Mercer County Community College
Online Learning Best Practices

Getting Started

You are considering enrolling in your first online learning course. How do you make sure you will be successful at Mercer County Community College (MCCC)?

Online learning is a convenient way to learn; however, it requires a new set of skills and other considerations to ensure success. The following information provides a checklist of items to help you through the online learning experience. Please review the information provided and use it to prepare yourself for a productive learning activity.

Understand online learning expectations

Understand the technology you need

You need the following items to complete an online course at MCCC

Hardware	Used for
PC or Laptop (Mandatory)	All activity in Blackboard Use exclusively when taking exams or uploading assignments Highly recommended for discussions
Tablet Mobile Phone (Optional)	Reviewing material Tracking due dates May be used to create discussion entries
Software	**Keep in mind**
Browser (Mandatory)	Use Google Chrome or Firefox Download to mobile phone and tablet also Do not use Internet Explorer or Edge
Student App (Recommended)	Download from Blackboard Student app from App Store or Play Store To monitor announcements, due dates, and grades You may use to read materials Don't use for assessments, assignments or discussions
Adobe Reader	Allows you to read files in pdf format
Word Processor	Recommend Microsoft Word or the ability to save or export in Word format
Internet Connection	**Keep in mind**
Wired or Wi-Fi	Make sure you employ a solid connection to the internet A wired connection between your home router and PC or laptop is the best If you use a Wi-Fi connection, sit where you have a strong stable connection Any interruption in the connection can cause Blackboard to save and close out during testing or interrupt an upload to an assignment A tethered connection to a cell phone can work, make sure you receive a strong cellular connection and keep the phone close to the PC or laptop

Know how to perform the following activities using your technology

Search for YouTube videos on many of the subjects below or do a general search for information in your browser to learn how to do them. MCCC Portal help is available on the website.

Activity	Be able to
Access MyMercer	Access MyMercer from the College website (mccc.edu)
Access your classes	MyMercer – My Classes module or the BB icon on MyMercer
Use a word processor	Open word processing software and type a document Use Spell Check and common formatting capabilities Save or export a document in MS Word format if needed
Browser	Open a browser, open multiple tabs Search for a website Search for information Close tabs as needed Close a browser Clear browsing history
Upload a document from a website	Click a browse or search button on an upload screen, Click through the file system on your PC Find the document you want to upload and select it This is used in completing assignments
Download a document from a website	Open a file from a website and download it to your PC Instructors will attach a file to a lesson for you to download and view
Email	Know how to send and receive emails in your College email. Student email addresses for students have the pattern of firstname.lastname@students.MCCC.edu
Save a file in pdf format	In different applications, you can click File/Save As or File/Export or File/Print and select a pdf format as an option. In Mac the first selection may be different. Download Adobe pdf reader to your PC or Mac to be able to read pdf files throughout your tools and in browsers.

Go to the MCCC website (mccc.edu) if you need help with anything College-related. Use the search capability at the top of the screen or the new bot (Vic) at the bottom right to search. You will be surprised how much academic and personal support are available from the College.

Setting Up to Be Successful
Now comes the fun part, making it all happen!

Dedicated Study Space
Set a dedicated, comfortable space to work in. Chair, couch, or kitchen table. Surround yourself with what you need. Put books, pens, writing pads, headphones, and tablets within easy reach. Some learners put all this on a rolling bookshelf and pull it out when they are working.

Every time you sit in that place in this way, you work on your classes. This will help establish the right mindset for you. Make sure the place enables your work. Ask others to stay away. Put up a sign, 'Student at Work.' Keep distractions out of sight. (TV, phone)

Make Your Plan
Review your syllabus and course information sections in the online course. Document all due dates for the course. Enter all due dates with what is being delivered in a calendar. Your calendar can be software-based or hard copy, whatever meets your needs. Check the calendar every day.

Now, set time in your calendar for all the reading, writing, studying, and working in the learning system needed every week. Schedule this time when you know you can do it. Estimate how much time you need for each task. Take into account outside activity. Do not neglect your work, family, and friends, instead schedule enough time to do your schoolwork and do the other things too. Schedule two weeks at a time if you cannot schedule the whole course.

Now work by your calendar. Completing an online course is a project. Review your calendar daily and evaluate what you have scheduled. You may need to make adjustments in time, based on the unexpected.

Time Blocking

When scheduling, try a technique called time blocking. Set an amount of time for a task and work that amount of time. Stop when the time runs out. Monitor how well you get each task done in the time you set over a week or two and make adjustments as needed. This will help you get to each task. Do not try to do items that take a long time in one sitting. Rather, do them in pieces. You will produce better work that way.

Stick to the plan. Do not procrastinate. Treat the time you schedule as if you are sitting in class. Attendance counts.

Internal Process Check

Do an internal process check every two to three weeks.
- How are things going overall?
- Do you feel overly stressed?
- Are you allowing enough time to complete things in your time blocking?
- Are you allowing enough time to do the other things you need to do?

Make adjustments when needed.

Take Study Breaks

About every hour, take a ten-minute break. Play with the kids, go for a walk, stretch, do something active to wake your mind up. Do not go slouch on the couch or do something more sedate. You will not want to go back to course work.

Participate

Online discussions are the way you, other students, and your instructor interact. Start threads in discussions, reply to other threads, and be active in them. Check your discussion area every day. It is OK to agree and disagree, politely, and academically. Discussions allow you to see how others perceive the content you are studying and add to your perspective.

Attend online meetings when scheduled by your professor. Go early, check your microphone and speakers using tools included in the presentation tool. Be active, and pay attention. This is valuable live interaction time.

Send an email or communicate with your professor in other ways when you have questions. Your professor is there just as if they are in the classroom. Give them time to respond. If you have an issue, get it resolved. Do not wait. Reach out to your professor.

Ask your professor if an online meeting tool is available for students to use to study together. If yes, set up regular study sessions. If not, set up live chat sessions where you can discuss the latest material.

The key is do not rest on your laurels. Be active and engage with your professor and other students. Please remember to always conduct yourself professionally and respectfully with your fellow students as well as your instructor. Remember, this is an academic environment. Show you understand and value the environment you are engaging in.