

## How to Succeed in an Online Course

Welcome to online learning at Northwest Vista College. If this is your first online course, then the following information will be extremely helpful. If this is not your first online course with NVC, please review the following information to ensure you are aware of how this course may be different from others you have taken.

### □ *What should I expect?*

First of all, let's clarify some common misconceptions.

- ✓ FALSE: Online classes are "self-paced."
- ✓ TRUE: Online courses follow the same academic schedule as on-campus courses.
  - In other words, it is not an open-entry/open-exit environment where you can start and finish when you please.
  
- ✓ FALSE: You can complete your work anytime you want.
- ✓ TRUE: You should expect "due dates" throughout the course.
  - You will probably be required to accomplish certain tasks and assignments *by* specific dates and times. For example, if you are required to post a reply to the weekly discussion *by* Thursday at 11:59 PM, you may do so anytime *before* that due date and time.
  - Some quizzes, exams or assignments may be timed. You will have only a specified amount of time to complete the item once you have started it.
  - In some courses, you can submit work early—ahead of the due date. Check your syllabus for your instructor's policies.
  - Make sure you are aware of time limits and deadlines for all graded items.
  - Use the syllabus, the calendar, and the weekly modules or folders to help you determine when items are due to be completed.
  
- ✓ FALSE: Everyone is online at the same time.
- ✓ TRUE: Usually, you will not be required to be online at specific times.
  - On rare occasions, your instructor may ask that you watch a live event via streaming video or online.
  - On some occasions, you may be assigned to a group discussion or project during which you and your group members may agree to meet virtually at an agreed-upon time for a chat (IM) or other type of online meeting.
  
- ✓ FALSE: You have to take an online class on campus.
- ✓ TRUE: In most cases, you will not be required to come to campus.
  - However, there are some courses that require students to take a test, conduct a presentation, participate in a lab, or complete

some other on-campus activity. If this is a requirement in your online class and you are not able to come to the NVC campus, the instructor *must* make alternate arrangements available to you.

- For example, you may be able to take a proctored test at a location in your local area, you may be able to participate in a group project via webcam or phone, or you may be able to create and post a video presentation of your activity. Your instructor will work with you if an on-campus visit is required.
- ✓ FALSE: A textbook is not needed because all course material is provided online.
  - ✓ TRUE: Most courses use the same textbook as the equivalent on-campus course. Some courses use an online book (e-book).
    - Although some course material will be provided through Canvas (the system used for online classes) or a publisher's website, be sure to check the syllabus for any textbook and other required materials.

### ❑ *I'm not sure if I would do well in an online class. Is there any way to tell?*

We suggest you take the [SmarterMeasure](#) assessment for a personalized, *confidential* evaluation of your own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to distance learning.

**Username:** accnorthwest

**Password:** learning

Also, please look at the [Canvas Quick Guide](#) to give you an idea of what online tools will be used.

Finally, if this is your first online class, please enroll in the free, fully online [Orientation to Online Learning \(OLRN-0001\)](#). You can sign up for this course through ACES—the same way as you registered for your other courses. OLRN will introduce you to the best practices of online students and what to expect in an online class.

### ❑ *Are online classes easier than face-to-face classes?*

No. In fact, in many cases, students report that online classes can be *more* challenging due to the online environment itself. Online classes are *not* easier or less time-consuming than face-to-face courses.

### ❑ *The importance of good time management.*

To be successful in an online environment, you must be a good time manager. You should plan to commit at least as much time to each online course as you would to a traditional, face-to-face course. This includes the time you would spend in the classroom plus time spent studying, researching, writing papers, taking exams, and so on.

### □ *How much time should I plan?*

Expect to put in *at least the same amount* of time and work both in and outside of the classroom as you would in a face-to-face class. For example, if a face-to-face class meets for 2 ½ hours per week, plus requires reading, homework, and studying that comes to about 3 hours per week, you should plan to spend that same 5 ½ hours per week (or more) for your online class.

### □ *When should I work on my online course?*

Think about your time commitments and daily/weekly schedules. Are you planning to do your online class work while you are at your job? Are you hoping to do it when you get home at the end of a long day of on-campus classes or work? Are you planning to spend your Friday or Saturday evenings working on your online classes instead of enjoying some social time with friends or family? Are you planning to study at the same time you are taking care of children? You must consider whether these are realistic plans.

### □ *So how do I plan for my online class?*

Usually, it is best to create an actual schedule that takes into account all of the activities you participate in each day. Be sure to include school, work, social time, family time, time you spend traveling to destinations, and time spent on homework, reading, and studying for all of your classes.

### □ *Make sure that you can work uninterrupted.*

- ✓ Turn off distractions such as your phone and TV.
- ✓ Be firm with those who demand your time, and be willing to tell others, "Please don't bother me. I am in class right now."
- ✓ If you plan to do your coursework while you are at work, consider staying an hour after your shift or working on your class during your lunch break.
- ✓ Use a calendar—on paper or online—to help you plan and schedule your time.
- ✓ Decide your own priorities. Only you can determine what takes precedence in your own life. Plan your time accordingly.

