

Myths and Truths about Online Classes

Myth: Online classes are far easier than face to face classes.

Truth: Online classes, often called Distance Education, are usually considered much harder than face to face, or traditional, on-campus classes. Written work takes the place of classroom discussions or lectures. It is the responsibility of the student to read all the assignments on their own and to follow the deadlines as stated. Online classes require a great deal of self-discipline as well as the same time commitment as traditional classes.

Myth: Online classes have no deadlines.

Truth: Online classes typically have weekly deadlines, which involve a day and a time. For example, the deadline might be Sunday by midnight CST. This means your work must be submitted before that time. Students should allow more than enough time in the event that the system is slow in response time or the system is unavailable. Failure of your own computer is not an excuse for missed assignments; therefore students should have a back-up plan for turning in work, such as campus or the local library.

Myth: I can do the whole class during the last week of the semester.

Truth: This plan is sure to fail. First, you have missed deadlines and second, the quality of your work will be below standards expected of a college student. The closer to the deadline that you wait to do your work, the greater the risk of failure. Plan ahead as most classes display the entire semester from the very first day of class and allow you to work ahead.

Myth: A discussion board is the same as an online chat.

Truth: A discussion board is a formal written exercise which requires you to think about the topic and address the entire question in a clear, concise and intelligent manner. This is not the format to use informal language or chat. Discussions often carry more weight towards your final grade than any other assignments. You want your discussion to demonstrate how much you know about the topic, so using language that is “chatty” is not to your advantage as points will be lost and your grade will suffer.

Myth: It is okay to use text language on discussion boards as it is not an English class.

Truth: Text language is never appropriate in a college class, an e-mail or message to an instructor or in an assignment. Many instructors take off points for failure to follow simple rules of grammar, such as using text abbreviations like “i” instead of “I” in your discussions. Again, discussions should display you in the best positive light.

Myth: Teachers have to send reminders of due dates for online classes.

Truth: Never! It is the responsibility of the student to read and understand the syllabus, the schedule of assignments, any posts that the instructor makes – such as in an “Ask the Prof” or FAQ section or area online to which the instructor directs you for information, as well as any and all announcements. Included in the syllabus should be a policy for missing deadlines, such as a

make-up or late work policy so that you are aware of the consequences from the first day of class.

Myth: Late work and make-ups are always accepted online.

Truth: Generally, late work and/or make-ups are NOT accepted in an online class as the assignments are made available from day one and students have access to the information 24-7. It is the responsibility of students to plan their schedules in order to complete their assignments on time. Usually, instructors will make an exception if documentation can be provided that verifies the student could not participate for the entire week or session due to a serious illness, death in the immediate family, or other serious emergency of this nature, but do not count on being able to hand in anything late or being granted a make-up. Rather count on a zero tolerance policy as the standard. It is expected that you will spend a minimum of 1 hour for every credit hour in an online class just as you would a traditional class. You have an advantage that traditional students do not, you can access assignments 24-7, and therefore most instructors have a very tight policy about missed work.

Myth: There are no attendance policies in online classes.

Truth: Attendance is a requirement for financial aid purposes and for grade issues. Many instructors use participation in discussion boards as a measure of attendance and some will deduct points from your grade if you do not participate in that session. For that reason, instructors may not allow you to post early or late on weekly sessions. Instructors may require you to submit a graded assignment once a week as well. Make sure you read the entire syllabus to find out what requirements are needed for attendance and if you are unsure, ask.

Myth: As long as I log in, I am considered to be "in class".

Truth: Logging in is not considered "in class". Instructors have access to a log which tells them what day and time you logged in, where you went and what you did as well as how long you took to do it. Most instructors do not consider you "in class" unless you submitted an assignment, Reading a file is not considered "in class" in many cases unless your assignment was to read the file. This log also provides information on how many sessions you attended and how much time you actually spent "in class". Whenever there is a discrepancy, instructors can refer to this log as a record of your activity.

Myth: All classes have the same deadlines.

Truth: Not true! Each instructor is free to set their own deadlines. Just because two of your classes happen to have the same deadline, never assume that the third will have the same deadline. It is your responsibility to know when the deadline is for each class.

