

The Key to Successful Online Learning

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The Summer of 2004 I had my first experience with online teaching. In the past I had taken a number of online courses, but my perspective changed when the ‘shoe’ was on the other ‘foot’. My learning experience had been from the student’s perspective, now I had to change my way of thinking. I had to ask myself what are the *keys* to successful online learning? Also, what does success mean from the perspective of the teacher, as well as the student? Now that I have experienced both sides of the coin, I realized that success as a student means achieving ‘good grades’ or ‘simply completing’ the course. From the viewpoint of the teacher, it means to ‘effect change’ or ‘enhance learning’. The skills of the students should increase when they have completed any course, and online learning is no different.

As I stated earlier I had the privilege of volunteering for [Adventist Virtual Learning Network](#), as an assistant instructor. It was one of the most fulfilling teaching experiences, mainly because I was able to watch the positive interactions between the online *learner* and the *instructor*. I observed a group of dedicated learners come together, and through group discussions, personal e-mail and ‘telephone coaching’, students were able to complete the course successfully while promoting life-long learning and friendships within the Seventh-day Adventists organization. As a result, many of the students were teachers, looking for courses to fulfill their [NAD certification renewal](#).

The name of the online course is [Technology in the Early Elementary Classroom](#). The course is offered twice each calendar year. In this program, we taught students how to use an elementary specific computer program entitled ‘Kid Pix’. This program is geared toward learners of different stages and levels of computer literacy. Like many other classes in previous years, the class I assisted with had a varied amount of learners with different experience levels. The majority of the teachers had very little computer experience and some only used a word processor to send or read emails. Very few students knew how to ‘surf’ the net, more-less how to attach files to an e-mail message. Although the learning levels varied, a number of students successfully completed the course and are now able to integrate the computer tools into their teaching practice.

From my experience, I would recommend the following *keys* to be a successful online learner:

1. ***Always use a reliable computer.*** Most online courses should inform you of the basic computer processing requirements needed to take part in the course. This is especially important when trying to post, download and send e-mails to the teacher or other students.
2. ***Have a basic knowledge of computers.*** This means that each online course expects a certain amount of ‘base’ knowledge prior to starting the course. If potential students are not sure that they have this basic or initial computer knowledge, they should enroll in a beginner’s computer course to learn computer fundamentals.

3. ***Open Communication with Instructor.*** In an online learning course it is important to communicate with the instructor in order for them to provide the necessary coaching requires of the student.

4. ***Be Motivated.*** Students need to have a positive attitude in order to motivate themselves and others in order to complete tasks. This is one key that often present at the beginning of an online course but tends to diminish as the course progresses.

5. ***Pace yourself.*** There is a suggested weekly schedule for the class which is not required to be followed exactly. One of the advantages of online learning is that the course is geared to the learner's pace. However, there are time constraints of which the course must be completed by.

The points listed above are geared towards the student, but could also apply to ways in which the online instructor can help students to be successful. The typical role of teaching and learning is changing from the usual 'classroom' based setting towards a more internet based environment. This has helped many individuals who have not been able to take courses due to time constraints or family/work commitments. If you have never taken an online course, I encourage you to do so, even if it's just for the mere experience. You should start looking into the various courses that AVLN has to offer. I hope that the points introduced in this article have sparked an interest to upgrade your educational requirements provided through the Adventist Virtual Learning Network.