### □ *Find a good place to work in peace.*

Many students enjoy working in the NVC Open Computer Lab, the library, or one of the many other student labs on campus. (See list below.) You might also want to consider taking your laptop to a private place on or off campus, working in a local coffee shop, using another college library, or finding a quiet nook in a public library. There are many places with wireless Internet access that are good for studying and working uninterrupted.

### □ *What's "netiquette"?*

Your instructor will probably require you to use college-level academic writing in most or all of your online work. This means that "text-speak" is out. You will be expected to write as you would for an essay or classroom assignment.

### □ *Can you give me some examples?*

Sure! Your instructor may have other guidance, so be sure to check the syllabus, discussion guidelines, or course homepage.

- Compose your messages in Word or a similar word processing program.
- Spell-check and grammar-check your discussion messages, and then copy and paste them into your discussion postings. (This will also keep you from losing your work.)
- Use standard college-level grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In other words,
  - Capitalize proper nouns and the pronoun "I."
  - Spell out words (for example "before," not "b4," "through," not "thru," and "because," not "b/c").
  - Use punctuation as needed.
- Do not "SHOUT" by using all capital letters.
- Avoid vulgarity. Avoid sexist, racist, or other exclusionary or inconsiderate language.
- Keep any humor clean and non-offensive. (If you wouldn't tell it to your grandma, don't post it in your online class.)

### □ *What else makes the online environment different?*

In a face-to-face classroom, you are a part of a social setting in which it is easy to communicate with your instructor and classmates. Sometimes, the online environment requires you to make a little more effort to ask a question, state your opinion, get a clarification, or help someone else. You should plan to use a public communication tool (such as a discussion board) rather than a private message whenever possible. If you have a question, others probably have it, too. You should reserve private communication for private topics such as grades.

Also, when we see each other in a face-to-face setting, we tend to get to know each other by sight and personalities. This takes a little more effort in the online environment. For example, in your introductory postings, you might want to let your classmates know a little bit about you—your likes and dislikes, your major, your experience with online learning, your favorite pet or movie, and so on. You'll find that others will have common interests. You may also add a picture to your Profile. When we create connections with each other as people, we are more likely to communicate and learn successfully as students.

### □ *The missing “non-verbal factor.”*

In a face-to-face classroom, the instructor can see the puzzled look on your face when you don't understand. The instructor can tell if the class is enthusiastic about a project or dreading it. Your classmates can tell when you're not feeling well, or when you've come into the room late, or when you are always the first one to turn in your assignments. In the online environment, the non-verbal factor is mostly missing.

For these reasons, it's important to communicate not only the message, but any important information about you, the sender. For example, here are some effective messages:

- I'm excited about this assignment and look forward to learning something new.
- I am confused about the requirements for this assignment and am not sure if I will be able to complete it on time.
- I'm wondering if anyone else has started this assignment and can help me pick a topic.
- Help! I don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing!

Put your “non-verbals” into words so that others will know “the whole story.”

### □ *Ask for help when you need it!*

Stay in touch with your instructors. In a traditional class, it's easy to raise your hand to ask a question or to talk with the instructor before or after class. Online, if you're confused, if you have a question, if you need an extension on an assignment, or if you don't understand the material, you must take the initiative to contact your instructors. Their job is to help you succeed!

Also, remember that your classmates are often valuable sources of information. Just as you might lean over to ask the person next to you for clarification in a classroom, you should “talk to” your online classmates, too. Use the general discussion boards, your group pages, and the inbox to contact your classmates.

Finally, ask your instructors for help managing and scheduling your time. Remember that every one of them has been a college student, too, and they often understand your situation better than you may think. 😊

### □ *What are the technical requirements for success?*

Keep your computer equipment in good working order. Too often, online students fall behind when their Internet connection is weak or discontinued, or when they have trouble with tools, programs, or hardware. Make sure you know what you will need at the beginning of the course, and then have two plans—a primary plan and a backup plan—for how you will be able to accomplish the course requirements. Remember that

computers are available on campus Monday through Saturday, and that any computer with Internet access will allow you into your online class.

□ *What software and hardware do you recommend for me to be a successful college student?*

For the best possible learning experience while at NVC, here is a quick list of requirements and recommendations to ensure you have the needed computer tools to succeed. As a minimum, you should have, or have access to, the following:

1. **A desktop PC or laptop computer.** We recommend your operating system be Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7 or 8, or the Mac equivalent.
2. You should have an **Office Suite** that includes a Word Processor, Spreadsheet, and Presentation software. Microsoft Office is recommended. With proof of enrollment, you can get the latest Office Suite and other Microsoft products at a discounted price [through the Alamo Colleges](#). There are also free alternatives such as [OpenOffice](#). Make sure you choose an Office Suite that is compatible with Microsoft Office Suite 2007 or better.
3. You need a **web browser** (access to the Internet) on your Desktop PC or laptop to access tools for registration, financial aid and course materials. No matter which web browser you use (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, or Safari) make sure you use the most recent version and that your pop-up blocker settings will allow your courses to open. More info can be found [here](#).
4. If you do not have access to broadband/high speed Internet at your home (for example, if you have dial-up), please plan to use student computers on campus or another location such as a Public Library.
5. If you plan to use your computer at work or one in a public library, be aware that there may be firewalls installed that prevent unrestricted access to the Internet.
6. Some online courses may require that you also use a website other than Canvas (usually one provided by the textbook publisher) that only allows specified browsers (normally Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox).
7. **Java.** This free program may be required to use some features of your online classes. If you are prompted to download Java, you can download the latest version [here](#).
8. If you are a **Mac** user, most newer Macs come with BootCamp that allows you to purchase and install Microsoft Windows on your Mac. To learn more about BootCamp and other options, click [here](#).

