

**UNIVERSITY OF
NEBRASKA
HIGH
SCHOOL**

Characteristics of Successful Online Students

Enthusiasm & Curiosity • Organization • Study Skills
Intellectualism • Being Well-Rounded

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Characteristics of a Successful Online Student Part I

Enthusiasm & Curiosity

Barry Stark, Principal

When considering online learning, students, parents and educators should be aware of several characteristics that make successful online learners. While these qualities are certainly not required to do well in University of Nebraska High School courses, I have noticed that several of our students demonstrate these characteristics during their time with us, and applying these skills after graduating high school often leads to successful college and career experiences.

Throughout this series, we will discuss the following characteristics:

- Enthusiasm and Curiosity
- Organization
- Study skills
- Intellectualism
- Being well-rounded

Let's kick off this series with enthusiasm and curiosity. I was recently inspired by one of our students, Makaylo Van Peebles, who is traveling the world to teach English to children. Makaylo states:

*“Ahh—claiming and embracing education!
I have been re-inspired by these young
children to treat my education like the great
privilege it has always been.”*

I think Makaylo makes an excellent point about focusing on the privilege of our education, and we should see each opportunity to learn and be taught as a benefit to us. Learning as efficiently and effectively as possible requires enthusiasm, curiosity and effort from our students. They are more likely to be engaged in the content and execute assignments when they connect their passions with their course work.

To assist students, we have incorporated “Teacher Connect” activities within our courses to provide open-ended questions and encourage students to expand on their interests. These questions also encourage interaction between students and teachers, which is important but often overlooked in online education.

If students approach their learning with enthusiasm and curiosity, one of the results will be an attitude of content mastery rather than just “learning for the test.” The ability to connect concepts with facts enhances mastery and becomes a lifelong skill.

We look forward to discussing the characteristic of organization in the next several weeks, as well as providing suggestions and resources to help students be more successful.



Barry Stark, Principal

Characteristics of a Successful Online Student Part II

Organization

Carolyn Hovermale, Lead Teacher

When students enter into online learning for the first time, one of the first pieces of advice I give is to start a system of organization sooner rather than later. From my experience, students who have a system of organization perform better and are less stressed throughout their courses.

But what do I mean by “organization?” I think it’s a bit more than having a calendar with your deadlines and a notebook for each of your courses (though these are definitely great suggestions). It is about goal setting, being responsible and self-directed and paying attention to details. Like Mr. Stark said in Part I of this series, these are skills that will apply to your successes after high school—college and career. I truly hope the tips provided below will help you as you look to improve in these areas.

Set Goals

- **Use a calendar or planner.** This will help you avoid the last minute rush to complete assignments, which will allow you to be more attentive to details as well. You will avoid skimming readings and be able to comprehend more of the content.
- **Have your own daily/weekly/monthly calendar.** This can also help you schedule your assignments and plan for the future to avoid stress. If you make a habit of reviewing this calendar at the beginning of each week, you will always know of upcoming due dates and be able to plan accordingly. We assist in this process by providing an 18-week calendar in each course syllabus introduction.
- **Chunk your goals.** For large projects or when studying for tests, the best way to establish your goals may be to put them in chunks. This allows you to break down big to-do items into smaller bites. It will not only help you complete tasks more efficiently, but also give you a sense of accomplishment as you will be able to cross things off your list more often.



Carolyn Hovermale, Lead Teacher

Be Responsible & Self-Directed

- **Use a to-do list.** When taking courses with the University of Nebraska High School, you are indeed studying independently, which means you are responsible for completing your assignments on time. Along with your daily/weekly/monthly calendar, a to-do list can be extremely helpful in terms of planning how you are going to spend a specific amount of time.
- **Read each course’s introduction.** Each of our courses has an introduction section that I strongly encourage all students to read. This will give you important insight into the course and the expectations associated with it.
- **Keep copies of projects & unit evaluations.** Keeping good files of your work can save you time. It can also ensure that nothing gets lost. Especially if you have to mail in a project, never send the original without keeping a copy. Having old evaluations on hand will also give you great study guides for progress tests.
- **Keep all school materials in one place.** There is probably a time when you have lost a certain piece of paper, file or notebook. It can be extremely frustrating, especially if you spent a lot of time on the piece. This is why students should keep all of their school materials in one place. Even if you can’t have them spread out all the time, have a book bag that stores everything you need. This will save you time and stress!
- **E-mail unhsteach@nebraska.edu if you have questions.** Part of being responsible is knowing when to ask questions and seek out advice. We are always here to help you when you need it, so do not hesitate to e-mail us at unhsteach@nebraska.edu.

