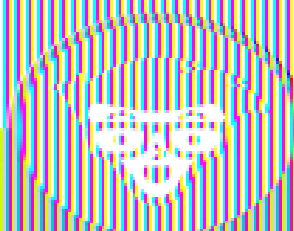


LEARNING MADE EASY



Online Learning

101



Identify the
online program

Get organized to
learning at a c

Be the best le
you can be

**Susan M.
Kevin E.**

Leaders in educ
online learning



Online Learning

**by Susan Manning, EdD, and
Kevin E Johnson, MEd**

FOREWORD BY Joan Vandervelde

School of Education

University of Wisconsin-Stout

**for
dummies**
A Wiley Brand

Online Learning For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2020946839

ISBN: 978-1-119-75686-6; 978-1-119-75687-3 (ebk); 978-1-119-75688-0 (ebk)

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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Foreword](#)

[Introduction](#)

[About This Book](#)

[Conventions Used in This Book](#)

[What You’re Not to Read](#)

[Foolish Assumptions](#)

[How This Book Is Organized](#)

[Icons Used in This Book](#)

[Beyond the Book](#)

[Where to Go from Here](#)

[**Part 1: Introducing a Different Kind of Learning**](#)

Chapter 1: Planning for Your Online Learning Journey

[Examining the Characteristics and Advantages of Online Education](#)

[Knowing the Technology and Computer Skills You Need to Succeed](#)

[Seeing How to Go About Becoming an Online Learner](#)

[Becoming a Star Learner](#)

[Looking at a Few Special Situations in Online Education](#)

Chapter 2: The Traits and Benefits of Online Learning

[What Makes Online Learning Different from Traditional Education?](#)

[Who Benefits from Online Learning?](#)

[Getting a Grip on Potential Pitfalls](#)

[Determining Whether You're Ready to Join the World of Online Learning](#)

Chapter 3: The Equipment and Skills You Need to Succeed

[Checking Your Technological Readiness](#)

[Testing Your Technological Abilities](#)

[Staying Safe Online](#)

Part 2: Preparing to Be a Learner

Chapter 4: Discovering What's Available Online

[Examining Different Types of Online Programs and Courses](#)

[Finding Out Which Institutions Offer Online Programs and Courses](#)

[Checking Out Different Structures of Online Courses](#)

[Finishing Your Schooling Faster with Accelerated Programs and Courses](#)

Chapter 5: Doing Your Homework: Evaluating Schools

[Focusing On What You Need in a School](#)

[Finding an Accredited School](#)

[Talking to the Right People to Find the Answers You Need](#)

[Narrowing Your Options](#)

Chapter 6: Applying to School and Securing the Cash

[Applying to an Online Program](#)

[Calculating the Costs of Online Classes](#)

[Figuring Out How You'll Pay for Online Classes](#)

[Applying for Federal Financial Aid](#)

Chapter 7: Getting Accepted and Prepping for Class

[Finding Out Whether You've Been Accepted or Rejected](#)

[Registering for Classes](#)

[Getting Oriented](#)

[Buying Books](#)

Chapter 8: Mentally Preparing and Having a Technology Mindset

[Taking On the Right Attitude](#)

[Knowing the Tools You Might Use](#)

[You Don't Have to Know Everything](#)

[Mastering New Tools Quickly](#)

Part 3: The Virtual Classroom: Being an A+ Student

Chapter 9: Navigating the Learning Environment

[Reaching Your Virtual Learning Environment](#)

[Locating and Understanding Critical Documents](#)

[Modules and More: Understanding a Course's Content Organization](#)

[Attending Live Sessions](#)

Chapter 10: Meeting the People in (and Around) Your Classroom

[Getting to Know the Folks Who Are Front and Center](#)
[Seeing Who's Behind the Scenes](#)

Chapter 11: Communicating Clearly Online

[Checking Out Methods of Communicating Online](#)
[Creating and Putting Forward an Online Persona](#)
[Participating in Discussions](#)
[Tapping into Social Networks](#)

