

Top five tips for studying online

1. Interaction with teachers and staff
2. Manage written work
3. Variety of online interactive activities and materials
4. Study space, good internet connection, back ache
5. Private or group

You can have meetings online, talk to your friends online, and for a long time now we've been able to buy almost anything we like online, from the comfort of our own home. But ask anyone about online language learning and their facial expression changes. Can you really learn a language online?

I've been doing online courses as a learner since around 2003, and things have changed quite a lot over the years. Back then, it was all done via a Blackboard system, with online forums on which you could chat with classmates about particular assignments set by the professors. You got a little feedback from the same professors, but mostly you were on your own with a lot of books. I'm not sure that back then, I would have been able to learn a

language online. However, now things are much different, and the technology we have these days allows for a very different experience.

Here is some advice for if you are thinking of studying English, or any language, online.

Being part of a community: Interaction with teachers and staff

Possibly the most important aspect of learning anything is being part of a community and support from the professionals. The interaction you get working with your teacher in an online classroom, via Zoom, Skype, or Google Classrooms is important, but so are a number of other points of communication.

- **Get to know the staff at the school; schedule regular online meetings with them so that you can get to know who they are, what their areas of expertise are, and how they can help you. It's really important that you have an opportunity to voice concerns, ask questions, and get advice as often as you can. A small problem can be quickly solved by staff if you have an opportunity to talk with them, but if you're online, and don't have any interaction with staff, only a once a week lesson with a teacher, these problems can build up and create a much greater sense of dissatisfaction and unease.**
- **Meet with your teachers outside class time. Again, you should feel that you are getting as much support as you need. Often a teacher has a specific set of goals they want to get through in a lesson, and it may feel as though you can't bother them with extraneous questions during this time. You might also be embarrassed to ask in front of other students if you're in an online group class. If you were in an actual physical school you could easily talk to your teacher for five minutes outside class, but online you can't do this. So you have to create opportunities to do so. A school should**

provide this for students in the form of counselling sessions for students, or consultation time; where a teacher is available online for a set period of time each week in which students can pop online and chat for ten minutes or so about anything they are concerned about. Learning a language should be incredibly enjoyable, but there are always questions about this or that, and you need to be able to address these as soon as possible, so that you can find an answer, a solution, and move on to the next challenge.

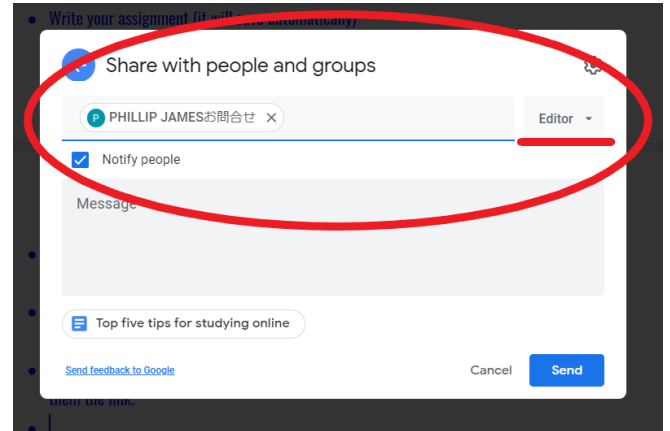
Managing your written work

A crucial aspect of learning a language effectively and efficiently is that of doing as much written work as you can. From regular diary writing to writing imaginative stories or preparing presentations, the act of writing more quickly reinforces recently acquired language, allowing you to move on and learn more. Link to [PJ Complete Study Guide](#)

However, if you're not in a physical classroom, how can your teacher effectively read and mark your work? One of the fastest and most convenient ways to do this is through Google Docs. If you have a Google account, you can access Google Docs and share work you've created with anyone.

- Open Google docs on your browser
- Open a new document
- Write your assignment (it will save automatically)
- In the top right of the page you'll see a share button; click it to reveal your share options
- The share options are 1) anyone on the internet can view this link (not a good option if you want privacy!) 2) Only people added can open with this link

- Choose option 2; make sure you have the email address of your teacher and send them the link.
- Make your teacher an Editor, as in picture, otherwise they won't be able to add any comments
- They will be able to open and share the document with you in class so that you can both view it at the same time and discuss any issues you both want to discuss.



Variety of online interactive activities and materials

Even if you are right at the start of learning a language, a complete beginner, or someone with a few years experience, you are going to need a variety of activities and materials to ensure you effectively and efficiently learn the language. Learning a language simply by talking to someone for an hour or so a week would be rather like learning to play tennis by simply practicing your backhand hitting the ball against a wall for an hour each week.

Your online school should provide a great range of online activities and materials because our brains need this variety in order to learn effectively. Integrated learning means using speaking skills in conjunction with reading, writing, and listening skills, as well as a good focus on pronunciation, and vocabulary and grammar practice. In your school, you should look for the following:

- **Integrated video work:** studying relevant vocabulary, discussing the topic of the video, watching the video, discussing its content and being challenged to answer

specific questions relating to its content, and finally, as a homework assignment; writing a summary of the video content.