Pay Attention to Details

- **Study in the right setting.** For years, students have chosen their beds, the floor or a comfortable couch on which to study, but these are places we associate with relaxing or sleeping, which can affect your concentration. It is helpful for students to study at places that we associate with work, such as a desk or a table. These will not only get you in the right mindset, but will give you plenty of writing surface and space to spread out your materials.
- **Avoid distractions.** Turn off the TV, put your cell phone in another room on silent and shut the door. Not only will this keep you on task, but it will make for a more efficient use of your time.
- **Read directions twice.** If anything, teachers like to know that students at least read the directions! Doing so twice gives you a better grasp of the objectives of the assignment and helps you avoid unintentional errors.
- **Seek out inspiration.** Not into what you’re studying? If given the opportunity to apply lessons to what you’re interested in, take it! Motivation must come from within, but sometimes we need to seek out a bit of inspiration. You may not always realize the benefit of every course immediately, so take a moment to consider how it will help with your long-term personal or professional goals.

Characteristics of a Successful Online Student Part III

Study Skills

Barry Stark, Principal

It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to provide suggestions and tools for students that help them grow and succeed academically. These suggestions are very easy to implement, and for many of you will be validation for those skills you are already utilizing.

In Part I and Part II of this series, we offered information that we hope you will carry with you throughout your educational journey and beyond. In this article, I am going to readdress some ideas from Part II, so you can see how they apply to studying as well as other advice I recommend to students as they navigate through our courses.

To begin, I want to let you know that we offer a course called "Study Skills," which after reading this article you may consider beneficial. This course is intended to help you improve your study habits and attitudes by learning new study procedures and methods.

Study Skill Tips

- **Use a calendar.** Create a personal calendar or use the prepared calendar within each course for goal setting. Each semester course covers 18 weeks, and you can plan to spend one hour studying for each course five days a week to complete the course in 18 weeks.
- **Read the introduction.** When beginning a new course, always read the Course Introduction.
- **Complete all activities within the syllabus.** Even though some assignments are not graded, they will help you expand your knowledge and ability to answer questions of higher-order thinking.
- **E-mail unhsteach@nebraska.edu.** Connect with a teacher to ask questions and get advice when you need it.
- **Use resources.** Get help with various subjects by referring to HippoCampus.org and KhanAcademy.org.
- **Use reading strategies.** When reading materials, I suggest finding the main concept discussed within each paragraph. Make a notation of the main idea in 1-3 words in the margin by each paragraph. This will help you stay focused on the importance of each paragraph and results in a map that you can refer to as you prepare for unit evaluations and projects. This will also help you determine the meaning and purpose of the passage.
- **Print a copy of the unit evaluation.** Printing the evaluation will allow you to complete it on paper and make it easier for you to make notes.
- **Use testing strategies.** For unit evaluations, you should practice using testing strategies as this will help you prepare for college entrance exams. Some strategies include:
 - Identify an answer prior to reviewing the answer choices.
 - Eliminate wrong answer choices to narrow down to the two best options.
 - When you choose a final answer, you should know why it is the best answer—ask yourself if the answer correctly addresses the main idea of the question.
 - Complete the easiest questions first, then those that require more thinking and finish with the most difficult questions.
- **Always review missed answers.** To provide a better understanding of the concept, it's always a good idea to review incorrect answers and recognize why a different answer was deemed more appropriate for the question asked.



Barry Stark, Principal

“These suggestions are very easy to implement, and for many of you will be validation for those skills you are already utilizing.”

Characteristics of a Successful Online Student Part IV

Intellectualism

Tim Brown, Lead Teacher

Our team has enjoyed providing you with some thoughts about the traits many successful students have or attain during their time with the University of Nebraska High School.

At this point, you have read and, hopefully, reflected on the first three parts of this series. I am pleased to continue this discussion with some thoughts about increasing your intellectual or academic performance. We have two goals for our students—mastering objective and subjective requirements.