9. **Anti-virus software** such as Symantec/Norton, McAfee, Kaspersky, Bit Defender, G-Data, Avira/AntiVir, etc. *PC World* magazine and PCmag.com review and recommend various programs.

10. **A removable device** (such as a flash drive) for storing your files.

11. **Speakers, headphones, or ear buds.**

□ *Where can I go on campus to use a computer?*

**Library (70 computers)**

Redbud Learning Center (1st floor)

<http://www.alamo.edu/nvc/lrc>

**Student Computer Lab (100 computers)**

Juniper Hall, Rm 106H (across from the library)

**College-Level Writing Center for English (30 computers)**

Juniper Hall, Rm 216

[jschulze@alamo.edu](mailto:jschulze@alamo.edu)

**Writing Across the Curriculum Lab (24 computers)**

Redbud Learning Center, Rm 205 (above library)

**Cooperative Learning Center for English and Reading (20 computers)**

(for Developmental English/Reading classes)

Juniper Hall, Rm 229

[Student computer labs and centers are all linked here.](#)

□ *Can I bring my laptop to campus? Where can I use it?*

Students are welcome to bring laptop computers to campus. The wireless network is available in most buildings and outdoors campus-wide.

□ *I need to print something.*

NVC students use the Go Print system which allows you to pay for copies in advance and print from specified computers on campus. More information is available in the Student Computer labs and the Library.

## □ How do I access my online class?

1. First, log into ACES.
  - a. Go to the [NVC homepage](#).
  - b. Click the login to ACES tab.
  - c. It is recommended that you bookmark the [ACES login page](#).



(Add it to your Favorites.)

- d. Log in using your ACES user name and password. If you have forgotten your user name or password or need help, click the [Having problems logging in? Click here](#) link.

A screenshot of a login form titled 'Secure Access Login'. It contains two input fields: 'User Name:' and 'Password:'. Below the fields are two buttons: 'Login' and 'Cancel'. At the bottom of the form, there are two links: 'Having problems logging in? Click here.' and 'Forgot Password?'.

2. Click on the My Courses tab.
3. Be sure to select the current semester from the drop-down menu under Schedule.
4. Click on your course name. Your online course homepage should automatically open!

## □ What if I can't get into ACES?

Please call the Support Central Help Desk at **210-485-0555, opt. 4** or **866-493-3947** for assistance.

You can also contact the NVC Help Desk at **210-486-4777**. Hours of operation:

Mon - Thu 8:00am - 6:00pm  
Fri 8:00am - 5:00pm

## □ What kinds of assistance do the Help Desks provide?

- Anything to do with ACES
- Passwords
- Access to Student & Financial web services
- Student.alamo.edu email reset or access
- Am I registered?
- Problems with pop-up blockers, anti-virus software, firewalls, anti-spyware software, etc.
- Questions about hardware/software compatibility
- Mac compatibility issues. Another place to try is the [Apple Support Center](#).

### ❑ *How can I find phone numbers, email, and office locations for other NVC faculty and staff?*

On the [NVC homepage](#), click [Contact Us](#) in the upper right corner. There you will find links to a directory, a course search, and department links.

Also, once you are logged into ACES, in the My Courses tab, you will see a link to each of your instructors' emails under their names.

Finally, in your online classes, you can always contact your instructor through the Canvas inbox.

### ❑ *Where else can I get help?*

- Whenever you are using Canvas, you can click the Help icon on the top right corner of the page for links to the guides, videos, Canvas Help Desk, and your instructor.
- At the top of every Canvas course, you will also see a Resources tab. This tab contains links to the Canvas Quick Guide, Technical Support, and College Resources.
- You can also call the Support Central Help Desk 24/7 at **210-485-0555, opt. 2**, for Canvas help.

### ❑ *Can I access my online course from my Smart Phone or other handheld device?*

Using your Internet browser, log into your online course through ACES. Not all functions are available through a hand-held device; for example, you will probably not be able to upload and submit assignments. However, you will be able to access your course homepage, check messages, participate in discussions, and so on.

If you have an iOS or Android device, you may also download the Canvas Mobile App to your smart phone. Here are the guidelines to [download the Canvas Mobile App](#).

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### ❑ *Still have questions?*

Email us at [nvc-distancelearn@alamo.edu](mailto:nvc-distancelearn@alamo.edu)

Distance Learning Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=490332465077#!/NVCDistanceLearning>