

Attributes of Successful Learners



The successful lifelong learner is one with a hunger for literacy, a desire for skill advancement, a working knowledge of good problem solving abilities and basic critical thinking skills. The lifelong learner has personal qualities that contribute to developing “self-efficacy, strong intellectual interests, and good communication and interpersonal skills”. (Lawson, Askill-Williams, & Murry-Harvey, 2006).

Successful distance learners are self-motivated, self-reliant and self-disciplined. Distance learning students are the architects of their own learning environment, have the ability to manage their study time and schedule. Students can often customize their learning projects to fit their personal interests and there is great opportunity for personal growth and individual academic success. This requires both internal personal motivation and discipline, and also requires the establishment of a supportive personal learning environment and may require elimination of certain activities to make room for online learning in daily life.

Distance learners should be independent, self-directed individuals. The online environment enables students to learn at their own pace, relieving some of the pressure of traditional seated learning and making learning more enjoyable but requires that the student is able to identify learning goals and objectives and focus their attention accordingly. Distance learners become independent problem solvers, doing their own research and expanding their life long learning skills. This process helps them develop critical thinking skills, and the ability to interpret and synthesize reading materials, articles and research papers with differing points of view and in the process develop their own positions and beliefs about the subject matter.

Some computer and Information literacy is necessary for a distance learner. Distance learners should possess a working knowledge of email, the Internet, and basic keyboard skills. Instructional material within the learning management system will provide all the other skills needed to access and begin the online or distance course. Distance learners may be required to develop skills for researching and locating information from various sources and differentiate and evaluate them for inclusion in distance learning assignments and research projects.

Distance learners should be energetic and disciplined managers of their own time. Students must be able to organize and plan their own best study schedule. While individual learners may prefer a different time of day or times in the week to devote to their distance learning study and projects, it is important to devote time each week to course work and it is vital that the distance learner understand that the same amount of time is involved in distance education courses, and traditional seated courses. The distance learner should assess his or her best time of day for study, whether it is early morning or evening, every person has a best time of day for learning and thinking. A deliberate effort must be made to carve out time in the student's daily schedule for an optimal study time. Study time should not be the time that is left at the end of the day, unless that is the time when the student is most alert and attentive.

All learners and especially distance learners need effective communication skills. The particular nature of distance education requires that communication be done in a written format, whether it is email, written assignments or discussion forums, the written word is vital in distance education. The ability to write clearly and communicate ideas becomes more important since it is the primary means of communication in distance learning.

The successful distance learner has a strong sense of responsibility and personal commitment to academic success. Online learning, like many things in life, reaps rewards equal to the energy put into the process. The independent nature of distance education requires the presence of motivation, and

discipline but commitment and follow-through are also vital. The successful distance learner must be committed to complete the process once started.

Confidence is an important attribute for a successful learner, especially in distance education because there are times when the learner will need to evaluate what has been studied, form conclusions and make critical judgments. A strong sense of self-confidence is an asset in distance education as well as traditional learning situations.

A strong sense of ethics is essential in distance learning students because much of the learning is independently done and without direct supervision of the instructor. Learners will not gain the knowledge and skills they wish if they do not adhere to strong ethical standards. Ethical behavior is required for distance education and the benefits of developing a strong sense of ethics, and ethical behavior standards will serve the students in their lives as citizens, their personal lives and their careers.

Many distance learning environments and courses require good collaborative and group management skills for group projects and discussions of study topics. The ability to collaborative work toward a goal, or collaborate in a discussion is helpful for distance students. Students may be asked to work within a group in various capacities to support a collaborative effort for discussion, research, or project, so social skills as well as communication and respect of the other students is vital. Working together in an unemotional and civil fashion, and coping with the personalities of the others in the group may be challenging but these skills are needed in distance education as well as in most aspects of life.

The most important of all the attributes of distance learners and life long learners is a hunger for knowledge and an inquisitive and curious outlook on life. The distance student has opportunities for personal growth as well as education. Learning to be a self-motivated life long learner is a skill that will follow the student and serve them in many other aspects of their career and life.

References

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