

Checklist

Being an effective online learner

Awareness:

Knowing about the resources needed when taking an online course and the ability to use these

- 1. I have access to the up-to-date hardware/software needed for the course and my internet connection is fast.** This is important as it will facilitate a fluid and uninterrupted learning experience.
- 2. I am able to use the platform I will be undertaking the course on.** Be aware of which Virtual Learning Environment you will be using, and understand how to navigate it prior to the course beginning. This will mean that accessing classroom materials will be easy and stress-free.
- 3. I will practice video calling and methods of online communication before starting my course.** Many components of the course will use these methods of communication. An awareness of these is vital and will make you more confident when beginning the course.
- 4. I am able to access the online resources and services provided by my university.** Universities offer online services such as language support. It will also have online services and staff who can be contacted to help you navigate the online library. It is important you use these resources and services as they are crucial for personal study.

5. I will check the handbook the tutor has written prior to the course starting.

Be aware of any course deadlines (place these in a calendar) and look at the reading list. This way you can plan ahead and do the preliminary reading to avoid becoming overwhelmed when the course begins.

Taking Action:

Planning to be an effective online learner

- 6. I am able to plan a study schedule prior to the course starting.** Routine is key and flexibility is a perk of online learning but do put aside certain times of the day to focus on your studies. This means you won't fall behind and work won't pile up.
- 7. I will make sure I have a study space where I can work with minimal interruptions.** It is important to have a designated study space you can leave when you need to relax. This is important as a quiet space is key for course components like online webinars and Skyping with other classmates.
- 8. I am capable of time management.** Sticking to a study schedule will help increase focus and setting aside time to focus on course work will help you to prevent getting stressed.
- 9. I can avoid social media during study hours.** This is a major distraction during study periods. It is important to avoid social media during these times as this will help to increase focus.
- 10. I will check-in regularly.** This is vital to knowing when deadlines and discussion opportunities are. These opportunities really enhance and will allow you to make the most of online learning.

Practice:

Regularly practicing the following will allow me to gain the most of the online learning experience

11. I can use opportunities to interact with course peers in group discussions or projects. This will help you to meet others on your course and challenge you. This is important as it will make you reflect on different viewpoints and spark debate.

12. I am able to avoid using text speak. Although the course is online, it is important to practice using proper academic English. If you need help with this, you can contact the university where someone will be able to provide support.

13. I am capable of speaking to others online in a professional matter. Speaking to others online respectfully is of the utmost importance. This way you will create successful working relationships with your tutor and your peers.

14. I am able to self-motivate. Practice setting up a reward system when you achieve tasks as this could be a great way to keep motivated. A mood journal may be helpful in recording your emotions and reflecting on learning progress.

15. I know that help is available. Remember that there are people there for guidance if you feel stressed. Contact your tutor and use class peers as a support network, this way you will never feel alone or under supported.

16. I am capable of managing my workloads. Be aware that online learning requires time-keeping, scheduling and meeting deadlines. Keeping on top of workloads will have a positive impact on your online learning experience.

Top tips

Downloading a plug in for Firefox/Chrome/Explorer is a great way to stop using social media during these times (e.g. for Chrome try *StayFocusd*)

Written notes using the Cornell system may consolidate and help you question online material. A clear guide to this system is available here: <http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>

FutureLearn offers free, short online courses. They have three to prepare you for learning online. These are linked to in the further resources.

Reflective activity

Being an effective online learner

Please complete this activity individually, with access to the Internet. The results are for your personal use. Start by reading the Introduction and then proceed with the activities. You might wish to refer to the video, checklist and further resources while taking this activity. In total, the activity should take about 20 minutes. If, after completing the activity, you have further queries, please contact your tutor and support available at your university. Remember to save your completed activity as it will be useful to return to later in your course.

Introduction

Online learning is comparatively different to face-to-face learning, although many of your skills are transferable. You need to consider how you study, where you study, how you engage with your learning materials, and how you communicate with your tutors. There will be some skills that you already have e.g. time management but others that you may wish to develop to become an effective online learner.

This activity is designed to get you thinking about how you learn, face-to-face and online, and how you can ensure it is beneficial to you (and others).

Section 1: Reflecting on how I learn and, how I will learn online (15 mins)

Using each question as a prompt, reflect on how you have learned in face-to-face environments and how you will adapt your study strategies to become an effective online learner.

1a: How do I engage with learning and teaching materials?

