Introduction to the Text: *E-Learning Companion*

Catalog of Contents: Common Obstacles to Success in Online Coursework

Success in the traditional classroom doesn't always translate into success when college courses require the use of online technology. There are barriers that often prevent normally high achieving students in the classroom from achieving the same levels of success when online technologies replace the traditional lecture hall. Being aware of these barriers is the first step in overcoming them and being successful.

Below are several common obstacles that many students must overcome on their path success in online coursework. Despite all of these thousands of students each semester successfully supplement their college courses with online coursework. The challenge for you will be adapting previously mastered learning skills, and developing new study habits, to ensure that you can also overcome these obstacles and be successful in your online college coursework.

**Technical Terminology**

The rapid growth of the technology in the daily lives of people around the world has brought with it a host of new vocabulary that each of us must know in order to communicate effectively with our classmates, instructors, technical support, and even our family in many cases. Overcoming the obstacle of technical terminology is more challenging for some students than others since our experiences commonly define our vocabulary. For example, if your roommate is a dance major then you will likely become familiar with many terms that are used frequently within that community of learners, likewise if you are an engineering major you will learn a certain vocabulary for communicating with other engineers.
As students, however, you will want to build a broad vocabulary of general technical terms that will allow you to communicate effectively with your fellow students and professors. Understanding the basic functionality of computer components (without being overwhelmed with the details of how the components function nor why) and discerning what online resources to use when given an assignment for class will increase the likelihood of your success in today’s college classroom.

In Chapter One, E-learning Vocabulary, we will present a discussion of common technological terms as well as their typical application in the context of online coursework. In addition, the glossary provides definitions of many terms and phrases, which are underlined throughout the companion, that you may not be familiar with as they related to online technologies.

**Utilizing the Technology**

As you have likely discovered from your own experiences, computers, cell phones, the Internet, and all technologies will inevitably stop working at the most inopportune times for your studies. It may seem like the Internet is never slow when your roommate is downloading music, but when the time comes for you to do your research for an upcoming term paper the pace of information coming into the computer is outpaced by a snail. Knowing the many features and options of your computer’s software applications can help you fully utilize the technology to achieve success in college.

Chapter Two, Technology Tips for Online Students, will focus on the how to avoid and overcome many of the common obstacles that technology can place between you and college success.
Unfortunate Choices

Too often in life we put ourselves in situations where the odds of being successful are not in our favor. In selecting college courses students regularly make unfortunate choices about which courses to take and when; often taking the most challenging courses that require the use of online technologies in the semesters where they have least time available to concentrate on their studies.

Chapter Three, Selecting the Right Opportunities for Success, provides a guide for making decisions that will balance your many academic, work, and personal commitments in order to improve the likelihood of your success in online coursework.

Lack of Planning for Success

The odds success in online coursework are dramatically improved when you have a plan that outlines your goals as well as your strategies for being successful. The challenges associated with starting each new semester in college, from creating a class schedule that doesn't overlap with other commitments to figuring out how to log into the colleges Internet portal, planning for success is typically overlooked.

Chapter Four, Preparing a Plan and Following It, will not only focus on how to quickly develop a useful plan for your success in college, but also offer many suggestions for how to follow through with your plans and achieve your goals.
Time Mismanagement

Procrastination and other mishandlings of time are common obstacles to success for online students and on-campus students alike. The temptations for time mismanagement associated with the flexibility of college course are only magnified when you are assigned online coursework, but don’t be fooled; online coursework typically requires as much, or more, time of students.

In Time Management Strategies, Chapter Five, we will discuss many strategies for how you can use long-standing time management techniques as well as today’s technologies to help you avoid time mismanagement and achieve success in your online coursework.

Online Isolation

Being outside of the traditional classroom can be an isolating experience for many students. For most of us we have had years of experience working with other students and our instructors in the conventional classroom, and we have developed many useful strategies for being successful in that environment. Yet, transferring those talents and developing positive relationships with other students in an online learning environment is not a skill that most of us have developed.

In Chapter Six, Developing Positive Online Relationships, the suggestions, tips, tools, and techniques will focus on providing you with the skills for developing a positive online relationship with your professors and classmates.

Lack of Training for Online Success

Few high schools (and only a small number of colleges or universities) adequately prepare students for being successful in college, and even fewer provide students with necessary learning skills and study habits for success in online coursework. Even though online technologies have
become more universal in their use in education, their application rarely affords students with the opportunities to build effective strategies for success in college courses that require greater critical thinking and independent learning. Yet, surmounting this obstacle and achieving success in online coursework only requires that you adapt many of study habits, as well as adopt a few new learning skills, for the online classroom.