Chapter 12: Developing Good Study Habits for Online Courses

[Setting Aside Time to Learn](#)
[Navigating the Web Efficiently](#)
[Reading Wisely](#)
[Visiting the Library](#)
[Working Offline](#)

Chapter 13: Getting a Handle on Group Dynamics

[Making Your Online Group Successful](#)
[Resolving Conflicts](#)

Chapter 14: Recognizing We Are Global

[Setting the Stage for Global Learning](#)
[Meeting People around the World](#)
[Accessing the Internet around the World](#)
[Making the Most of Your Class Time](#)

Chapter 15: Understanding Netiquette and Ethical Behavior

[Defining and Using Netiquette](#)
[Recognizing the Importance of Online Ethics](#)
[Avoiding Plagiarism](#)

Chapter 16: Finishing and Submitting Your Assignments

[Understanding the Ramifications of Rubrics](#)
[Writing 101](#)

[Completing Different Types of Assignments](#)

[Submitting Assignments](#)

[Understand How and When to Use Media](#)

Chapter 17: Building a Portfolio of Work

[Developing a Body of Work to Take with You](#)

[Getting Help with Finding a Job](#)

Part 4: Special Considerations in Online Learning

Chapter 18: Educating Students from Kindergarten through High School

[Understanding Why Kids Are Attending School Online](#)

[Seeing the Differences between K-12 and Adult Online Education](#)

[Checking Out Different Kinds of Virtual Schools for Kids and Teens](#)

[Going Through the K-12 Enrollment Process](#)

Chapter 19: Accessibility in Online Education

[Determining Whether the Courses You Want to Take Are Accessible](#)

[Disclosing a Disability to Your Chosen Online School](#)

[Using Assistive Technology Online](#)

Part 5: The Part of Tens

Chapter 20: Ten Myths about Online Learning

[Online Learning Is Anytime/Anywhere](#)

[Only Kids Take Online Courses](#)

[An Online Course Is a Helpful Way to Learn How to Use Your Computer](#)

[You Must Be a Computer Geek to Take an Online Course](#)

[Online Learning Is Easier than Face-to-Face Classes](#)

[Online Courses Are Lower in Quality than Face-to-Face Courses](#)

[Online Learning Is Always Independent](#)

[Online Learning Is Less Personal than Traditional Learning](#)

[You Need a Webcam for an Online Class](#)

[Everyone Cheats Online](#)

Chapter 21: Ten Best Practices for Online Learners — Including Self-Care

[Treat Learning Like It's a Job](#)

[It's Not a Sprint — It's a Marathon](#)

[Manage Your Own Expectations](#)

[Your Calendar Is Your Best Friend](#)

[Advocate for Yourself: Ask for Help](#)

[Be Present in Class \(And Let Your Instructor Know\)](#)

[Give Constructive Feedback](#)

[It's Okay to Take a Break](#)

[Sleep Is Good for You](#)

[Say Thank You](#)

Index

About the Authors

Advertisement Page

Connect with Dummies

End User License Agreement

List of Tables

Chapter 3

[TABLE 3-1 An Example of Hardware Requirements](#)

Chapter 6

[TABLE 6-1 On-Campus versus Online Costs](#)

Chapter 9

[TABLE 9-1 A Typical Discussion Rubric](#)

Chapter 13

[TABLE 13-1 Example of a Group Project Schedule](#)

Chapter 16

[TABLE 16-1 An Example of a Rubric for a Paper](#)

List of Illustrations

Chapter 3

[FIGURE 3-1: A summary of the physical makeup of a computer with Windows Vista.](#)

[FIGURE 3-2: A summary of the physical makeup of a computer with Mac OS X.](#)

[FIGURE 3-3: An example of a computer's file structure.](#)

[FIGURE 3-4: A sample URL of a secure site.](#)