This could include many different types of materials eg lectures, seminars, videos, podcasts or slides, course handbooks and handouts.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1b: How do I access and annotate readings and video materials?

This could include books and journals as well as online readings, articles, and video materials.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1c: What digital literacy skills do I need?

Digital literacies are the skills you need to live, learn and work in a digital society

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1d: What strategies do I use to manage my time and avoid distractions?

This may include approaches you take to avoid disruptions to your studying and tactics for time-management.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1e: How do I interact with my tutors?

Communications with your tutors help to enhance your learning. How can you adapt the way you communicate face-to-face to online to ensure you interact effectively with tutors?

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

--	--

Section 2: My skills for effective online learning (5 mins)

Using your answers from Section 1, identify five skills you already have which will help when studying an online course and five skills that you will need to develop to become a more effective online learner.

	Strengths	Skills to develop
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Section 3: My on-going reflections for effective online learning

Now that you have identified the five skills that you would like to work on, investigate the ways in which you can develop these. Utilise all of the help available to you including your tutors, your university's learning service or study skills support, your university library, your fellow students and all the resources in your virtual learning environment. You can continue to work on developing your skills throughout your course.

Further resources

Being an effective online learner

General

Student transitions to blended learning, University of Glasgow. Student experiences of using blended and online learning for the first time. The first four videos in particular highlight the study skills needed for independent, online learning:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/staff/telt/blended/students/>

Jisc Digital Student. Online learners' stories. A useful way to see how other students navigate online learning:

<https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/digital-learner-stories/>

Essential student skills: Getting online. Tips for getting set up at home including preparing your computer hardware:

http://induction.uhi.ac.uk/Using-technologies/Getting-online/set_up_home.html

Skills for OU study: Study skills for online learners by the Open University:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/>

Study skills for online learning. Open University tips for studying and making notes online:

<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/help/topic/computing/category/study-skills-for-online-learning>

Five-step strategy for student success with online learning. Further hints and tips for students hoping to study online. There is a lot of information here, so take your time to look around the blog. <https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2012/09/28/five-step-strategy-for-student-success-with-online-learning/>

7 tips for success when taking online courses: From University of Illinois, more tips regarding online learning:

<https://online.illinois.edu/articles/online-learning/item/2015/09/16/7-tips-for-online-success>

University of Exeter iTest: A short quiz from the University of Exeter to find out how you can improve the way you use technology to make you more effective in your studies.

<http://wip.exeter.ac.uk/collaborate/itest/>

How to be a successful online learner: Introduction to studying online resources from Northeastern University:

<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/successful-online-learning-strategies/>

Student guide to online learning: Resource from Michigan Virtual University that also includes an online learner readiness rubric:

<https://micourses.org/resources/pdf/toolkit/studentguide.pdf>

A student guide to studying online: Blog post by Tony Bates on issues to consider before commencing online studies. Includes links to other universities' guidance on online learning: <https://www.tonybates.ca/2012/02/29/a-student-guide-to-studying-online/>

Open online courses

Get starting with online learning: FutureLearn MOOC by the Open University that explains what online learning is. You can also review your own online study skillset, learn in online communities and use different technologies: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/online-learning>

Checklist

Working with others online

The 'I' in 'Team'

1. I will participate in creating aims and outcomes for the online group project as early as possible.

As a group, work together in the first week or two of your studies, to establish the goals of your project.

2. I will play an active role in developing and maintaining a project plan, which details how the group will achieve identified goals.

All members of the team must agree how, and when, the group will reach their agreed aims and outcomes. A project plan should be created and updated regularly.

3. I will help to identify tasks and assign them to members of the group based upon individual strengths and preferences.

Online collaboration works best when each learner is playing to their strengths and preferred ways of working. This will make for an effective project and ensure that each learner is confident that they can complete their tasks on time.

4. I will assist the group in establishing preferred channels of communication online.

The group must decide which channels of communication they will, and will not, use. There should be clear and agreed ground rules about how often all members of the team must check these channels.

Working in the group

5. I value working collaboratively online with my fellow learners and tutor(s).

This is key to a successful online group project. You will rely upon your fellow learners for support and also your tutor(s) when potential problems arise.

6. I will respect group guidelines.

Online group work can become chaotic. It is important to remember that group projects are a team experience, and not a solo one. Once ground rules have been established, team members must adhere to them so that the group work is completed on time.

7. I will contact my fellow learners if I become unsure of my contributions to the group work.

It is easy to become lost and confused in the work involved in online group learning. If you are worried about your work, talk to members of the group as soon as possible.

