

# Distance Education Success Guide

Produced by the Adventist Distance Education Consortium (ADEC)  
[www.sdaedu.org](http://www.sdaedu.org)

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# Overview of Distance Education

If this is your first exposure to a distance learning course, you may be wondering just what it means to take a course from a distance. You're not alone. While online courses are becoming popular among students who are not otherwise able to attend courses on a college campus, many students are taking distance courses for the first time. And they have questions about what distance courses are like, how they are delivered, how they work, and how to succeed at them.

Many distance courses offered by ADEC institutions use computer and Internet technologies to bridge the gap between you and your instructor. Other courses are available to you as traditional correspondence courses.

This guide is designed to help you get started in distance courses that use computer technologies as part of the course. You can be assured that you don't have to be a computer wiz to succeed. A few simple skills are all you need.

While you may not see your teacher or classmates on a daily basis, you are still an important part of a community of learners. Students report that when they become involved in distance courses and take opportunities to share of themselves in collaborative learning, they form important and sometimes lasting relationships with their instructors and fellow students.

This guide will help you understand what's required and what you can do to help yourself succeed. If you have questions at any time, please use the question tab below to email your question, and we will respond as quickly as possible.

# Distance vs. Classroom Education

Most of us are very familiar with at least one of the more significant media of distance learning known to humans--the book. While we can't all listen to the author of a book in one room together, we all share a distance learning experience each time we read the book. Most distance courses make use of assigned textbook readings, just like your typical college course.

Maybe you are familiar with the concept of correspondence courses, where you receive printed materials from an instructor, complete assigned readings at your own pace, submit assignments through the mail, take tests at a library or school, and complete the course within an agreed period of time.

Distance courses are similar to correspondence courses because they allow you to learn without attending a class, at your own pace, within an agreed period of time. But distance courses are also able to take advantage of technologies like:

- Email
- Internet hyperlinks to information
- Online reference source materials
- Chat rooms and discussion boards

These technologies help bridge some of the distance between you and the content you are seeking, and they stimulate you to think in new ways and to interact with other distance learners about the concepts you are learning.

In a traditional classroom, you might expect your instructor to present information orally and visually, respond to questions, and collect assignments during regularly scheduled class periods each week. In distance courses, the instructor assumes a role similar to a guide who helps direct you to the resources that will help you learn. In addition to a textbook and written directions, the instructor:

- May include visual and audio materials related to your course content
- May encourage you to work collaboratively with other online students
- Will respond directly to your questions submitted by email or in a chat room

And, instead of regular class schedules, you do your assignments on your schedule.

One other similarity between distance and regular courses is worth mentioning. Courses from institutions of the Adventist Distance Education Consortium are presented from a foundation of faith and Christian values just like you would find if you were taking the course on the campus of any of the member colleges and universities.

# Helpful Computer Tools

You don't have to be a computer wiz to excel at distance education, but a few simple computer skills using common computer tools will make your learning experience more successful. If you are already very familiar with computers, you may want to briefly skim through this section.

## Email

You will need to know how to send and receive email messages. Each email program is a little different, so you may need to consult your email help menu to answer specific questions you might have.

## Email Attachments

One useful feature of email is that you can attach documents, like Word files or illustrations, to your email message. If you haven't done this before, you start by saving the document you wish to attach. You can save the document on your computer's hard drive which is usually drive C:, on your computer's Desktop, or on a floppy disk.

Then open your email program and select the "Attach" option. A new window will open. At the top of that window will be a box with text something like "Look In:" or "Location:" next to it, and some text inside the box. Click on the arrow at the end of the box, which will give you a dropdown menu. Use the dropdown menu to select the location of your document, and then locate and select the document name. Your email program will show you that you have attached the document.

## Copy and Paste Functions

Copy and paste options allow you to copy text to a new location without disturbing the original text. You may copy and paste between documents and even from a document into an email message.