[FIGURE 3-5: A sample URL of an unsecure site.](#)

Chapter 4

[FIGURE 4-1: The interface of a typical self-paced course.](#)

Chapter 6

[FIGURE 6-1: The FAFSA portal.](#)

Chapter 7

[FIGURE 7-1: An example of an online course registration system.](#)

[FIGURE 7-2: An example of an online orientation program.](#)

Chapter 8

[FIGURE 8-1: The home page of a course taught on Canvas.](#)

[FIGURE 8-2: A view of a self-paced course in Bridge.](#)

[FIGURE 8-3: The Windows keyboard, with highlighted keys.](#)

[FIGURE 8-4: The Chromebook keyboard, with highlighted keys.](#)

[FIGURE 8-5: The Mac keyboard, with highlighted keys.](#)

[FIGURE 8-6: An LMS with Record sessions using Panopto software.](#)

[FIGURE 8-7: Saving a document directly from a page.](#)

[FIGURE 8-8: Saving the document from a link](#)

[FIGURE 8-9: Copying-and-pasting text.](#)

[FIGURE 8-10: An Internet search using Google.](#)

[FIGURE 8-11: Searching YouTube for help.](#)

Chapter 9

[FIGURE 9-1: Enabling pop-ups in Chrome.](#)

[FIGURE 9-2: Canvas: A portal you might see when first logging in.](#)

[FIGURE 9-3: The home page of a course taught on Canvas.](#)

[FIGURE 9-4: The home page of a course taught on Moodle.](#)

[FIGURE 9-5: A calendar with a monthly view.](#)

[FIGURE 9-6: A calendar view listing assignments.](#)

[FIGURE 9-7: A calendar RSS feed.](#)

[FIGURE 9-8: A calendar with an added RSS feed.](#)

[FIGURE 9-9: A view of a typical grading scale.](#)

[FIGURE 9-10: A sample home page that shows module organization.](#)

[FIGURE 9-11: A sample interface for an online office hour.](#)

Chapter 11

[FIGURE 11-1: A sample announcement from an instructor on a course's home page.](#)

[FIGURE 11-2: An example of internal private communication.](#)

[FIGURE 11-3: Canvas discussions: A discussion in chronological order.](#)

[FIGURE 11-4: Canvas discussions: A discussion displayed in threaded fashion.](#)

[FIGURE 11-5: A social network, used academically.](#)

Chapter 12

[FIGURE 12-1: A full taskbar, showing multiple floating windows.](#)

[FIGURE 12-2: A single window, with multiple tabs.](#)

[FIGURE 12-3: A social bookmarking account.](#)

[FIGURE 12-4: The View and Zoom options inside a browser.](#)

[FIGURE 12-5: Highlighting a web page within a browser using a text highlighter ...](#)

[FIGURE 12-6: Your learning management system can alert you to new information.](#)

[FIGURE 12-7: An online library portal.](#)

[FIGURE 12-8: An example of a keyword database search.](#)

Chapter 13

[FIGURE 13-1: An example of a discussion forum for a group.](#)

[FIGURE 13-2: An example of a group project document using Google Docs.](#)

[FIGURE 13-3: A group call using Zoom.](#)

[FIGURE 13-4: A group call using Teams.](#)

[FIGURE 13-5: A group call using Google Meet.](#)

Chapter 16

[FIGURE 16-1: A dropbox in Canvas.](#)

[FIGURE 16-2: A quiz page in Canvas shows different variations on the Submit button.](#)

[FIGURE 16-3: Audio submission inside a Canvas discussion forum.](#)

[FIGURE 16-4: A video, embedded in a discussion.](#)

Chapter 17

[FIGURE 17-1: The public view of an ePortfolio.](#)

[FIGURE 17-2: Sublevel navigation in an ePortfolio created with Weebly.](#)

Chapter 18

[FIGURE 18-1: A synchronous class interface.](#)

[FIGURE 18-2: A glimpse of what an online course for K-12 looks like.](#)

Chapter 19

[FIGURE 19-1: An example of a captioned video.](#)

Foreword

When I think of the sixty online instructors that I have supervised since 1996, at the top of the list are Dr. Susan Manning and Kevin Bowersox-Johnson. Both are award-winning online instructors with over twenty years of experience designing and teaching online courses and certificates using a consistent application of proven best practices in online learning.