8. I will listen to, and value, the different views of other members of the group.

Actively listen when your fellow learners are presenting their ideas. You may not agree but you should respect these different perspectives. Afterwards explain, politely, where you agree, and do not agree, and explain your reasons.

9. I am willing to raise concerns with the group about possible shortcomings or problems.

You will be working with your group to ensure there are no major issues. If there are issues, it is essential that you raise your concerns as soon as possible. You should try to provide positive, realistic solutions on how the group can fix the problem in a cordial and timely manner.

10. I am willing to trial online technologies for the benefit of my team. There are many different technologies for online group work. Groups need to decide the best technologies for recording and presenting their work.

Skills for being an effective online team player

11. I am able to convey my ideas in online discussions. It is essential that you are as professional as possible in all your messages to the group. Take time to craft your posts to the team and re-read them a few times. Do not use text language or slang which can easily be misunderstood.

12. I am able to manage my own time effectively as part of a team. Establishing protected time for working around other commitments and responsibilities is essential. This should be organised in advance in case changes need to be made when discussing the group work with other members of the team.

13. I am self-motivated and self-disciplined. Keeping yourself enthusiastic and organised will ensure tasks are achieved effectively and in a timely manner so that you do not disappoint other members of the group. Fellow members of your team will be frustrated if they have to compensate for your lack of contribution to the group project.

14. I am able to participate in online activities without interruptions or distractions. I am able to dedicate a quiet place for online group learning. This should be a quiet space with minimal distractions, ensuring a conducive online learning atmosphere.

15. I am able to remain professional online at all times. Group working may be demanding and stressful since your fellow learners may be balancing study, work and family responsibilities. You will need to remain calm, positive and retain a professional approach to completing the online tasks while working with other members of the team even though you may never meet face-to-face.

Top tips

Working in groups takes time. You will need more time than you expect. Always leave extra time especially when near to assessment deadlines.

Show your group you value their ideas. Encourage others to join discussions by asking specific members to share their thoughts or by suggesting limited talking so that everyone will have time to express their ideas. If you show you are genuinely interested in the ideas of other group members, it will encourage them to contribute more.

No one is talking. Always check that everyone has shared two ways in which the team can communicate with them, just in case. Organise regular meetings. If the problem persists, contact your tutor.

Support each other. If someone is having a work crisis and struggling with the tasks, do what you can to help. They will do the same for you!

Help is available if you need it. Remember that not everyone has the same level of IT literacy. Offer to help other members of your team. Remind fellow learners about IT workshops and services that are available in your university.

Reflective activity

Working with others online

Please complete this activity individually, with access to the Internet. The results are for your personal use. Start by reading the Introduction and then proceed with the activities. You might wish to refer to the video, checklist and further resources while taking this activity. In total the activity should take about 20 minutes. If, after completing the activity, you have further queries, please contact your tutor and support available at your university. Remember to save your completed activity as it will be useful to return to later in your course.

Introduction

Working in groups can be fun and very rewarding but from time-to-time it can be perplexing, and even frustrating. A lot of the benefits and challenges of working in face-to-face groups are the same for online group work but there are some different ones too e.g. communicating using technologies.

Many of the skills that you have learned working in groups face-to-face can be transferred to the online environment e.g. setting of goals and planning. However, online group work requires some specific skills too e.g. knowing how to communicate professionally in different technologies.

This activity is designed to get you thinking about working in groups online, and how you can ensure it is beneficial to you (and others).

Section 1: Learning in groups (10 mins)

Consider the benefits and challenges when working in groups, professionally and personally, face-to-face and online. Then, consider the skills you will need in online group work – some of these may be new and some adapted from face-to-face group work.

1a: What are the benefits of learning in groups for me?

In your experience, professionally and personally, what are some of the advantages of group work? Do you anticipate different benefits working in groups online or will they be the same?

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1b: What are the challenges of learning in groups for me?

Reflect upon some of your experiences of working in groups, professionally and personally. What were the challenges for you and the group? Group work online will have similar challenges but there may also be some new ones too. Do you anticipate different challenges working in groups online or will they be the same?

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1c: What skills do I need to work effectively in groups?

In your experience, professionally and personally, what skills did you need to perform well in a group and to help others in the group too, so that your group achieved its targets? This could include communication, time management and organisational skills. Do you anticipate that you may need different skills to work effectively in groups online or will they be the same?

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

1d: What approaches do you use to work in groups effectively?