To begin the copy and paste process, the text that you want to copy must be highlighted. You can highlight by dragging your mouse over the text while holding down the left mouse button. You may also highlight by holding the shift key and using your arrow keys to move the cursor. Or you may select an entire document by using the "Select All" option in your program's "Edit" menu.

While the text is highlighted, select the "Copy" option by doing one of the following:

- Select the "Copy" icon in your toolbar
- Select the "Copy" option from your program's "Edit" menu
- Right click your mouse while it is over the highlighted text and select the "Copy" option
- Hold the Control button and select the letter "C"

Once you've copied the highlighted text, the next step is to paste it. Go to the location where you want the material to appear. Put your cursor exactly where you want the copied material, then do one of the following:

- Select the "Paste" icon from your toolbar
- Select the "Paste" option from your program's "Edit" menu
- Right click your mouse and select the "Paste" option
- Hold the Control button and select the letter "V"

You may want to try this a time or two to get the hang of it. Try copying and pasting between two documents. Open your word processing program and type a paragraph. Highlight the paragraph and copy it. Then open your email program and select the "New Message" option. Click inside the message box and paste the message into the box. It won't take long before you are using this feature often!

## Web Browsers

Web browsers, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator, are used to navigate the Internet. Navigation buttons enable you to move backwards and forwards between web pages. The Address field shows the web site address, or URL, of the page that you are currently looking at. You can type in an address in the Address field to go directly to a specific web site or page on the Internet.

Review the Technical Requirements section of this guide for web browser requirements when taking ADEC courses.

## Search Engines

To enter a query into a search engine, just type in a few descriptive words and hit the 'enter' key (or click on the Search button) for a list of relevant web pages. Since search engines only return web pages that contain all the words in your query, refining or narrowing your search is as simple as adding more words to the search terms you have already entered. Your new query will return a smaller subset of the pages found for your original "too-broad" query.

## Choosing Keywords

For best results, it's important to choose your keywords wisely. Keep these tips in mind:

- Try the obvious first. If you're looking for information on Picasso, enter "Picasso" rather than "painters".
- Use words likely to appear on a site with the information you want. "Luxury hotel Dubuque" gets better results than "really nice places to spend the night in Dubuque".
- Make keywords as specific as possible. "Antique lead soldiers" gets more relevant results than "old metal toys".

## Advanced Search Options

You can increase the accuracy of your searches by adding operators that fine-tune your keywords. Each search engine is a little different, however, here are some standard advanced search features you can use to narrow your search: "+/-", phrase, "OR", and Domain Restricted searches.

For more search engine tips, go to: <http://searchenginewatch.com/facts/index.html>

## Recommended Search Engines:

- Google: <http://www.google.com>
- AllTheWeb.com (FAST): <http://www.alltheweb.com>
- Yahoo: <http://www.yahoo.com>
- MSN Search: <http://search.msn.com>

# Learning Styles

How do you learn best? By seeing? By doing? By hearing?

Most of us learn in different ways at different times, and it's important to remember that there is no "right" way to learn. Some of us rely more heavily on sight, others learn by hearing or doing or combinations of all three. Understanding your learning style may help you recognize how online courses may work for you.

Researchers generally categorize learning into three styles--[visual](#), [auditory](#), and [kinesthetic](#). We'd like to suggest a fourth characteristic of successful students--[motivation](#)!

More information on learning styles is available at:

- McVay, M. (1998). How to be a successful distance student: Learning on the Internet. Needham Heights, MA: Simon and Schuster.
- [DVC Online](#)
- [NC State University](#)
- [University of Northwestern Ohio](#)
- [VARK Questionnaire](#)

## Visual learning

Visual learners rely on sight, pictures or visual representations to learn concepts. They may draw pictures to help them understand a new idea or be drawn to watch a how-to program on television. They are better at reading maps than at understanding oral directions.

Visual learners generally do well with the written material of traditional courses, but they find classroom instruction to be challenging. They appreciate when the instructor provides overhead lecture points or writes assignments on the board.

The online learning environment favors visual learners. Online courses may contain more visual information and graphic presentation.

