

Tips for Success in Independent Study Courses

Developing Good Reading Skills

In an online independent study course, you'll do lots of reading.

One thing that will help you read successfully is to have a strategy. Part of your strategy should be to have on hand the tools you may need, such as pencils, highlighters, sticky tabs, and a dictionary.

Use these tools effectively.

- Don't highlight everything in your textbook or other reading material. Rather, highlight items that you find particularly interesting, provocative, or argumentative, or that you or your instructor think are important.
- Use sticky tabs to mark pages that have important information.
- You cannot highlight the online material. However, you can take notes on the online material and highlight important points in your notes.

Once you have the tools you'll need, divide the reading process into three steps:

1. Pre-read the material.
2. Read the material thoroughly.
3. Review and study the material.

Pre-Read the Material

Before you begin pre-reading, set a goal for your study session. For example, "I'm going to spend 30 minutes reading and reviewing the first 10 pages of my reading, paying special attention to the lesson objectives."

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

During the pre-reading phase, be sure to pre-read the online objectives and discussion 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 the Material More Thoroughly

As you read the material more thoroughly, several techniques work no matter what you are reading:

- 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 (ah-ha moments).
- Highlight important 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 the Material

Of course, you're going to want to review and study the material, but don't try to do everything all at one time.

- As you study, use the online objectives to remind yourself what the learning objectives are.
- If you want to remember material better, it's more important to review it often than to spend a lot of time reviewing it. Review material periodically throughout the course. Periodic review helps you build your knowledge and eliminates the need to cram before exams.
- If you study with a friend, you can discuss the material and ask one another questions.

Time Management

An online independent education course takes time to complete. You'll get the best results if you begin your course work immediately after registering and then proceed at a steady pace rather than in stops and starts.

Manage your time carefully by following these tips:

- Determine when you need to complete your course.
- Work backwards from there, identifying the dates by which you need to turn in assignments and take exams to meet your goal. Keep in mind that you must complete all of your course work (including exams) at least three weeks before you need your final grade.
- Set aside specified days and times to work on your course. 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.
- If you get off schedule, don't panic! Make adjustments that will enable you to get back on track.

Study Habits

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 independent education courses, where no one's standing in front of you urging you on—requires extra discipline.

Where to Study

If you want to improve your concentration and efficiency as a student, develop a place to study that is just that—a place where you go to work on academics.

- Find a comfortable place to do your work that has as few distractions as possible.
- Tool-up the environment with all your study needs.
- Keep your work area neat and pleasant looking.
- If you like to listen to music while studying, choose a mellow CD.
- Avoid relaxing while working. Create a work atmosphere.

How to Study

The following study tips will help you whether you're taking a distance education course or a traditional course.

- 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.
- As you study a lesson, look for its main points. List them or arrange them in an outline or chart. You'll soon find yourself using the main points as hooks upon which to hang details.
- Ask yourself questions, review your notes regularly, and discuss key concepts with your instructor, friends, and family.

Memory

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 is not the time to be cramming unlearned material. It is 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.

Academic Honesty

We realize the temptation to cheat while taking a distance education course may be especially great; after all, a teacher isn't there to watch you while you complete your work. However, we fully expect you to complete all course work honestly. This means avoiding both cheating and plagiarism.

Cheating involves submitting work on an assignment or exam that is not your own. Cheating includes

- copying someone else's work.
- allowing someone else to copy your work.
- having someone else complete your work for you.
- using unauthorized material to help you complete your work.

Plagiarism is a special kind of cheating in which you basically steal someone else's work and present it as your own. If you use the ideas, words, or statements of another person or source to support your ideas, you must always give credit to the person or source.

If a course instructor detects cheating or plagiarism, the instructor may recommend—depending on the severity of the cheating or plagiarism—that you receive

- a reduced grade for the assignment or exam.
- no credit for the assignment or exam.
- a reduced grade for the entire course.
- a failing grade for the entire course (forfeiting all course fees).

For more information, please see the Indiana University Code of Conduct at <http://www.indiana.edu/~code/>.

Be fair to yourself and other students: avoid the temptation to cheat. Do your own work and give credit to your sources of information.

Building a Sense of Belonging

Remember that you are not alone when you take an Indiana University distance education course! Your instructors and the staff are eager to see you succeed.

If you have questions or need help, be sure to ask.