This may include strategies you use to ensure you work well in groups and strategies you use to help others in your group to work well e.g. diffusing group tension with humour.

Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)

Section 2: Working in groups (10 mins)

In this activity, think about the challenges that you could face in group working, whether face-to-face or online, the impact of these challenges and finally how you might resolve them.

First, think about a scenario, which could be real or fictitious, involving a group which is experiencing issues. Outline the impact these problems may have on you and the group. Next consider the implications for you and the group of these challenges. Then, outline how you, as a team, might resolve the issues.

	Face-to-face (classroom based learning)	Online (blended or fully online)
Scenario Describe a scenario in which a group is experiencing problems. This could be real or fictitious.		
Impact In what ways will the issues outlined impact on you and the group?		
Implications What are the implications of the issues for you and the group?		
Resolution How would you try to find a solution to the issues that you have raised? What would you do and what would you encourage other members of your team to do?		

Further resources

Working with others online

General

Online group working guidelines. Student Kate Jones offers tips and tricks when studying in an online group. She closes with a list of frequently asked questions about online group work:

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/2/2436/Online_Group_Work_Guidelines.pdf

How to survive virtual group work. This short guide by eLearners is part of a portal to finding online degrees, but usefully outlines common scenarios in group work and offers practical solutions: <https://www.elearners.com/education-resources/online-learning/how-to-survive-virtual-group-work/>

Online Learning Tips: 5 Rules for Online Group Work. Part of the GetEducation.com portal, this short guide offers five useful tips for studying in groups:

<https://www.geteducated.com/elearning-education-blog/online-learning-tips-5-rules-for-online-group-work/>

Tips for participating in group work and projects online. Created by Drexel University, this visual infographic offers a brief overview of how to work in groups virtually:

<https://online.drexel.edu/news/group-tips.aspx>

Five steps to improving online group work assignments. This blog post by Gregory Wells from Colorado State University provides five practical tips about making online group work successful. Wells has a very pragmatic approach:

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/five-steps-to-improving-online-group-work-assignments/>

10 Netiquette tips for online discussions. Some tips on 'netiquette' and how to behave professionally in an online environment: <https://elearningindustry.com/10-netiquette-tips-online-discussions>

Discussion board Netiquette. A video outlining how to engage with discussion boards and other online platforms in an educational context:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwdqQjCfWSc>

University of Exeter iTest. A short quiz from the University of Exeter to find out how you can improve the way you use technology to make you more effective in your studies:

<http://wip.exeter.ac.uk/collaborate/itest/>

Open online courses

Learning online: Learning and collaborating. FutureLearn two-week MOOC by the University of Leeds on being an effective online learner and developing your online communication skills for working with others on discussion boards, wikis and other collaborative tools: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/learning-and-collaborating>

Learning online: Reflecting and sharing. FutureLearn two-week MOOC by the University of Leeds on getting the most out of online learning by reflecting and learning with others: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/reflecting-and-sharing>

Checklist

Learning effectively with technology

Access to technologies

1. I am aware of the technologies I will be using during my course. Identifying core technologies that will be used will help me to clarify how I will be expected to engage with my fellow learners and with my tutor on my course.

2. I have taken time to familiarise myself with online tools, resources and services provided by the university's library. The university library will provide online tools and services, including access to e-books and online journals. Knowing where and how you can find high quality academic resources will help you progress as a learner.

3. I have access to the hardware and software required for the course. Specific software and hardware may be required to take part in some courses. It is important to identify these requirements early, and to establish what personal hardware and software you need, and what your university can provide.

4. I have considered how the technologies I will use, during my course, will meet my specific access needs. Access needs can include requiring transcripts of audio or video resources, choosing particular colour schemes or the ability to easily enlarge text on your screen. Let your tutor know if any technology you are using does not meet your needs. They might not be aware of any access issues and will have to take action to meet these needs.

Learning to use technologies

5. I have taken the time to explore the technologies offered and supported by my university. An awareness of the tools available, and learning how to use them, will benefit you while you are learning, allowing you to focus on the subject rather than the technologies.

6. I have taken steps to understand technologies that are new to me and how they will be used. Technologies like wikis and e-portfolios are a common part of digital learning, but they do not always relate to technology that is encountered in everyday life. Where you are not familiar with technology being used, it is important to learn why and how the technology is used to support your learning.

7. I have read or watched video guidance on how technology will be used to support and facilitate learning. Technologies could include a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), an e-portfolio platform and online library systems. Engaging with information sources that provide support and advice on effective use of these systems will help you get the most out of them.

