Emily Nye, Former Director of Ashford University

Five Ways to "Write" Yourself as a Successful Online Student

As an online student, you've probably already discovered the wonderful flexibility and freedom of your online classroom. You can "attend" a lecture while commuting by bus, or from your break room at work. You can take a quiz while wearing your pajamas, holding a sleeping baby in one arm, or having coffee at your favorite neighborhood hangout.

Look around – there's no teacher in sight. Yahoo!

On the other hand, there's no teacher in sight. Yahoo?

You are expected to not only interact with your instructor, but also with classmates on discussion boards and projects. So, how can you be "present" in a virtual classroom?

A major part of your success for students online is how you represent yourself, and that amounts to being a strong and thoughtful writer. Writing is especially important in an online setting because that is how you demonstrate what you've learned to your instructor. Compare this model to a traditional classroom, where you get to have face-to-face discussions, and receive immediate answers to questions if you don't understand something.

In addition to showing what you've learned, how you come across in writing dictates the way your instructor and classmates will respond to you. Education researchers have shown that online or on a traditional campus, students who attend every class, sit in the front of the classroom (okay, you can't do that online), come prepared, ask good questions, and interact respectfully with their peers are the ones who progress toward their degrees.

Before you start any online writing project, be it an email to an instructor, a discussion board response to a classmate, or a research paper or essay, consider these five points that will help you to best "write yourself" and create a strong online presence:

1. Write well, which means taking the time to write. It is hard work! A thoughtful discussion board response requires careful reading of the course material, making sure you understand the assignment prompt, and drafting a response BEFORE you press the "Send" button.
2. Watch your language, which means using appropriate English and remembering that this is college. Even if you're writing an assignment using your phone or tablet, avoid "Text-ese." Don't abbreviate words or use slang.

3. Write as a helpful colleague. When you proofread any post to classmates or to your instructor, consider that written messages lose the added meaning conveyed by body language. Ask yourself: is this message clear? Am I coming across as angry or defensive? You might need to tone down your language or clarify a point by adding an example.
4. Write to entertain, from time to time, but be careful using humor or sarcasm. It's easy to be misinterpreted online. A smiley-face apology can't always undo the effects of a tactless remark.
5. Write as a nice person by using good manners. Acknowledge your classmates' efforts. "Please" and "Thank you" are golden!

If you feel you aren't a strong writer, you're not alone! Luckily, there are many free online writing resources, from the University of [Arizona Global Campus Writing Center Online](#), to [Purdue OWL](#), to [Grammar Girl](#).

Does this effort sound like a lot of work?

It is, but the benefits of learning to write yourself a strong online presence last far beyond college graduation. By becoming conscious of how your writing reflects you, you become increasingly aware of your audience and how to communicate effectively. That is the mark of an excellent writer – in your professional and personal life as well!