Above all, the authors understand how to coach and mentor newbie online students in becoming proficient online learners.

As a Coordinator of Online Professional Development, I have watched technology tools dramatically improve and advance. Yet I continue to hear instructors and trainers say the same thing today as in past years: Instructors wish remote learners understood the expectations of learning online and had a step-by-step success guide.

This book is a valuable compilation of lessons learned and provides a resource for new virtual learners to navigate the complexities of online learning. It answers questions about how to make the experience produce meaningful learning that sticks for life. Also, it includes how to locate legitimate online training and avoid scams.

Following the steps in this book will help result in the completion of an online micro-course, boot camp, certificate, virtual corporate sales training, or employee onboarding, as well as a full degree program.

Yes, you can Google and get the same stuff online, but this book provides specific strategies to leverage learning now and in the future as adults find themselves changing careers and retooling for the future.

Online Learning For Dummies is a book that will guide and motivate you to continue learning conveniently from your tablet or laptop or even your smartphone!

Joan Vandervelde

Online Professional Development Coordinator, University of Wisconsin-Stout

Owner, InstructOnline.com LLC

Introduction

According to the Babson Survey Research Group, online enrollments had grown for 14 years consecutively. Nearly every college student accesses course documents and resources via online portals. One in three learners in higher education takes at least one fully online course. That's a lot of online learning! And, considering that college is no longer limited to advantaged 18- to 22-year-olds, that means a lot of those online learners may be older and less familiar with the tools that come with the territory. That's why we've written this book — for the many learners who find themselves in school, online, and confused.

And then there's the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Overnight, brick-and-mortar schools had to shift to online options. College students were told to finish the term online. Though this kind of emergency instruction was not ideal for faculty or students, it brought about a sensitivity to how different online learning is from face-to-face models.

Furthermore, the ups and downs of the global economy have sent more learners back to school to retool or add credentials to their résumé. However, balancing work, family, and civic commitments with school is an arduous task at best. Online options allow learners to address their professional development needs at a time, and in a manner, that may be more flexible with their lifestyles. This may be part of the reason that online enrollments have mushroomed over the past few years.

Fifteen years ago when we tried to explain to people that we teach college courses online, we were met with, "How does that work?" Today, we hear stories of family

members or colleagues taking courses online, but many questions still remain. There's a bit of controversy, too, in that students may not have a choice but to take a course online, and too often they're left to flounder, with inadequate guidance from advisors and faculty.

Regardless of age or experience, learners who know what they want and are willing to work hard are the ultimate winners in the world of education. *Online Learning For Dummies* helps students become winners in the online classroom by explaining just how it works. We take you from the decision-making process of determining whether this venue is right for you to applying and enrolling and then to the skills you need to succeed.

About This Book

Online Learning For Dummies is not a highly academic book written for scholars. It's a book for everyday people who find themselves faced with online possibilities. You can trust this book when you need to quickly understand something about online learning. Consider these examples:

- » **If you're a working professional who needs to earn an additional degree or certification for career advancement,** we can show you how to put together your application materials and get started in a program.
- » **If you want to go to school full-time but lack the funding,** we can tell you whom to talk to regarding financial aid.
- » **If you want to take online courses but are unfamiliar with the technology involved,** we can

walk you through the kinds of tools you'll use to support classroom discussion and submit your assignments.

- » **If you're a high school student thinking about nontraditional schooling**, we can give you the information you need. We also cover students with disabilities.