8. If I am given the opportunity to choose the technology I can use for learning, I will consider how and why I will use it. You should consider if the technology is fit for purpose and if it will meet your requirements. When using non-institutional tools you will also have to consider online security and data protection guidelines.

9. I am familiar with the university's guidelines and policies on the use of social media.

Most universities will have policies on the use of social media. Familiarising yourself with these policies will let you know how you can use social media as part of your studies and give you guidance on activities and behaviour to avoid.

Learning and assessment needs

10. I know how to use self-tests or self-assessments to track my progress.

Some courses will allow you to use online self-tests or activities to track your progress. These can identify areas of strength as well as areas that you need to develop further.

11. I am aware how to use technology to submit my assessment.

The submission of assessments in the correct format and ahead of deadlines is important in any learning situation. If technology is going to play a part in the submission of assessments it is important to understand the requirements ahead of time so you can factor in extra time before deadlines in case there are technical problems.

Learning and studying

12. I have considered how the available technologies can help me prepare for my course.

Online learning provides flexibility, allowing you to engage at the time, pace and location that works for you. Engaging fully with these opportunities can help you prepare in advance and explore the subject in more depth.

13. I have developed an understanding of what my tutor is hoping to achieve from the use of technologies.

Understanding why a technology is being used to support your learning can shape how you engage with it. Understanding the intended learning outcomes associated with a technology use should lead to you getting the most out of the learning experience.

14. I know how to make effective use of a discussion board or a wiki in a learning context.

Discussion boards and wikis are popular tools for learning, and it is important to know how to use them in this context. Discussion boards provide an opportunity to engage critically with ideas and reflect on what you have learned in an asynchronous way i.e. in your own time. Wikis provide an opportunity to collaborate and co-create knowledge. This could be synchronously (in real time) or asynchronously (in your own time).

15. I know how to view, read or engage with online learning resources effectively.

Online learning resources are increasingly being used to supplement or replace traditional lectures. When watching or reading online learning resources as part of a course it is important to actively engage with the material, identifying key aspects and areas you have to investigate further. Take the time to interact with it purposely and actively. Do not just watch/read them; engage with them and learn.

Top tips

Being able to use technologies is not the same as understanding and being comfortable with how to use technologies effectively as an online learner.

Focus on why the technology is being used rather than the technology.

Engage effectively with online learning resources. Note taking can be a particularly effective for this.

Follow Netiquette guidelines when communicating with tutors and fellow students online.

Make sure to back-up your work.

Keeping copies of your work in more than one location can protect you in situations where there are problems with technology and vital work is lost. Options for backup locations include offline copies, external drives, and cloud storage services.

Reflective activity

Learning effectively with technology

Please complete this activity individually, with access to the Internet. The results are for your personal use. Start by reading the Introduction and then proceed with the activities. You might wish to refer to the video, checklist and further resources while taking this activity. In total the activity should take about 20 minutes. If, after completing the activity, you have further queries, please contact your tutor and support available at your university. Remember to save your completed activity as it will be useful to return to later in your course.

Introduction

You may be comfortable with using technologies and interacting online in your day-to-day lives. You will probably have some experiences of using technologies in your studies. However, being able to use technologies is not the same as understanding how to use technologies effectively as an online learner.

In online courses, you will be presented with a range of online resources and technologies that have a specific role to play in supporting your individual and collaborative learning. Many of these resources and technologies will be available within your university's Virtual Learning Environment and might include online reading materials, video clips, podcasts, discussion boards, and tools for collaborative writing such as wikis. It is important for you to understand what the different online resources and technologies offer in terms of supporting your learning, so you can then make the best use of them in your studies.

In this reflective activity, you are encouraged to explore the online resources and technologies that are available in your own online course. Identify how you can use each of these to support your learning and rate your current confidence with each one. You might also like to think about asking your tutors about their expectations of how you will use these resources and technologies and what help is available to you.

This activity is designed to get you thinking about technologies in your learning, and how you can ensure they are beneficial to you (and others).

Activity: Using online resources and technologies for my learning (20 mins)

Log into your Virtual Learning Environment, or equivalent, for your online course. Take time to identify each of the online resources and technologies you have been provided with. List each kind of resource or technology in the table below, alongside your own thoughts on how it will benefit your learning and your current confidence in using that particular resource or

technology. Note any questions you have for your tutors especially about how they want you to use the resources and technologies.