Myth: Online teachers have to be available 24-7.

Truth: There are no set guidelines or rules for online classes. However, there are best practices. Two of these concern how much time is allowed for the instructor to answer your e-mail or message and how much time is allowed to return an assignment grade. The general rule of thumb is 48

business hours to return a message; this does not include week-ends and holidays. The second is two weeks from the due date of the assignment. Instructors also teach other classes and most have other responsibilities. To assume that they will be available 24-7 invites problems for both students and teachers. Remember, instructors are people too. They sleep, eat, and have families and lives just as students do.

Myth: There is no disciplinary action a teacher can take in an online class, such as asking me to “leave” the class.

Truth: Instructors have the same policy for student conduct in online classes as they do for on campus classes. Messages or e-mails sent to online instructors are considered the same as if you said these things to the instructor face to face except that your instructor has absolute proof of what you said in writing. Posts can be removed if they are inappropriate and copies can be sent to the Dean of Students for appropriate disciplinary action. Instructors may use instruments such as “SafeAssign” to insure academic integrity and the attendance policy remains the same (students missing three consecutive classes are now reported to the Student Success Center instead of the Dean of Students). It is expected that college students are responsible adults who communicate with their instructors in a respectful and appropriate manner. Messages that are disrespectful and inappropriate will be reported. Students are also expected to read and understand the policies for Student Conduct as well.

According to the Students Right’s, Article 4 : “The student shall be free to discuss and express any view relevant to subject matter presented by the instructor or other class members. However, in exercising this freedom, the student shall not interfere with the academic process of the class by speaking to or behaving towards others in a hostile, demeaning, or intimidating manner.”

Myth: Being in an online class means that all of my materials are online and I will not need to purchase a textbook or print out a hard copy of my syllabus.

Truth: Absolutely untrue! An online class is no different than an on campus class when it comes to purchasing the required texts and having a hard copy of the syllabus to refer to in order to have the policies, assignments and due dates. Not reading the syllabus is never an excuse for missing work or attempting to turn in work late.

Myth: Being in an online class means that I will never be required to meet in person with my instructor or as a class on campus during the semester.

Truth: Some instructors require a face-to-face meeting, referred to as a “getting to know you” or “checking-in” meeting at some point in the semester. This should be indicated on your syllabus or communicated to you in some manner (e-mail, announcement, posting, etc.)

Myth: If the Blackboard system is down, I will automatically receive an extension on work that is due during the outage.

Truth: It is the responsibility of each instructor to inform you of their policy for handling outages. Some instructors require you to submit your assignment on time via an alternative e-mail address that will be provided for you during the first week of class. Other instructors may allow additional time to complete discussion boards or other assignments. This information should be provided to you during the first week of class.

Myth: I can request that my instructor correspond with me via my commercial e-mail account (yahoo, Comcast, etc.) rather than my pnc.edu account or by telephone.

Truth: FERPA legislation stipulates that commercial e-mail accounts and telephones are not secure modes of communication and therefore cannot be used to transmit confidential information from instructor to student. Instructors can only discuss confidential course information by means of your pnc.edu e-mail account or in person. Many instructors require students to communicate only through the mail section in the Blackboard course site rather than using Purdue e-mail. Your instruction will tell you which communication method is preferred.

Myth: My online instructor knows my password and should provide me with it during the first week of class. If I do not have my password or it does not work, I will receive an automatic extension for all work I missed.

Truth: No instructor will ever have your password. It is your responsibility to obtain your password by the first day of class and to make certain that it works. Not having a password does not excuse you from submitting your work on time. If your password locked, some instructors may grant an extension if you submit copies of our help desk correspondence and resolution.

Myth: If I have trouble with Blackboard, my instructor can help.

Truth: The instructor is an expert in the course content, not the computer delivery system. While the instructor may be able to help with a simple procedural issue, for any problems with access, downloading, or functionality issues, you should contact the Computer Help Desk at 219-785-5511.

Myth: If I have never used Blackboard, my instructor will teach me how to use it.

Truth: No. You are expected to know how to use Blackboard before you begin the class. Contact the Computer Help Desk at 219-785-5511 for information on when instruction is available. There are many training sessions for students each semester.

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