

Online education – it's convenient; it's flexible; and it suits your schedule and lifestyle. You've decided to enroll in classes or maybe it's a one-time seminar. Great. Now what? How do you get the most out of it? After all, it's your time and hard-earned money.

First things first: set your goals. Really define why you're doing this and what you want to achieve. Just be sure your goals are realistic and specific rather than lofty statements like: "to improve my life." Improving your life is great; just be sure you've got a clear picture of what steps you'll need to take in order to do that and how this education will help.

Find a way to separate yourself from distractions while you "attend class." Chances are good that your distractions are the very reasons the flexibility of online courses is attractive to you. They're things like your job, your spouse, and your kids. Let your family know how important what you're doing is to you (and to them). Create a schedule for yourself and ask them to respect it. It may mean that you have to carve out time either after the kids have gone to bed or before everyone gets up in the morning. Obviously, you can't ask your boss to leave you alone while you're studying or "in class." If this education will further your current career, your employer may be very understanding. A quiet spot during your lunch hour may fit the bill. You can study rather than joining co-workers for lunch.

Classes and seminars can bombard you with a wealth of information. Sometimes, it's too much, and it feels like it's impossible to digest it all! You're right. It is, especially when you're trying to learn amid juggling a family and job. For each class/seminar, plan on finding three nuggets of information that you can put to use immediately. That's it... just three. Keep a separate note sheet handy and jot them down. You'll know which ones they are by the 'ah-ha' reaction you have when you hear or read them. If you have more than three, jot them all down, but select the top three to start.

Begin using those three bits of information immediately. Review them daily. Post them on your computer screen. Do that for a week or two until those three nuggets are ingrained. If you had more than three to start, go back and choose the others and begin putting them to work the same way. Or review your notes for other bits of information that you can use and begin the process over.

The beauty of online education is its flexibility and the opportunity to work at your own pace. If your class is produced as streaming video, for instance, go back and re-watch it a week or two later. Like everything else, chances are you missed some of the information the first time around. You could never pause and rewind a professor while sitting in a live class, but now you can, so

don't hesitate to do that, especially during a complex point or something you find a bit confusing.

Don't be afraid to speak up and ask questions when you don't understand. Good instructors can tell by looking at their students if the information is getting through and making sense, but that benefit is missing in cyber school, so you do need to question them. Remember, the only dumb question is the one that goes unasked!

In all likelihood, your course will be a bit demanding since you're fitting it in to your already busy life, but it won't last forever and you'll be better for it. Self-improvement through education is an investment that never fails to pay off. You will reap the dividends and benefits. Keeping that in mind will help get you through the long days and reach the goal you set for yourself at the start!