

# How to Be an Effective Online Learner

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## About this Document

This document should be used with the Snap Language Livestream [How to be an effective online learner](#). For more information, see the [Snap Language Events List](#) on our website.

## Introduction: Characteristics of the effective online learner.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, many institutions discouraged students from taking online courses unless they had certain characteristics. According to the most frequently cited characteristics, effective online students

- are goal oriented,
- work well independently,
- have good time-management skills,
- have good communication skills,
- have good reading skills,
- have good writing skills,
- have a good study environment (including the setup of the physical space where they study),
- are motivated to succeed, and
- are intellectually curious.

In 2020, students were forced into online courses whether or not they lacked many or all of the above characteristics. What should you do if you lack some or all of the above characteristics? Should you throw your hands up in the air and stop your education? Actually, there are ways for you to take control and improve your effectiveness as an online learner.

The following tasks can help you sort things out. Make sure to watch the Snap Language Live Stream mentioned under “About this Document” so the tasks make more sense.



## Tasks: Evaluate Your Goals

### Task 1. Your educational goals.

**Instructions:** List the reasons you are taking or planning to take a course. Whether or not you have a choice for taking online courses, what are your goals for the future?

**Short-term goals** (*those you want to accomplish soon after your course or courses*)

**Long-term goals** (*those you want to accomplish later but that depend on completing your course or courses*)

**Note.** People are more effective when they have clear goals in mind.



## Task 2. Working toward your goals.

**Instructions:** Think about what you need to do to accomplish your short- and long-term goals.

1. How can you accomplish your goals? What do you need to do?
2. What resources do you need to accomplish them? (*If unsure, ask someone.*)
3. How does the course fit into your plan?

**Note.** People are more effective when they know what they need to do to accomplish their goals.



## Tasks: Improve Your Time Management Skills.

### Task 3. Create a study schedule.

**Instructions:** Write down the days and times you will dedicate to your course.

Be realistic. Do not budget more time than you actually have; otherwise, you will feel discouraged when you realize you cannot stick to your schedule. Likewise, do not schedule a few minutes a day for a course that requires several hours a week.

Spread your study time over several, shorter study sessions rather than scheduling one very long study session. You will learn better if you schedule, for example, four 2-hour study sessions a week rather than one 8-hour session on the weekend. Your brain needs time to absorb the information.

**Note.** It is important not only to have a clear schedule but also to stick to it!



## Tasks: Improve Your Communication Skills.

### Task 4. Create a study schedule.

**Instructions:** Are these statements true or false. See the answers and comments on the next page.

1. If you have difficulties or issues during a course, you should solve them yourself because online students must be independent. True False
2. When you ask an instructor to help you, you should send separate email messages for each of the issues you have. True False
3. To be able to assist you, online instructors prefer concise messages that list the important information rather than messages that are too short or long messages filled with irrelevant details. True False
4. Instructors are busy people so, when you send them a message, you should just write one paragraph stating the main point. True False
5. When you write to your instructor for any reason, it is best to use the same language you use when texting because it is a faster way to communicate. True False
6. When communicating in an online course, it is best to show your emotions (for example, your frustration or anger) so your instructor knows you are taking the course seriously.  
True False



## Comments to the above questions.

1. If you have difficulties or issues during a course, you should solve them yourself because online students must be independent.

**False.** Effective learners are independent, but they know when they need to ask for help. If you are unsuccessful after trying to solve difficulties or issues on your own, you should contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Do not wait until a small issue turns into a huge problem.

2. When you ask an instructor to help you, you should send separate email messages for each of the issues you have.

**False.** Whenever possible, you should send a single message listing any issues you have. You can either number them or write them in separate paragraphs so the instructor can see and address them all. This prevents you from writing several separate emails on the same day, which can be annoying.

3. To be able to assist you, online instructors prefer concise messages that list the important information rather than messages that are too short or long messages filled with irrelevant details.

**True.** Nobody likes a windbag; however, you should provide enough details in your messages so that the instructor knows what you are talking about. You should also keep in mind that instructors often teach several courses and sections so, for example, saying "I need help with the assignment" will not really mean much.

4. Instructors are busy people so, when you send them a message, you should just write one paragraph stating the main point.

**False.** A well written email should have a greeting, body (with the main content), a closing, and your signature (i.e., your name and perhaps the name of your course).

5. When you write to your instructor for any reason, it is best to use the same language you use when texting because it is a faster way to communicate.

**False.** Texting language is appropriate only for texting. If you write an email as you write a text message, you will likely give a very bad impression (that you do not care).

6. When communicating in an online course, it is best to show your emotions (for example, your frustration or anger) so your instructor knows you are taking the course seriously.

**False.** You can be honest without coming across as complaintful and rude. Sometimes you may be frustrated, but the instructor may not have control over parts of the course. You will create a better relationship with the instructor and have better results if you are polite.



## Tasks: Evaluate Your Mindset.

### Task 5. Motivation to Learn.

**Instructions:** What motivates you to learn?

1. **First**, list your motivations to learn:

2. **Next**, go over your list, **underlining your internal motivations** and **circling your external motivations**. How many are internal motivations? How many are external motivations?

**Note.** The more external motivations you have, the more effective you will be as an online learner because you do not expect others to motivate you to do the work.



## Task 6. More about your mindset and motivations.

**Instructions:** Think about the following questions. If you can, discuss them with someone else.

1. Are you intellectually curious? Why (not)?
2. What could make you more intellectually curious?
3. When you think of course instructors, do you see them as people you work with or against?
4. What is your typical reaction when you have an issue in a course? (*For example, do you complain a lot about it, ask for help, or just forget about it?*)
5. What behaviors do you think you could change in the short term to become a more effective learner **in general**? And **online**?
6. What behaviors do you think you could change in the long term to become a more effective learner **in general**? And **online**?

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