## Auditory learning

Auditory learning relies more heavily on what learners hear. These learners pick up ideas quickly from lectures and discussions. They may find that talking out ideas is a helpful way to learn.

Auditory learners have traditionally done well in the classroom. Their ability to hear and coordinate important concepts helps them take good notes and recall important ideas at a later time.

They may need to find ways to adapt their learning style to the online medium and to encourage their instructors to provide auditory as well as visual examples.

### Kinesthetic learning

Kinesthetic learning style seeks to be physically involved. Kinesthetic learners thrive in apprenticeship models where they can watch an expert and then do what they've been shown.

They may learn better by building a model to visualize a problem. They prefer active to passive learning.

Kinesthetic learners may also be challenged by parts of the online learning environment. They may seek projects that allow them additional opportunities to think in three dimensions, but they must also learn to accommodate the greater reading and graphic interpretation that internet-based courses require.

### Motivated learning

No matter what your learning style may indicate, perhaps the biggest indicator of your success as a distance learner is your motivation. Students who are highly motivated to complete a distance course often achieve a high level of success.

Factors that affect motivation may come from external and internal sources. External motivations might be to complete a college degree or to earn a promotion at work. Internal motivations might include your interest in the course content or a strong desire to give your best effort.

While motivation is sometimes hard to measure, successful distance learners are generally self-motivated and self-disciplined learners. They study and submit assignments regularly throughout the class term, they take advantage of learning opportunities such as instructor chats and emails, and they plan ahead to make sure they have time to access materials, time to assimilate their readings and activities, and time to reflect their thoughts back to the instructor.

# Technical Requirements

## For PC Users

- Internet connection  
Contact your local Internet service provider for connection information
- Windows 95 or newer (Windows 98 or newer recommended) or other modern graphical operating system.
- Web browser (Internet Explorer version 5.5 or newer or Netscape Navigator version 7.0 or higher recommended)  
Web browser free downloads available from links below
- Pentium 133 MHz processor or faster
- 16 MB of RAM or more
- 25 MB of free disc space
- 28.8 modem or faster
- CD-ROM required in some courses
- Sound card and speakers required in some courses  
RealAudio free download available from link below

## For Mac Users

- Internet connection  
Contact your local Internet service provider for connection information
- MacOS X or other modern graphical operating system.
- Web browser (Internet Explorer version 5.5 or newer or Netscape Navigator version 7.0 or higher recommended)  
Web browser free downloads available from links below
- PowerPC 100 MHz processor or faster
- 16 MB of RAM or more
- 25 MB of free disc space
- 28.8 modem or faster

## Downloads

Internet Explorer – <http://www.microsoft.com/ie/>

Netscape Navigator – <http://www.netscape.com/>

Opera Web Browser – <http://www.opera.com/>

RealAudio Streaming Video/Audio – <http://www.realaudio.com/>

## Hardware Requirements

If you're planning to take an online course, the first requirement is that you have regular access to a computer. You may use any of the major brands of computers available, and the online courses are designed to work with either PC or Macintosh computers.

You will probably want to complete your online coursework from your home, and to do that you'll need to have a connection from your home to an Internet Service Provider (ISP). A 28.8 bps dial-up connection is sufficient to handle your connection needs, although a faster connection will save you time waiting for pages to load.

You'll also need a modem to allow your computer to receive and transmit messages to the Internet. Most computers come with a modem built in. If you have questions about connecting to the Internet, your local Internet Service Provider can provide many of the answers you need.

Some online courses may require additional hardware such as a CD-ROM player for course enhancement materials. You will be alerted to any special hardware requirements when you apply for your course.

### Software Requirements

You will need a simple email program installed on your computer. Any of the popular email software programs will work. Your email connection is an important link between you and your instructor.

You'll also need a browser installed on your computer. Since most all computers come with email and browser software installed, you should be able to check off this requirement fairly quickly. Online courses are designed to work well with Internet Explorer or Netscape as well as other browsers.

