Be Prepared. It is our experience that systems will break down or service providers perform maintenance at the most inopportune times. Computer malfunctions or not being able to access your Internet service are not acceptable reasons for extensions. Locate a backup system. Print all important information to refer to when your computer is down. Best thing about Distance Learning is that you can always work ahead in case situations come up.

Log on Frequently. Log on as often as you can. Many instructors send emails or post important announcements and/or may make changes to assignments and exams dates. It is your responsibility to keep up on course announcements. Create a workable log on schedule, a comfortable routine, and you'll find the work manageable. If you let days go by before logging on, email and announcements may pile up and you'll find it difficult to catch up.

Answer emails. Respond to the email you receive. Not doing so tells the person who sent it you don't want to respond or you didn't get the message. If possible, reply immediately. If time doesn't allow you to send a comprehensive answer, send a quick one-liner, such as "I received this message and will reply later this evening."

Identify yourself. With most of us using a SPAM filtering system, it is a good idea to include your full name somewhere in your message either in the From line or the Subject line. This is not necessary with the ETUDES or Moodle internal message centers. If you use the instructor's college email address, don't assume the instructor will remember you by "fuzzybrain" or "hotmama1." It is also a good idea to also include a meaningful subject line description that includes the class title and/or a brief reason for the email.

Participate. In a completely online class, you don't physically "attend" a class, but attendance is still vitally important. In a virtual classroom, you attend by sending messages, participating in online discussions, and submitting work on time.

Save your documents in Rich Text Formatting (RTF). Save your files as Rich Text Format, an option in most word processing programs. Some instructors may not have the right decoding software, and RTF allows most programs to open and decode.

Don't flame. If you are upset at someone and you've written a message expressing that anger, wait 24 hours before sending it. After a day, you will be better able to decide on the wisdom of sending that message. It is very difficult to get the message back! Don't say anything in writing that you would not say in person. Don't use all caps; this indicates yelling.

Ask questions. If you don't understand the requirements for an assignment, be sure to ask questions. In a face-to-face classroom, the instructor is able to "read" nonverbal cues such as frowns, nods, wrinkled brows, or blank stares, and he uses this ability to adjust his presentation.

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In a virtual classroom, these cues are not available. Your questions or comments will help not only you, but also the instructor in clarifying his points.

Read Everything. Reading is key to your success in a distance learning course. You may find you spend a great deal more time reading, even re-reading, in distance learning then in face-to-face courses.

Become a part of the class. Respond to classmates' questions and concerns. In this way, you create a bond with them and begin to feel a part of the community. Get to know everyone in class via public and private emails and through the discussion forums. Your enjoyment of the online experience will be dependent on the extent to which you feel connected to your virtual classmates.

Use the Buddy System. Make sure you know someone in the class with whom you can brainstorm, discuss problems, and so forth. Try to implement a buddy system at the beginning of the session. Your instructor may already have this built in to the class through the discussion chamber. If it is not, try doing so yourself. Email is also a way to connect with others.

Check Spelling and Grammar. If your word processor has a spell checker, be sure to use it. Also use a dictionary when you are not sure if a word should be changed. Some word processors include a thesaurus function, so you can look up alternate words if you notice that you are repeating the same word too frequently. Many word processors also have a grammar checker; use that too, but use it cautiously because grammar checkers are not as accurate as spell checkers and you need to know a good deal about grammar to decide whether a recommended change is appropriate. Do not send messages or assignments without using proper capital letters and punctuation. Use of abbreviations and jargon is not usually recommended.