

A hand holding a smartphone, with a purple overlay covering the entire image. The text is white and stands out against the purple background.

Study like a pro wherever you are

Top Ten Tips for Learning Online

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 Sage

A composite image featuring a black computer mouse on the right side, partially overlapping a light blue background. On the left, there is a vertical checklist with three square boxes, each containing a checkmark. The number '1.' is prominently displayed in white on the far left.

1.

Understand what is expected

In a face-to-face class, the professor, tutor, instructor, or lecturer can easily explain course requirements and expectations for papers, projects, and/or assignments. Online, you must rely more on documents such as the syllabus and written descriptions of the work to be completed. These documents will not only tell you what is due when, they will also help you understand the criteria that will be used to determine your grade. They will set out the details of what you need to master to successfully complete the course and how you must demonstrate this in your work. Many professors provide clear guidance on how to differentiate between unacceptable, acceptable, and excellent levels of work. Read these materials carefully. If you are not sure what is expected, ask!



Understand your learning objectives

When you look critically at course and assignment materials, you will start to see the same action words used to describe the precise types of learning expected. Words like ‘evaluate’, ‘analyse’, and ‘interpret’ can be used for a whole course, and for specific assignments. Many educational institutions use a system known as Bloom’s Taxonomy to articulate learning goals and objectives (Anderson et al., 2000; Bloom et al., 1956). When you understand this taxonomy you can use it to determine what kinds of work is expected of you.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when you see these action words:

Using Bloom’s Taxonomy to understand assignments

Create	Can I put elements together in new ways, synthesize diverse ideas, generate innovative solutions?
Evaluate	Can I make a judgement based on evidence and analysis? Can I compare and contrast perspectives? Provide a coherent critique?
Analyse	Can I dig below the surface to understand the questions, problems, or perspectives? Can I determine constituent parts of a problem, and differentiate between relevant and extraneous ideas?
Apply	Can I select useful ideas or principles and put them into practice? Can I use an approach or procedure in a new situation or task?
Understand	Can I interpret, classify, summarize, and explain important ideas from readings or other sources? Can I compare and contrast sources?
Remember	Can I draw on past knowledge when confronting a new situation? Can I recognize and retrieve relevant ideas?

As you can see, you would complete an assignment that asks you to apply ideas differently from an assignment that asks you to evaluate ideas.



3.

Identify questions early

Once you have reviewed the course and assignment materials, and used Bloom's Taxonomy to discern expectations, identify any questions that remain. Don't wait until the last minute, get clarification right away. Don't waste your time guessing. And don't waste your lecturer's time by submitting work that does not align with the provided requirements.

When I taught, my motto was 'there are no dumb questions'. I think most professors would prefer to answer questions than to spend the necessary efforts to review and comment on work that is off-base. That said, busy professors will be aggravated if you ask them questions that are clearly answered in the written materials already provided – read everything carefully before posing the question.

4.

Find out what communication form your professor prefers, and use it

Some professors prefer to receive your questions in a post to the shared discussion board, so other students in the class can see the answer. Some professors prefer to receive your question by email, or by text message. Some professors will tell you what turnaround time to expect between your question and their response, and some will spell out times when they do not wish to communicate with students. Some professors have weekly office hours and prefer that you login and ask questions then. Others would prefer a conference call or telephone call with you. At the start of the course, ask your professor what communication times and modes they prefer and honour their requests or boundaries.



Plan your time

While the internet is instant, everything takes a little more time when completed online. Look at due dates, estimate the time it will take to complete major assignments or projects, and develop your own timeline and checkpoints. It is easy to get distracted when you are working online. Be kind to yourself and make sure you have enough time.



Proofread before posting or submitting assignments

When you develop a schedule and plan for your assignments, build in time to proofread and double-check that your work is complete. It can be harder to spot mistakes online so make sure you reread your work carefully and with time to make necessary changes.



7.

Review and use suggestions or comments

Use written or verbal comments on your assignments to improve your work. Use a grading rubric to ensure you have systematically met each of the necessary learning objectives. Make sure to address any feedback before submitting the final iteration of the paper or project.



8.

Give constructive and respectful feedback to peers

Classroom discussions are different for online courses. Sometimes you will be in a situation that resembles a face-to-face classroom, such as a web conferencing platform. Other times you will be commenting back and forth to your peers in the learning management system discussion board. Be aware that comments made in writing can seem more critical, blunt, or negative, than those made verbally. When peers hear verbal comments they interpret what you say based on your tone of voice and facial expressions. They can differentiate between ‘good job!’ said with warmth and enthusiasm from ‘good job!’ said sarcastically. Without nonverbal signals and context, written comments should be clear and specific. Ideally, any critical comment should include a suggestion for improvement.



9. Don't plagiarize

Cut-and-paste is all too easy, and the vast array of writing and visual elements available online can make using others' work very tempting. But just as you can search and find materials to insert into your assignments, your instructor can plug those sentences or paragraphs into a search engine and find the original source. Many institutions use plagiarism detection software as well. Learn how to properly attribute your sources and commit to submitting your own original work on papers and assignments.



10.

Be kind

Be the peer others want to have in their class. Keep in mind that students who are also adjusting to a new online learning environment might feel a great deal of stress and uncertainty. Being supportive, encouraging, and kind will help to build a mutually beneficial learning community.

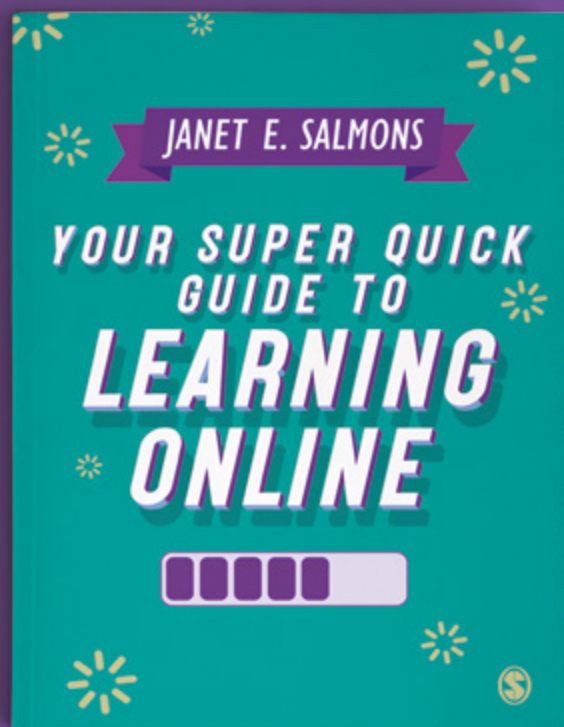


Dr. Salmons completed her Masters and PhD through distance-learning programmes and taught online for almost 20 years. She is the Methods guru for SAGE **methodspace.com** and author of numerous books about online research, learning, and collaboration.

 **@einterview**

Anderson, L., Bloom, B. S., Krathwohl, D., & Airasian, P. (2000). *Taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (2nd ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

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Your Super Quick Guide to Learning Online

Learn how to successfully adapt to online remote learning with this super quick guide. Packed with pragmatic, applied tips on how to adjust to a digital learning experience, this handy resource will instill you with the confidence and know-how needed to succeed.

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