

Chapter 7

Academic Motivation and Self-Discipline Strategies for Online Learners

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the academic motivation and self-discipline of online learners and how online academic strategies can translate to the modern-day workforce in the post-pandemic world. The chapter examines digital learning trends and skills students need to prepare them for online learning, such as self-directedness. It discusses the difference between motivation and self-discipline. It also covers strategies specific for different types of learners, such as undergraduate students, graduate students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, and students from underrepresented populations. It provides tips for various levels of educators to support student motivation and self-discipline in the online environment. It also provides tips for students themselves to address their own motivation and self-discipline strategies, such as eliminating distractions, setting goals, using technology effectively, and developing a routine. The chapter concludes with suggestions of how to implement these online academic skills into the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant impact to daily life, including to the realm of education and the workforce. In a world that was already becoming increasingly electronic, the pandemic moved higher education even farther into the digital environment. It is evident that “it is no longer possible to return to traditional education in the form in which it was” and that this “is a new step in education” (Baskireva et al., 2021, p. 3). This new step in education will thus require further examination of online learning.

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The purpose of this chapter is to examine academic motivation and self-discipline strategies for online learners, specifically in the higher education environment. Students may suffer from a lack of academic motivation and/or discipline, especially in the online environment where they may not feel as connected to the classroom, learning environment, content, their peers, or their faculty members. Likewise, higher education educators, including faculty, staff, and administrators, may be struggling to find ways to support student motivation in this online environment. As online learning and hybrid programs become more common, these academic motivation and discipline strategies could be useful for both students and educators. Strategies will be aimed at supporting online student success.

This chapter will begin with an overview of digital learning trends that have resulted from the COVID-19 environment. It will then overview the differences between student motivation and self-discipline, and how strategies to support online learners can differ by learner type. It will also include tips for educators to ensure online student learning success, and tips for students to be successful in this environment. It will conclude with information on how students can apply these same learning strategies in their future, increasingly virtual workplace.

DIGITAL LEARNING TRENDS

Given the impact of the COVID-19 work-from-home and learn-from-home environment, digital communication and digital learning are increasingly important for both students and educators. There are multiple terms used to describe students who are learning digitally from home, including online learning, e-learning, remote learning, and distance education (Gelles et al., 2020). Some students like the concept of learning remotely. For example, Baskireva et al. (2021) found that 50% of students were satisfied with this learning modality and felt that it provided them opportunities for self-development, self-realization, and self-improvement.

Joosten & Cusatis (2020) explored four measures to determine if a student may be ready for online learning: online work skills, online learning efficacy, self-directedness, and socialization. Students may be more successful with online learning if their online work skills are more developed, such as if they are able to use the required technology and programs successfully. Likewise, students who have high online learning efficacy and believe that the online learning environment can be just as effective as in-person classroom learning are more likely to be ready and motivated for online learning. In fact, “online learning efficacy was significant in predicting academic performance or course grade” (p. 189). Students also need a certain degree of self-directedness and self-discipline to know how to learn on their own. Lastly, students may be more prepared for online learning if they are competent in online social interactions, such as working on a group project with their group online.

Unfortunately, “education turned out to be unprepared for distance and digital education both on the part of teachers and students” during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baskireva et al., 2021, p. 3). Some students and educators are not satisfied with online learning and/or were not ready for online learning with the way that it was implemented in the COVID-19 environment. Instead of true online learning, Gelles et al. (2020) describes the COVID-19 transition to online learning more as Emergency Response Teaching (ERT), a temporary form of online learning that was enacted quickly due to a crisis situation, and was not the intended modality of delivery for the course content. Whereas some students and educators adapted to this change quickly and easily, others were not as prepared or accepting of this abrupt change to online learning (Baskireva et al., 2021). Students had various difficulties, including lacking the

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