From tips on how to avoid miscommunications to suggestions for getting the most out of online readings, Chapter Seven, Study Tips for Online Students, will provide you with a comprehensive guide to success in a quick and easy-to-access format that you can use throughout your college experience.

**Decreasing Motivation**

Maintaining your motivation throughout the semester is an obstacle for countless students taking on-campus or online courses. Although most students are typically excited about their college courses each semester, by Thanksgiving or spring break many of us are exhausted from the long hours of studying and find it difficult to remain focused on the exams and term papers that still have to be completed. The added potential for online isolation can sometimes only further undermine motivation. Through planning and practical motivational strategies, however, each of us can build skills for maintaining our motivation throughout the semester.

In Chapter Eight, Getting Motivated and Staying Motivated, we will discuss several strategies that will help you prevent a decrease in motivation throughout the semester.

**Technical Know-How**

The final obstacles to success in online coursework are the technical skills required to take advantage of many features offered by today’s computers software applications and the Internet. While most online coursework will only require minimal computer skills (such as locating a
Webpage, writing a paper in a word processing application, and sending an email), success in college comes much easier for students who know how to utilize the numerous features of software applications that can improve the quality of their college assignments and activities. Features that can help you stay organized, promptly find files, quickly identify useful online resources, share information between software applications, and many others are all common in most of today’s software applications.

In the How To Tutorials section you will find detailed guides for completing many of the tasks you will require in order to be successful in your online coursework. These guides provide step-by-step instructions for effectively using many of the features you will want to use in software applications like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, as well as the Web portals like WebCT and Blackboard. Take a few minutes to review the tutorials and then keep this book next to your computer so you can quickly finds the guides you want, when you require them. A list of the How To Tutorials, along with a summary list of useful tips, is available on the inside cover as a quick reference guide.
Introduction for Instructors

Whether it is in the traditional classroom or the online classroom, the fundamentals of success are rooted in the effective learning skills and study habits of students. From acronyms used to memorize the spectrum of color (such as, r.o.y.g.b.i.v. or h.o.m.e.s) to computer-based systems for learning complex foreign languages, in the traditional college environment these skills are used by students around the world. And yet, if students enrolled in an English course that meets on-campus and requires some additional online assignments, or if they are taking a completely online biology course, the skills that led to their success in the traditional classroom by no means guarantee their success in this new and challenging online learning environment.

The online classroom is a new learning environment for almost all students. And while many students have been very successful in the traditional classroom, the online learning environment offers an array of obstacles and opportunities that must attended to in order to be successful. E-Learning Companion is intended to provide students with the appropriate strategies and tactics for achieving success with any online coursework, whether it is for an entirely online course or for a course that simply uses online tools to supplement on-campus experiences. Throughout this companion we will address specific steps that can be taken by any student to realize their goals and gain the most from the online course experiences.

Based on our years of experience in both taking and teaching online courses, we have identified two fundamental skills that are essential to the success of online students. Each chapter in this book will guide and assist students in developing these skills as they apply to the e-learning success.

The first skill of successful students doing online coursework is to adapt old skills and habits from the traditional classroom for use in the online classroom.
Students enter the online classroom with a range of learning skills and study habits that they have developed through our years of experience in the traditional classroom. And while some of these skills and habits are not useful in achieving their goals (for example, day dreaming while giving the appearance of paying attention to the instructor), many of the skills and habits will provide students with an excellent foundation for adapting to the new characteristics of the online learning environment. In this book we will build upon these skills and habits whenever possible.

The second skill of successful online students is to develop and apply new skills and habits for the online classroom.

The learning skills and study habits necessary for success in the online classroom are not always the same as those utilized in the conventional classroom. The new technologies that offer students the opportunity to expand their education at a distance, also produces barriers to success that are dealt with by successful students through the development of new skills and habits specific for the online environment. Throughout this book we will provide guidance and directions for developing these new learning skills and study habits that can help your students to be successful in any college course that utilizes online technologies.

Success in online coursework requires the effective integration of online strategies and student success skills (see Figure 1). By combining the learning skills and study habits that are required for success in any college course with the distinctive skills required in online learning environments, your students can build the expertise to be successful in any online coursework that my be required throughout their college education.
Each day professors, instructors, multimedia developers, web-masters, and many other professionals around the world are working to develop online learning environments that can offer students the necessary tools and resources for being successful. But their work can only provide students with the opportunities for success; the real work is still on the shoulders of the learner. In order to be successful in these new learning environments, students must also work on developing the necessary learning skills and study habits that can translate into success in the online classroom. This book is intended to provide the foundation for that success through the implementation of study habits and learning skills unique to the online environment.

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\[^i\] ROYGBIV is an acronym for the colors in the visible spectrum - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet; and HOMES is an acronym for the five Great Lakes - Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior.

\[^{ii}\] Based in part on Anderson and Kanuka, 2003