

# Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design

## General Questions about Distance Education

Here are some frequently asked questions posed by distance education students. Having an answer for your students or providing this Q&A sheet to them could help them in their distance education endeavor.

**Q: How do I know if distance education is right for me?**

**A:** From what distance education students say, a prospective distance education student should consider the following issues before enrolling in a distance education course or degree program:

**Time management** - Can you balance your time among courses, family, and work?

**Motivation** - Are you motivated to take the course/degree and complete it?

**Flexibility** - If you like taking courses on your own time, then distance education may be for you.

**Self-directed** - You will receive some instruction and direction in a distance education course, but a lot of the learning will be self-directed; you are in charge of how much you learn!

**Q: What is the distance education experience like? Is it like a "regular" classroom?**

**A:** Depending on the technology used, such as interactive videoconferencing or videotape, it may look like a "regular" classroom. But in most cases, it's not like a regular classroom. Distance education courses are provided through some type of technology (videotape, videoconferencing, Web, streaming video). You probably will have some feeling of isolation, because most likely you won't be in a classroom with other students. But you do have the flexibility of accessing your course on your own time. You'll also find that you will probably be able to interact with the instructor more often through mediated channels (phone, e-mail, chat) than you would be able to do in a large class.

**Q: In a distance education environment, how do I communicate with my professor?**

**A:** In a traditional classroom setup, you have the opportunity to ask questions face to face. With distance education, you can still interact and communicate with your instructor, but it's a little different. In videoconferencing, you still can ask questions of your instructor through the interactive audio and video (the instructor can see and hear you through a television monitor, and you can see and hear the instructor). With other types of technology, the communication methods may be through chat sessions, electronic bulletin boards, the telephone, and e-mail.

**Q: What technology will I use in my distance education course?**

**A:** This depends on the course. Some of the possible technologies include CD-ROMs, Web, videoconferencing, videotape, and streaming video. You will need to check with your college and possibly with a course's instructor to find out which technology is used.

**Q: Will I have to travel to do my distance education course?**

**A:** Generally, you will not have to travel on a regular basis to a central location, if it is a Web-based course. For videoconference courses, however, you may have to travel to a site that has the videoconferencing equipment. Occasionally, a distance education class will require a special class meeting at the main university campus or other centralized location. In some cases, this may require an entire weekend at the beginning of the term. Instructors will notify you of such requirements.

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**Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design** is a collaborative effort of the following universities: University of Florida, University of Idaho, Iowa State University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, Texas A&M University, and Texas Tech University. This project was funded through a **United States Department of Agriculture Higher Education Challenge Grant** (2002-2004).

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