You might check to make sure that you have a recent version of the browser installed on your computer. If you are using a version of Internet Explorer that is lower than version 5.5, or if you are using a version of Netscape lower than version 4.7, you should go to the site for that product and download a newer version at no charge.

Most courses do not require a specific word processing program (such as Word or WordPerfect), but you will probably need to be able to access some word processing program to send and receive documents.

Some distance courses may use audio material as an additional instructional medium. Many computers come with the capability of playing audio, but you may need to download a free version of an audio program. Your instructor will give you more information.

# Learning at a distance

## Communicating with your instructor

Learning from a distance can be a challenging new experience for students who are accustomed to face-to-face interactions with instructors. So it is important to consider how you will communicate with your distance learning instructor.

In a classroom setting, you might ask questions during a class discussion, you might see the instructor before or after class or during office hours to ask questions. Learning at a distance changes how you communicate but not necessarily what you communicate. Students who take the opportunity to ask questions of their instructors via email find a high level of quality interaction is available to them.

Remember that your instructor does have other students and a personal life. But in most cases, you should hear a response to your email within one school day.

Frequent and regular contact with your instructor will help ensure that you are keeping on the right track with your study and getting the most value for your learning investment.

If for any reason you encounter problems that make it difficult to complete your course within the allotted time frame, contact both your instructor and the registrar at the school offering your course to discuss options you might have. Early consultation allows you the best chance of completing your course and getting a good grade.

## Communicating with Classmates

Some distance classes encourage collaborative learning by providing learning opportunities that involve working with other members of your distance class.

You may be asked to collaborate in a group project where you will share email and project drafts with other students. You may also be involved in a chat room or discussion board. A chat room is a website that allows you to communicate with your instructor and other class members while you are all online at the same time. A discussion board allows you to post comments and reactions to comments posted earlier by other students and your instructor.

Students who engage in collaborative learning projects are amazed at how quickly distance becomes unimportant and they can focus on completing shared projects with classmates in other parts of the world using the tools of online learning.

## Student Expectations for Distance Education Courses

### Time Demands

As you consider distance learning, you'll need to recognize some of the differing expectations of distance learning. To ensure your success, you'll want to plan a study time into your daily and weekly schedule in a place where you can work uninterrupted for periods of time. Distance courses don't require your time to travel or listen to lectures in class, but they do require additional time for reading, writing, and submitting assignments to your instructor. A commitment on your part to regular study will help you succeed.

### Self-motivation

Another key factor in the success of distance learning students is their motivation for success. Students who are more highly self-motivated, who can organize their study time and complete assignments on deadline, will generally find greater success in distance courses than students who are not self-motivated. Your motivation may come from a desire to complete a degree or just to learn more about a subject, but whatever the case, you will want to assess honestly your level of self-motivation to determine whether a distance class is right for you.

### Comfort Level with Internet Technologies

And finally, students who are comfortable working with the tools of the Internet generally have fewer frustrations in accessing distance course materials. The more quickly you can master web skills like transferring files, downloading software, and other routine web activities, the more likely you are to avoid wasting time and becoming frustrated.

# Academic Integrity

Each institution offering courses through ADEC has specific policies regarding academic integrity. Those policies apply to distance courses just as they apply to face-to-face classes. If you submit writing that borrows ideas from another author, you must clearly attribute the ideas to that author. Failure to attribute borrowed words or ideas to the rightful author may result in a failing grade for the assignment or a failing grade for the course at the discretion of the instructor.

## Reasons for Guidelines

Academic integrity is especially important in a distance learning environment. You are paying for an opportunity to learn and to develop your knowledge, skills, and abilities. If you short-circuit that process by copying from another author, the only person who is really hurt by that action is you. You've stolen from yourself the opportunity to learn, and you've taken your dignity and self-respect in the process. For your own sake, maintain the highest integrity in your academic experience. Make sure that all writing is your original expression. Attribute borrowed ideas to the original authors. Place all quoted ideas in quotation marks. And follow the guidelines for good writing style in your list of citations.