You will see that a few illustrative examples have been provided to get you started, although you should feel free to delete or amend these.

Resources or technologies	How will it support my learning?	My current confidence in using this feature (Low/Medium/High) including any additional thoughts	Queries for my tutors relating to how these resources/technologies are supposed to be used on my course
Online course materials (e.g. text-based study units or readings)	I can access these at any time, so can read and study the materials at times that best suit my own learning and in advance of particular activities and deadlines.	High – However it will be important to be organised in studying course content and not leave it until the last minute.	
Video clips and animations	It may be easier and quicker to understand concepts and ideas from videos and animations than just from reading the course materials.	Medium – I can easily play the video clips and animations but will need to focus on their content and what they are there to explain rather than just watching the clips.	
Wiki	I can see that we have been given a Wiki to use for a group project, to be used as a shared space that everyone can write within.	Low – Although I understand the point of the Wiki, I have no experience of using Wikis and don't know how the various features work.	

Further resources

Learning effectively with technology

General

Jisc Digital Student - Learner Stories. These stories share the experiences of participants in a recent research conducted by Jisc on students' experiences with digital technology:

<https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/digital-learner-stories/>

Jisc Digital Student - Key themes from the Digital Learner Stories. Key themes that emerged from recent research carried out by Jisc on students' experiences with digital technology:

<https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2017/03/28/key-themes-from-the-digital-learner-stories-now-available/>

23 Things. These resources from the University of Edinburgh introduce different technologies that you may encounter as a student. The guidance here will help you engage effectively with these technologies:

<http://www.23things.ed.ac.uk/>

Pedagogical approaches to Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). Resource from Bournemouth University that provides information about different approaches to Technology Enhanced Learning that you may encounter as a student, including blended learning and the flipped classroom:

<https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/centre-excellence-learning/tel-toolkit/pedagogical-approaches-technology-enhanced-learning-tel>

Technology and tools for online learning: Although targeted at university staff, this guide introduces you to a range of learning technologies and how they may be used to support your learning:

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/technology-and-tools-for-online-learning>

Student guide to evaluating information technology on campus. Educause (US) guide for students to investigate their university's IT provision including support services, and how to manage your personal information:

<https://library.educause.edu/~media/files/library/2006/1/pub2301-pdf.pdf>

University of Exeter iTest: A short quiz from the University of Exeter to find out how you can improve the way you use technology to make you more effective in your studies:

<http://wip.exeter.ac.uk/collaborate/itest/>

Checklist¹

Being a responsible online learner

Know what is out there

1. I am aware of how my identity currently appears online. This may be in search engine results, current or old social media profiles, or data gathered by the platforms you use.

2. I am aware of who can see me online. This may include friends, family, strangers, employers, professors, scholarship bodies, advertisers, online companies like Facebook, and members of online communities such as an online course or gaming community.

3. I am aware of professional codes of conduct for online behaviour. The profession you wish to enter (nursing, law, teaching etc.) may have guidelines that are relevant to you even as a student. An example: <https://tinyurl.com/y6usojos>

Set your goal

4. I know what type of online identity I would like to have. You may wish to be as private as possible in all domains, to present one blended identity, or to settle on separate identities for different parts of your life (personal and professional).

Act accordingly

5. I have updated (or deleted) each of my social media profiles. If a profile is visible to employers, make sure it presents an engaging professional identity. Even on a private profile a small amount of public information can be beneficial if it is consistent with your CV.

6. I think twice before posting online. Even in private profiles, avoid posts and interactions that would be damaging to your professional life, because in exceptional cases a friend or connection could make them public. Try not to post or respond to posts when angry.

7. I have tried to remove any unwanted search engine results associated with my identity. You may need to make a request to the person or platform who posted the information. For extreme cases, seek advice. The [EU “Right to be Forgotten”](#) ruling may be relevant.

8. I have checked my privacy settings on social media and other platforms. This is important for controlling what others can see, but also for understanding and limiting how the platform uses or owns your data.

9. I make an effort to understand online terms of service, e.g. for Google. This can be difficult, but it gets easier if you make it a habit. You may not be able to change the terms, but you can change how (or whether) you use the service.

¹ We would like to acknowledge the Digital Footprint MOOC which informed the development of this resource - <https://www.coursera.org/learn/digital-footprint/>.

10. I think twice before tagging others, or sharing their posts. Some people are more private than others. Get permission before sharing someone else's private post with a wider audience.

Create a personal brand (optional)

11. I present consistent, up-to-date information across my public profiles online. You may want to use the same profile image across platforms.