Mastering Objective Requirements

Providing students with interactive learning experiences has been shown to raise math and science scores on standardized tests. We have taken this into consideration and provide students with hands-on activities and practice exercises to enhance learning. I encourage you to take advantage of these activities within your courses.

It has also been determined that learning and retention of mathematic and scientific concepts is contingent upon understanding the step-by-step process. Learning material in a progressive manner helps with both retention and overall understanding. So remember, fully understanding the process is more important than the specific problem (Dr. Phillip R. Rosenkrantz).

Another handy resource I suggest taking a look at is Texas A&M's Student Counseling Service site addressing Self Help Math Study Skills.

As for completing multiple choice tests, there are some important techniques to keep in mind. I've listed some from the Penn State Learning site here:

- Anticipate the answer before you look at the choices. Physically cover the responses to see if the first answer that comes to mind is one of the choices.
- Read over all of your options.
- Eliminate highly implausible answers.
- Look for words like “always,” “never,” “only,” “must” and “completely” in the choices. These can often be the incorrect response.
- Mark responses you are unsure about in the margin to recheck after you have gone through all the questions.
- Do not spend a lot of time on any one question. Mark your best guess and check questions later if time permits.
- Look for multiple ideas or concepts within the same true/false statements. Keep in mind that all parts of the statement must be true or the entire statement is false.
- Be cautious about changing your answer to a true/false or multiple-choice question without valid reasoning. Your first choice is more likely to be correct than are later “guesses.”

Mastering Subjective Requirements

Subjective requirements focus on writing as well as critical thinking and analysis. Sometimes students are caught off guard by the amount of writing involved in completing an online course. It is important to realize why we include so many written assignments—often times, it is an opportunity to share your opinions and develop your ideas.

When writing, keep in mind that each of your points should be substantiated with valid reasoning, research or facts. Also, make sure to lay out your paper in a way that takes the reader on a logical path from one point to another in a clear and concise way. For more tips about writing, I suggest visiting the Purdue Online Writing Lab.

Writing also allows you to advance your problem solving and critical thinking skills. Much of the time, we will be asking you to reflect on literature that you have read or the relationship among ideas within a text. When completing an assignment like this, be sure to read carefully and jot down a few notes for an outline of what you would like to communicate. I find that many students are much more efficient at completing their papers when they can see all of their ideas, organize them and then begin writing.



Tim Brown, Lead Teacher

Characteristics of a Successful Online Student Part V

Being Well-Rounded

Barbara Wolf-Shousha, Director

Since late February, we have been exploring the different traits students who successfully complete online courses have and acquire during their time with the University of Nebraska High School. It has been interesting to see our team develop these pieces because it has prompted great conversations about the goals we intend our students to reach, and I have enjoyed seeing all of our thoughts come together.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to read and reflect on each of the four preceding parts of this series.

For my piece, I wanted to discuss one of the most impressive characteristics of our student population—being well-rounded. We are constantly awed not only by the great academic work of our students, but by the unique ways they spend their “free time.”

Athletes, dancers, musicians, singers, artists, volunteers, world-travelers—we are proud to see such a great diversity among our students' interests. It is definitely a characteristic we thought important to point out in this series.

I hope by encouraging you to be well-rounded, you will take the time to pursue your interests and talents outside of your studies. There is so much out there for you to explore, and you have a lot of it at your fingertips thanks to the Internet. Also, reaching out in this way will provide you with invaluable experiences for your future, whether that means college, university, military or career. My sincere hope is that you will know what it feels like to be passionate about something.

If you don't know where to start, consider what you like to do in your spare time right now

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and then ask yourself if there is another outlet that would allow you do this activity or talent in a more formalized way. You can also reach out to family and friends to see if they have suggestions about ways you could spend your time. Remember, whatever you do beyond your academics will provide you with great content for college admissions essays and job applications.

For a bit of inspiration, I also encourage you to read about some of the students we have highlighted in the Student Spotlight section of our homepage at highschool.unl.edu.

Thank you so much for reading this series of articles. I hope it has provided you with some suggestions you will incorporate into your studies and future plans.



Barbara Wolf-Shousha, Director