- **Research projects:**
 - research a subject in English that you have a keen interest in
 - discuss your research with your teacher or classmates and talk about how to organise your research into an appropriate presentation format
 - work on this at home
 - in the next class give a presentation to your teacher or classmates
 - finally, provide opportunities for questions and feedback

This is very similar to how you would create a presentation for work, and indeed these days, as online working increases, it is very likely many people will be doing this more and more online, and not in physical office spaces.

- **Online quizzes:** because you're not actually physically in a room with your teacher or other students, the online experience can feel quite isolating. There isn't the opportunity to interact with people in the same way as you would in a regular classroom. You need something more exciting and fun to maintain your motivation and a variety of fun games and quizzes are essential in providing this. It also changes the focus of the interaction you experience online, from being a basic two way conversation, to being something much more interactive, whereby you, as a student, get to use your pc to read questions, discuss and input answers, and get feedback.
 - You may want to do them on a pc rather than on your phone though, as you need to input words and phrases, which can be somewhat inconvenient if you're using your phone.

This variety and change of focus is essential in helping your brain consolidate what you are learning. It is much more difficult for you to learn something if the pace and range of activities are too narrow, in short; fewer activities and materials is more likely to lead to something close to boredom, which everyone knows is when your brain switches off!

Study space, good internet connection, back ache

One difference you may have realised exists between a physical school and studying online is the place in which you study. Schools are designed as a learning environment, and mentally, once you are in the classroom, you are *ready to focus and learn*. You need to recreate this environment at home.

If you have the luxury of having a designated room in which you can arrange your pc, books, ect, and have them there all ready, whenever you study, great. However, it's not uncommon to have to study in the living room or a bedroom.

- Try keeping all your language study materials in a large enough box, which can be pulled out quickly whenever you need it
- Not being able to find pens, notebooks, spare paper, is going to increase your frustration and decrease your ability to focus; you're not going to be able to learn as much as you'd like, and if you don't realise this is the cause of your slow progress you might even give up unnecessarily or too early.
- Lighting: if your room doesn't have a bright light, try to buy a small desk lamp that you can store in your box along with your other materials. Low lighting is going to make it difficult to read, make you sleepy, and then, of course..., you're going to fall asleep.

- Taking a language class on your phone is not a good idea. I've had plenty of university students try to do this because they don't have access to the internet, and use the mobile phone instead. If you do this, you won't be able to read much of what is on your screen, it will be almost impossible to do anything other than talk. Not great if your teacher has planned some fun activities which involve using other websites, or possibly worse, if you need to work with other students using online materials. You're going to let your team down.
- Internet connection: in my house my study room is somewhat far from the internet router so I need a wifi repeater (中継器). This is great, as otherwise my internet connection is poor, and my online class is almost always broken up by the bad connection.



Backache

The final issue here is backache. In a regular classroom, your teacher will know that sitting down for long periods of time is going to cause some people to develop a bad back, so the teacher has everyone stand up regularly, and move around the class, talking in pairs, asking questions, etc. If you're online for a long period of time, you need to do some of the following:

- have the pc high enough so that your shoulders and back are not hunched over
- Try finding a place where you can put the pc so that you can actually stand up whilst taking the class; I frequently do this whilst I am teaching. I put my pc on a shelf on one of my bookshelves and stand up. Whenever I do this I might get tired feet after a while, but that's nothing compared to back pain.

One-to-one or group lessons

A lot of people tend to assume that studying online means studying one to one with a teacher. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to both one-to-one lessons and group lessons; it mostly depends on your personality and your needs

One-to-one lessons

Advantages

- You can ask your teacher questions whenever you want
- You can talk about only the things you are interested in
- The teacher can focus all their attention on you and the issues related to your progress and language development
- There is more flexibility with your schedule
- You don't need to worry if you are somewhat shy or embarrassed about speaking in front of others

Disadvantages

However, there are a few drawbacks. Most importantly, you don't usually conduct business one to one, and with the same person. Usually, you are working with many different people, so it's important to be able to express yourself in a number of different ways, depending on who you are talking to, and for you to be able to understand a whole range of different accents and styles of English.

You should also pay attention to the fact that your teacher is highly likely to adapt their own English so that you can understand them. This is good for the classroom, and avoids making

you feel embarrassed or demotivated, but on the other hand, it doesn't prepare you for interacting with people in the real world.

Group Classes

Advantages

- Group classes are more realistic of the outside world; negotiating and understanding a variety of different people
- You have to be able to express yourself in many different ways, in order for people to be able to understand you
- You are likely to be more confident, as you have to use English in front of your peers. Your teacher will, inevitably, grow used to your English, and not notice when you are making mistakes. Classmates, on the other hand, are usually unable to do this, and so if they cannot understand something, they will not be able to complete certain class activities, highlighting your need to improve your accuracy and speaking skills.

Disadvantages

Obviously, if you are naturally shy, you will be nervous in group classes. You may conversely already be very confident in your English and only want to brush up on certain areas or skills. You may also have a tight schedule, and so need a flexible lesson schedule.

Studying online has come a long way over the past few years, and although there are certain advantages to studying in an actual school, if you're busy, or if it is inconvenient, nowadays, online lessons can be very rewarding and essentially no different to studying at a regular school.