12. I am actively building an online audience and network. If you feel comfortable being public and that it will benefit your career, this can be a great move. Remember to post regularly, respond in a timely manner, and follow others.

Top tips

If you cannot remove unwanted information, you can instead make it less prominent by curating a more up-to-date, relevant online presence.

Turn on the “tag review” function, available on Facebook and some other platforms. This means that you can check what you have been tagged in before it appears on your profile.

Reflective activity

Being a responsible online learner

Please complete this activity individually, with access to the Internet. The results are for your personal use. Start by reading the Introduction and then proceed with the activities. You might wish to refer to the video, checklist and further resources while taking this activity. In total the activity should take about 20 minutes. If, after completing the activity, you have further queries, please contact your tutor and support available at your university. Remember to save your completed activity as it will be useful to return to later in your course.

Introduction

Being responsible online is about being aware of your online presence, and its impact on you as well as others. Your online presence can also be described as a “digital footprint”:

“It’s the data you leave behind when you go online. It’s what you’ve said, what others have said about you, where you’ve been, images you’re tagged in, personal information, social media profiles and much more.”

(Digital Footprint flyer, <https://tinyurl.com/y79m6m5o>)

Your digital footprint impacts on you professionally because employers and others in your professional life will see aspects of your online presence. It also impacts your data and privacy rights because many online platforms e.g. Facebook and Google gather data from our online behaviour and build up their own profile about us. The things we do online also become part of other people’s digital footprints, e.g. when we tag someone. So it is important that our online behaviour is respectful to others.

This activity is designed to get you thinking about your online presence, and how you can ensure it is beneficial to you (and others).

The definitions we are using (just in case):

Social media = interactive online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Google+, YouTube, Instagram.

Online platform = a more general term including many types of websites but especially social media (above), any Google interface, online shopping websites, Uber and Airbnb, and websites that invite you to sign in and personalise your experience.

Section 1: Describing my online presence (5 mins)

Tick/mark everything that applies, even if that means multiple ticks in each category.

Social media presence

- I have several social media profiles
- I'm active on social media
- I'm not on social media
- I'm very private online
- I use my online presence to engage an audience
- I'm not interested in having an audience online

Search engine results

- I know what appears when I Google my name
- I don't know where my name appears online

Online identity

- My online presence is more personal than professional
- My online presence is more professional than personal
- I have a blended personal-professional online presence
- I have more than one online identity (e.g. professional identity, gaming community, Reddit)

Up-to-date?

- All my online profiles are up-to-date
- Some of my online profiles are out-of-date
- When I was younger I left a digital presence that is still relevant to me now
- When I was younger I left a digital footprint that is irrelevant or harmful to my current identity

Data and privacy

- I sometimes/often read online terms and conditions
- I never read online terms and conditions
- I have recently reviewed my privacy settings online
- I don't tend to check my privacy settings online

Interacting with others

- I only tag friends/others if I think they would agree to it
- When I tag someone online I don't think about whether they would agree or not
- I seek permission before making a private post more public (e.g. by sharing a screenshot)

I have shared someone's private post without seeking their permission

Overall

I'm happy with how I present myself online

I'm not happy with all of my digital footprint

There are some changes I want to make to my online presence

Using the statements you ticked as a basis, write a short description of your online presence in your own words (you can repeat information above and/or include new info).

Section 2: Documenting my online presence (10 mins)

This step gives you two possible templates for exploring your online presence and deciding what you want to change about it (if anything). Read the descriptions of Step 2a (social media) and Step 2b (Google and DuckDuckGo searches) and complete one of them. If you think that you can do both in 10 minutes – go for it!

2a: Social media

List all the social media platforms that you've signed up to (old and new, active or inactive) in the first column. Delete or add names of platforms in the first column as appropriate. Then fill in the other columns. The final column is for deciding whether some action is necessary to ensure your social media presence is working to your benefit.

Social media profile (examples below)	Up-to-date? (Y/N)	Is this public? (Y/N)	Would it be good for my career if employers saw this? (Y/N)	I've checked the terms and conditions for this service (Y/N)	Action(s) (e.g. keep / delete / change privacy settings / read terms and conditions / update content / change the types of post I make / engage more with my audience on this platform)
Facebook					
Snapchat					
Twitter					
Instagram					
Google+					
LinkedIn					
WhatsApp					
Profile for your online course					

2b: Google and DuckDuckGo searches

Do a Google search for your full name, or full name plus an important keyword (e.g. hometown, or school name) if your name is not unique. In another browser window or tab, do the same search on DuckDuckGo (another search engine which does not use cookies, so it might show you a less “tailored” set of results that might be more similar to what others see).

