to face interaction?
2. Can you dedicate 4 to 6 hours a week (anytime during the day or night) to participate in the learning process?
3. Are you self-motivated and a self-disciplined person?
4. Do you enjoy reading?
5. Do you set goals for yourself?
6. Do you procrastinate in completing assignments and studying for tests?
7. Do you think increased learning will take place through sharing your work, life and educational experiences as part of the learning process?
8. Are you comfortable with e-mail, computers and new technologies?
9. Typing is not an overwhelming ordeal for me?
10. Do you have a strong need to take this course in an on-line environment?

*If you answered yes to six or more of these questions, then there is a good chance that you will be successful in our on-line learning program.

What Makes A Successful On-line Student?

1. **Be open minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process.**

Introverts as well as extroverts find that the online process requires them to **utilize their experiences**. This forum for communication **eliminates the visual barriers** that hinder some individuals in expressing themselves. In addition, the student is given time to reflect on the information before responding. The online environment should be open and friendly.

2. **Be able to communicate through writing.**

In the Virtual Classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing. Many students have limited writing abilities, which should be addressed before or as part of the online experience. This may require remedial efforts on the part of the student.

3. **Be Self-motivated and self-disciplined.**

With the freedom and flexibility of the online environment comes responsibility. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the flow of the process.

4. **Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.**

Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether students are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the online paradigm. If a student is experiencing difficulty on any level (either with the technology or with the course content), he or she must communicate this immediately. Otherwise the instructor will never know what is wrong.

5. **Be willing and able to commit to 4 to 15 hours per week per course.**

Online is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many students will say it requires much more time and commitment.

6. **Be able to meet the minimum requirements for the program.**

The requirements for online are no less than that of any other quality educational program. Successful students will view online as a convenient way to receive their education – not an easier way.

7. **Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process.**

The learning process requires the student to make decisions based on facts as well as experience. Assimilating information and executing the right decisions require critical thought; case analysis does this very effectively.

8. **Have access to a computer and a modem.**

The communication medium is a computer, phone line, and modem; the student must have access to the necessary equipment.

9. **Be able to think ideas through before responding.**

Meaningful and quality input into the virtual classroom is an essential part of the learning process. Time is given in the process to allow for the careful consideration of responses. The testing and challenging of ideas is encouraged; you will not always be right, just be prepared to accept a challenge.

10. **Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom.**

If the student feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, they may be more comfortable in the traditional classroom. Online is not for everybody. This should be made known. An online student is expected to:

- Participate in the virtual classroom 5-7 days a week
- Be able to work with others in completing projects
- Be able to use the technology properly
- Be able to meet the minimum standards as set forth by the institution
- Be able to complete assignments on time
- Enjoy communicating in writing.

The online learning process is normally accelerated and requires **commitment** on the student's part. Staying up with the class and completing all work on time is vital. Once a student gets behind, it is almost impossible to catch up. Basically, the student needs to want to be there, and needs to want the experience. The teacher may have to contact students personally to offer assistance and remind the student of the need to keep up.

You Are Ready To Begin:

Steps:

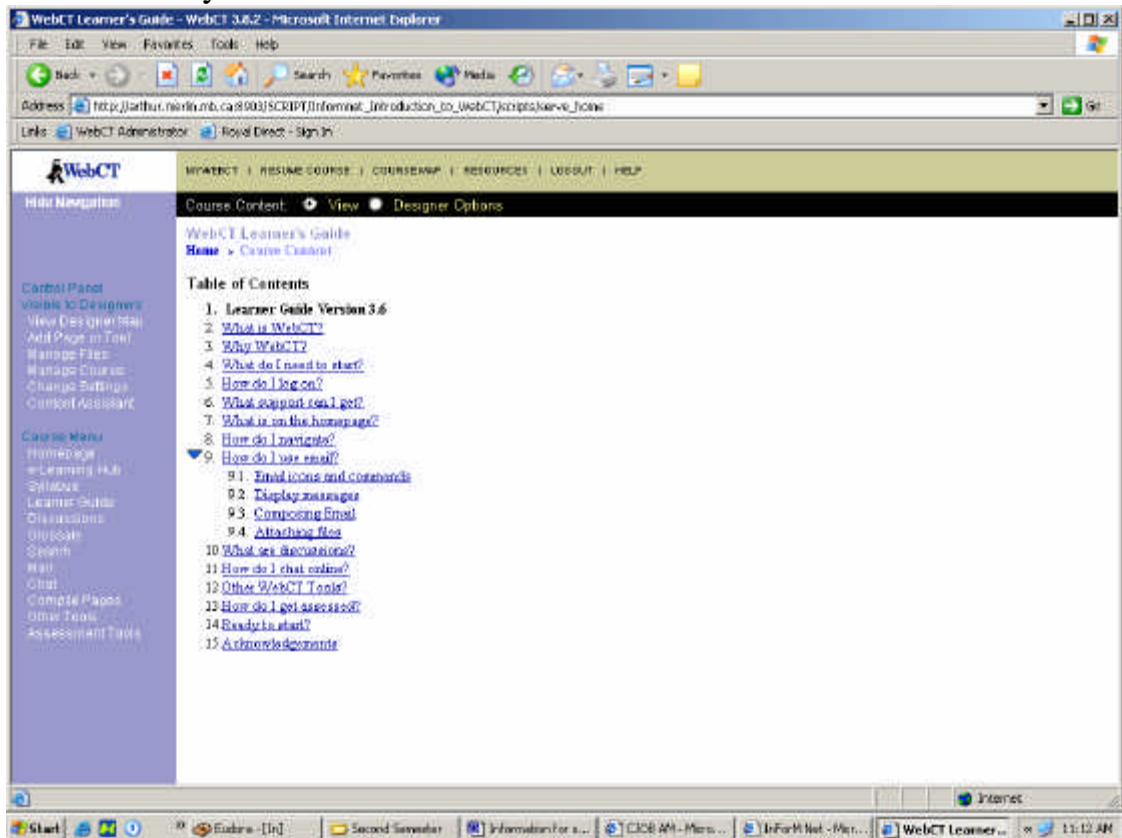
1. Visit the InForm Net website:
<http://www.informnet.mb.ca>
2. Browse the InForm Net Homepage; get familiar with all of the information.
3. How to use your assigned user name and password.
4. Select Login.
5. Log in to myWebCT.
6. Enter your user name and password.

7. Review the Course Tools (Course Content, Calendar, Bulletin Board, E-mail and Help)
8. Select Course Content Icon:



The following is a picture of a typical course content page.

The course content page is where you will spend the majority of your time in an on-line course. This page includes the content of your course, homework assignments, due dates and test information. You may find that your teacher has released the entire content of your course, or may have, chosen to release the material one unit at a time. Whichever the case, please review this page and know what you have to do to be successful in your on-line course.



10. Visit “Calendar of Course Events” daily to receive reminders of unit deadlines.

11. The “Bulletin Board” is a location where students will have threaded asynchronous discussions throughout the course.

12. “Private Mail” is webCT’s very own email system.

13. Visit the “Help” section of webCT if you have any questions about tools in the course. Don’t be afraid to ask your instructor for assistance as well.

If you have any questions, please reply to this address: bdugray@peminatrails.ca

Good Luck!

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