Depending on who you are and what you need in terms of online learning, you can easily skip around this book to find exactly what you need. (Don't worry — we won't complain if you want to read it from cover to cover!)

Conventions Used in This Book

We use several standard conventions throughout this book:

- » New terms are *italicized*. We try to use as little jargon as possible, but because online education utilizes some slightly new vocabulary, some terms are unavoidable. Italicized words are followed by definitions in layman's terms. (We also italicize any words we want to emphasize.)
- » Key words in bulleted and numbered lists are **bold** so that you skim what's most important.
- » You'll see a lot of web addresses — how could you not, when we're talking about *online* learning? Also, notice we don't always give the entirety of the address, just the basic information you need to type into your browser bar. For example, if you type www.vimeo.com, you'll get to the page!

- » We've used gender-neutral language throughout the book. You'll notice "they" as the most common pronoun. That's because teachers and students come in both varieties!

What You're Not to Read

Of course, our egos hope that you read and digest every word. But the realists in us know that you're busy and might want to read only the essential material. So, if you need to skip a few things due to time constraints, here are a couple of suggestions:

- » **Sidebars (in shaded gray boxes) contain information that is interesting but not critical to understanding online education.** You can skip these boxes, especially if you understand the context of the surrounding material.
- » **We use the Technical Stuff icon for any topic that may require a little more explanation of what it is and how it works.** However, providing an understanding of technical details isn't the purpose of this book. Therefore, paragraphs marked with this icon can be skimmed quickly or skipped entirely, if you prefer.

Foolish Assumptions

As a way of helping us focus on what to write, we made several assumptions about you, dear reader, when writing this book:

- » **You know how to use a computer for the basics.** We hope this is true about you. If it isn't true, perhaps

you can skim [Chapter 3](#) and then decide whether online education is really for you.

- » **You're considering going back to school and you're leisurely looking at alternatives.** Maybe you're curious about how online learning works and want to get a sense before you select a school or program. In that case, you have plenty of time and may read the book from cover to cover.
- » **You know which subject you want to study.** We know that not everybody knows exactly what they want to study or what career they want to have upon graduation. We've done our best to speak to those who want to participate in a full-fledged online program as well as those who want to explore options and possibly take only one or two classes total.
- » **You're faced with an online course, have no idea what you're in for, and need the information quickly!** This is where the majority of online students find themselves the first time. If you're already enrolled, you may want to jump to [Part 3](#) and learn what you need to excel.
- » **You're an online instructor (or were recently forced to become one) and are curious about the various ways in which online courses are structured and how students and staff interact in cyberspace.** This book can help you see online learning from the student's perspective, and it may inspire you to try a new idea or two. Heck, it may even inspire you to consider taking an online course as a way to grow professionally.
- » **You're an online instructor and you need your students to be better prepared for taking online courses.** Perhaps your students are coming to your virtual classroom unprepared, with false expectations

about online learning. In this case, consider recommending this book to your school bookstore to help your future students settle in to your online course quicker.

How This Book Is Organized

Online Learning For Dummies is organized in five parts. The parts are organized so that you can start by looking at the big picture of online learning and then walk through the decision-making and application processes, dive into courses and succeed, and, ultimately, move out of the educational realm to apply your newfound skills and knowledge.

Part 1: Introducing a Different Kind of Learning

In this part, we give you the basic landscape of online learning. In particular, we discuss what you may need to consider about online learning to see whether this is truly a fit for you. In addition, we give you an overview of the technological competencies you should have before taking an online course.

Part 2: Preparing to Be a Learner

If you haven't gone to school in the past ten years, you're in for a surprise! Almost everything is online, from course catalogs to applications to live advisors. This part walks you through the processes you need to follow to select an appropriate program or course, apply, register, and enroll. We also tell you about why you need to have the right attitude for learning online.