List the major results about you (up to 10), and for each result fill in the details below. Again, reflect on whether it would be good for your career for employers to see this, given that it is public, and ask yourself whether any actions need to be taken.

Search result	Did you expect this to be public online? (Y/N)	Would it be good for my career if employers saw this? (Y/N)	Action(s) (eg no action / remove it myself / ask someone else to remove / look into other ways to remove / highlight and link to my professional profile)
1. _____ _____			
2. _____ _____			
3. _____ _____			
4. _____ _____			
5. _____ _____			
6. _____ _____			
7. _____ _____			
8. _____ _____			
9. _____ _____			
10. _____ _____			

Section 3: Stating my goals (5 mins)

Now you probably know more about your online presence, and you know what actions you can take to improve it. To sum up and reflect upon this, please state a long-term goal you wish to achieve with your online presence. It can relate to any aspect of this activity.

Examples include:

- I want to become more private online, and limit the amount of information people can find out about me.
- I want to create a blended public-private online identity because this matches my interests and career goals.
- I want to engage more with an audience online.
- I want to start reading the terms and conditions for platforms I use.

Once you have done this, write down the first action you will take in this direction – scan through the “Action” columns of Section 2a/2b for inspiration.

Our online identities are always changing, as are our goals and careers. So you might want to repeat this activity at a later date – perhaps in six months or a year, or whenever you next apply for a job or scholarship – to see whether you are achieving your goals. If you want to do this, write down a date for repeating the activity below, and put the date in your calendar 😊

My long-term goal is to...

My first action will be to...

I plan to do this reflection again on _____ [date in calendar].

Further resources

Learning effectively with technology

General

Digital Footprint. CourseEra MOOC taught by Louise Connelly and Nicola Osborne at the University of Edinburgh. Explains the concept of a 'digital footprint' and provides guidance on how to manage your online identity:

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/digital-footprint/>

Jennicam Revisited. Podcast story about 19-year-old Jennifer Ringley, one of the first people to share their life extensively online: <https://gimletmedia.com/episode/5-5-jennicam-revisited/>

RightClick. Interactive resource from Robert Gordon University, containing guidance, hints and tips for engaging and being responsible on specific social media platforms:

<http://www.rgu.ac.uk/staff-and-current-students/rightclick/>

University of Exeter iTest. A short quiz from the University of Exeter to find out how you can improve the way you use technology to make you more effective in your studies:

<http://wip.exeter.ac.uk/collaborate/itest/>

What does your digital footprint say about you? TEDxYouth 8-minute talk by digital education expert and blogger, Nicola Osborne:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVX8ZSAR4OY>

Being professional online

Dear students, what you post can wreck your life. A blog post (which also contains positive advice!) by Thao Nelson, a lecturer at Indiana University, posted on *The Conversation*:

<https://theconversation.com/dear-students-what-you-post-can-wreck-your-life-79224>

Data and privacy rights

The Privacy Paradox: Note to Self. Podcast from US National Public Radio, containing five days' worth of challenges and resources for "taking back your digital identity":

<https://project.wnyc.org/privacy-paradox/>

Includes a quiz, **What's your Privacy Personality?** (Shrigger, Realist, or Believer):

<https://wnyc.typeform.com/to/CWAeSB>

Who owns your data? (Hint: It's not you). A five-minute video from PhD Comics:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1txYjoSQQc>

Why what Facebook knows about you could matter offline. 46-minute podcast from the *On Point* podcast (NPR): <http://www.wnyc.org/story/why-what-facebook-knows-about-you-could-matter-offline/>

Facebook can track your browsing even after you've logged out, judge says. Article from July 2017, in the *Guardian*. The responsibility for keeping browsing history is the responsibility of the user: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/03/facebook-track-browsing-history-california-lawsuit>

WebChoices: Digital Advertising Alliance's Consumer Choice Tool. This browser-based tool allows you to opt out of “interests-based” (targeted) advertising from companies who have signed up to the scheme: optout.aboutads.info/

Who targets me? A tool and project aimed exposing interest-based political advertising in UK election campaigns, which appear as FaceBook adverts: <https://whotargets.me/>

Open online courses

Managing your identity online. FutureLearn MOOC by the University of Leeds on how to present yourself online:
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/online-identity>