

# Pr Pointers

by Kappa Delta Pi

“There are two fundamental equalizers in life—the Internet and education.”

*John Chambers  
CEO, Cisco Systems*

## 3 Reasons for Online Learning.

1. *Flexibility*
2. *Increased retention*
3. *New ideas*

### Online Course Checklist

- Clear expectations
- Instructor availability
- Vital learning community
- Array of resources

### Resources

#### [www.academicinfo.net](http://www.academicinfo.net)

AcademicInfo is an online education resource center with extensive subject guides and distance learning information that provides independent and free information.

#### [www.pbs.org/teacherline](http://www.pbs.org/teacherline)

PBS TeacherLine provides online professional development for PreK–12 educators, including 130 graduate-level courses.

[WWW.KDP.ORG](http://WWW.KDP.ORG)

For Today's Teacher

# You Don't Have to Be High-Tech to Learn Online



By Pat Milner

*Are you fighting the ongoing battle to earn professional development points or CEUs amid a way-too-busy schedule? Online courses may be your answer in convenience and flexibility. But buyer beware: Choose online courses structured for ease of use and based on standards that boost student achievement.*

### Native or Immigrant?

Did you grow up with the Internet, iPods, and cell phones? Then you're a digital native (Rutherford 2005). Online learning probably seems natural to you.

Does college registration evoke images of you standing in line for hours, running from table to table before classes closed? If so, you are a digital immigrant, adapting technology into your information-gathering process. But never fear! Though your background and comfort level may affect your success in some online learning environments, the best courses make adapting easy.

“There's little difference between digital natives and non-natives in course success, according to Joanna Ray, an online course facilitator for [PBS TeacherLine](http://PBS TeacherLine). “If they have concerns up front, the stress is alleviated right away when they go online and see the structure and ease of use.” Not convinced? Really, this is all it takes to succeed at online learning:

- know how to browse the Internet;
- be able to use a word-processing program;
- have an active e-mail address; and
- possess a willingness to learn something new.

When you have those prerequisites in place, you are ready. So where do you start?

### Choosing Online Courses

Many studies have been conducted to determine what enhances the online learning experience. While a certain amount of luck is involved in getting the right assemblage of course content, skilled instructor, and tools, a few aspects can upgrade the experience from simply covering required material to providing a truly beneficial experience. To ensure success and prevent disappointment, prospective online students should do a little investigation before signing up. Consider asking the provider, instructor, or a previous learner about the following items:

- **Grading and assignment deadlines:** Are expectations clear? What is the grading rubric or standard? What happens if a virus eats your homework and redoing it puts you past the deadline?
- **Availability of the instructor:** How do you contact the instructor—via e-mail, text, or even a Tweet? How quickly can you expect a response?
- **Vibrancy of the learning community:** How do learners interact and how often? Group discussions and assignments are a great way to stimulate thought.
- **Array of resources:** How varied are the assignments? You do not want to be a victim of death by PowerPoint®. A rich variety of videos, articles, and mixed media helps every type of learner. (By the way, some courses are self-contained—everything online with no additional costs in books or materials.)



## Online Advantages

According to a study by Mary Rose Grant and Heather R. Thornton (2007), students believe that online courses allow more interaction with the instructor than face-to-face courses. More interaction contributes to better retention and application of what's learned. Additionally, students get to know one another through their participation on a discussion board, a sometimes graded element that also builds community. Students ask questions, share ideas, and provide feedback to one another. "Giving positive feedback—online and through telephone calls—builds trust and confidence," Ray said about her online courses.

Through online courses and interaction, students gain "exposure to different learning styles, points of view, and perspectives that increase student versatility and ability to adapt to real-world situations" (Grant and Thornton 2007).

The flexibility of online learning also "allows students to access the learning environment when they are ready and mentally present to do so" (Grant and Thornton 2007). Retention increases because of the additional time needed for processing and responding to course content.

## Staying on Track

Don't underestimate the work required. Some people equate online and easy. Not so, especially for graduate courses. Because you proceed at your own pace, it can be easy to get behind on course work and not fully comprehend content covered in discussions. Staying on track is important to getting the most out of online courses and to balancing studies with working. So be sure to keep up with the reading and assignments.

## Credit Where It's Due

Choose wisely to get the credit hours you need when you take online courses. Many non-university classes, such as PBS TeacherLine courses, qualify for graduate credit at colleges and universities. Some schools even offer these courses through their programs. For example, when the School of Education at Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana, lost an instructor and could not find a substitute on short notice, it called on TeacherLine. Since then it has added additional TeacherLine courses for credit.

## References

- Grant, M. R., and H. R. Thornton. 2007. Best practices in undergraduate adult-centered online learning: mechanisms for course design and delivery. *Journal of online Learning and Teaching*. 3(4).
- Rutherford, P. 2005. *The 21st century mentor's handbook: Creating a culture for learning*. Alexandria, VA: Just ASK Publications.

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**Pat Milner** is the marketing ambassador for PBS TeacherLine in Indiana. TeacherLine offers professional development courses online to individual PreK–12 teachers and school districts. Certified instructors lead more than 130 standards-based courses. For more information, visit [www.pbs.org/teacherline](http://www.pbs.org/teacherline).

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