Part 3: The Virtual Classroom: Being an A+ Student

This part is where we talk about the specifics of how online learning works. Drawing from years of helping new learners become acclimated to online courses, we

walk you through the common activities and processes you need to know as an online learner. This includes communication skills, identifying important documents and resources in a course, and understanding your role and tasks as a learner. Even if you've taken an online course previously, you may be surprised at the details we address.

Part 4: Special Considerations in Online Learning

One of the truisms about online education is that it offers more educational possibilities for persons who may not have access to a more traditional educational system. This includes younger students (those in kindergarten through high school) and students with disabilities. Online classrooms are diverse, and we address special needs in this part of the book.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

Every *For Dummies* book concludes with a short summary of key information and tips. In our Part of Tens, we have included ten myths about online education and ten best practices for self-care while being an online learner.

Icons Used in This Book

As is customary in any *For Dummies* book, we've used a few standard icons. Here's what the symbols mean and how you should interpret them:



TIP

We use this icon to mark strategies and techniques we've learned from being online students ourselves or from our former students.



REMEMBER

Any information marked with this icon is worth remembering and taking away from this book.



WARNING

This icon denotes things you should be cautious of. Taking note of this info can help you avoid unnecessary headaches.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

We use this icon when we feel the need to provide more background information on a topic — material that's interesting, but not essential to your understanding the big picture.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the pages you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere cheat sheet that offers a number of online-learning-related pearls of wisdom. To get this cheat sheet, visit www.dummies.com and type **online learning for dummies cheat sheet** in the search box.

Where to Go from Here

We understand that your situation is specific to you and that you may not necessarily need the same information as other readers. Feel free to look over the table of contents and decide which chapter might best meet your needs. Our recommendation is that if you're brand-new to the idea of online learning, flip to [Chapter 1](#) for an introduction and move through the book sequentially. If you're already taking an online course, head to [Part 3](#) for pointers on succeeding in your class.

We truly hope that not only is reading this book enjoyable to you but that it also helps you make some important decisions, provides you with the right questions to ask on your academic journey, and better prepares you for your online adventures.

We wish you luck in your online journey and prosperity in your future careers and academic adventures.

Part 1

Introducing a Different Kind of Learning

IN THIS PART ...

Explore the online learning landscape

Evaluate the benefits of online learning

Gauge your own online learning aptitude

Examine the technical requirements for effective online learning

Chapter 1

Planning for Your Online Learning Journey

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Seeing what online learning is all about
 - » Walking through the process of becoming an online learner
 - » Finding out what it takes to succeed in online classes
 - » Looking at special populations that may benefit from online courses
-

Hello, and welcome to the world of online learning. We are excited that you picked up this book to help you jump into online learning and what it takes to succeed in the online classroom. In this book, we explore the ins and outs of online learning. We share personal stories, from both instructor and student perspectives, as a way to help you understand what is expected of learners and overcome the sometimes false expectations of new online learners. We want to be clear that this relates to learning via a college course as well as learning via workplace training; in either scenario, the shift to learning online requires new skills.

You may have some specific questions about online learning, such as these examples:

- » What is online learning, and how does it differ from the traditional face-to-face classroom?

- » Which institutions offer online programs or courses, and how do I find them?
- » What type of computer and technological skills do I need in order to be a successful online learner?
- » What kind of work will I be expected to do, how will I complete that work, and how will I be graded?
- » What resources are available if I need help?

Our hope is that we have created a resource that answers these questions and more in order to help you succeed as an online learner. In this chapter, you begin your journey into the virtual world of online learning.

Examining the Characteristics and Advantages of Online Education

In a nutshell, online learning is using the Internet to support learning. It is about connecting the learner to educational materials by way of the Internet. Online learning combines a student (you), a curriculum (determined by the school or instructor or trainer), and an Internet connection. In this section, we introduce a few traits and benefits of online learning; we cover both topics in more detail in [Chapter 2](#).

The nature of online education

The content delivered as part of an online course and the way in which you prove that you're learning that content may vary widely. This list describes a few common formats: