

# 5 QUESTIONS About Enrolling in Online Prerequisites for the Health Professions

When you have to take prerequisite courses to apply to graduate programs in **Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physician Assistant Studies, Speech-Language Pathology, or any other health profession**, a flexible, online format can be appealing. Due to their flexibility and convenient “location,” more students are taking these courses online. But how does someone relatively new to online learning identify a quality course, taught by a well-prepared instructor? A simple Google search can bring up a seemingly overwhelming amount of information so here are 5 important questions to consider when evaluating your options:

## 1 Why would I choose to take a course online?

Online courses are not easier; they take about the same amount of time in preparation and participation as a face-to-face (f2f) course. When you study online all of your course materials are available to you 24/7 through a learning management system (Blackboard, D2L). This means that you can access your “work” from multiple devices so that you can more easily integrate study time into your day.

Anytime/anywhere access and more flexible weekly schedules causes very little disruption to your work and/or family life, allowing you to continue to accrue income until beginning full time graduate study.

## 2 What added value comes with taking a course online?

Taking a course online requires you to take additional responsibility for directing your learning, planning your schedule and accessing the resources provided by your instructor.

Some additional responsibility is valuable because self-direction is a skill *required of all health care providers*.

Directing your own learning also contributes to development of ownership of information, and confidence in one’s ability to learn and grow.

Many online students also appreciate the flexible schedule of online instruction to spend more time thinking about what they have read and composing the thoughts they will share with their instructor and colleagues.



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## 3 Is Online Learning Better or Worse than Face-to-Face Learning?

People have been asking this question for years; lots of studies have tried to compare a course taught online with the same course taught face to face.

There are lots of opinions about the outcome, but I don't think that anyone has proven that either format is "better" than the other.

They are different.

Online learning is not for everyone. But it could be for you if you value your independence. It could be for you if you like to make your own schedule within weekly requirements. It could be for you if you want to build your ability to learn in preparation for the demands of graduate study.

So, to some extent, you have to decide if online learning is better or worse for YOU.

But you also should have some ideas about how to assess the quality of an online course you are considering.

## 4 How do I Recognize the Quality of an Online Program?

### Faculty training:

Teaching online is much more than uploading slides and text documents and linking with videos on the internet. The instructor needs training using the online environment to design instruction that creates rich interaction among students. Ask how faculty are selected and prepared to teach online.

### Course Design:

A student in an online course should have the opportunity to interact with course content as well as their instructor and other classmates. Look for courses that include interactive technologies, regular discussions, and explicit ways to contact faculty when needed.

### Available support:

A self-paced, fully independent course looks appealing at first glance. But it gets very lonely when one is lost, or even a bit confused, with only your computer for company and assistance. Look for the kinds of support you are accustomed to: contact with the instructor; assistance from library staff; support from technology; support from peers.



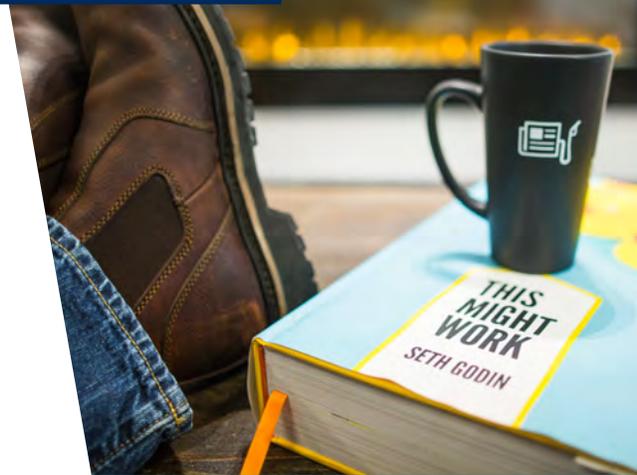
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## 5 Will Schools Accept Prerequisite Courses Taken Online?

I wish I could write here ABSOLUTELY.... But that is not true.

Yet.

Over the past 10-15 years, there has been increasing acceptance of courses taken on line.

While some programs explicitly state their policy for accepting online courses on their website, more often they do not and you will need to call the Admissions Office.

If the Admission staff are hesitant about accepting your course, try to find out what information they could review to assess your course. Any high quality online program will be able to provide you with a syllabus that can describe the course.

### Student Experiences with Online Courses

**Read some interesting stories** of students who have taken online courses and labs to fulfill prerequisites for graduate programs in the health professions.



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