Taking classes can be a fairly daunting task when faced with the demands of busy life schedules. Here’s a solution, take your courses online. You’ve tried that but sometimes you just feel left out of the classroom’s social loop. Well have you tried a hybrid solution yet? A hybrid course will allow you to attend your class face-to-face, online or both. Here are some tips to help you succeed in your hybrid course.

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1. Don’t Treat It Like One or the Other

This is a hybrid course so use the benefits of each style of the course even if you'll be doing primarily one over the other. If you’re going to be primarily a face-to-face student make sure to use the online notes and, course materials and if available the class recordings to accent your own in class notes. If you’ll primarily be taking the course as an online student don’t forget there are real live people in this class to interact with and a live instructor to ask questions to.

2. Do Read the Syllabus

There’s tons of information here. Everything from the instructor’s office hours to course assignments can be found in the syllabus. It’s a quick way to find standard information about the class. So give it a look on or before the first day of class and give yourself an idea of what you’re about to embark on.

3. Don’t Sit Idly By

Participate, participate, participate. You have to get involved in the class, especially if you’re online. When there’s a class discussion or forum posts by your classmates have a voice and respond. When you’re online if you don’t speak up people can easily forget that you’re even there. Not being seen by your classmates or instructor can have a negative impact on your grade.

4. Do Get to Know Your Classmates

Everyone who’s asked to share notes in a face-to-face class knows that your classmates can be your best friends. The same applies to those students taking the course primarily online. Classmates can answer question that are unclear to you, catch you up on things you’ve missed and even be a sounding board for you to bounce your thoughts off. Social interaction will also alleviate the feeling of disconnect some students feel with a class solely online.
5. Don’t Forget to Reflect

Many instructors ask students to write reflection papers for each class or week that has gone by for the class. Whatever the time frame of the reflections are, try and do them as they come up. Going back in the end an looking through your notes or revisiting the entire online library for the course to write your reflections can be exhausting and probably won’t look that great to your instructor either.

6. Do Attend A Class (F2F)

Are things getting rough online? Is motivation to keep up with online work getting a little low? Well why not go in to the face-to-face portion of the class. Interaction with real living people in a “normal” classroom setting can be just the jolt you need to get things going again. It will also give you chance to meet the people you’ve been interacting with in your virtual settings, talk with your instructor and get out of the house for a much needed breath of fresh air. See number seven.

7. Don’t Get Stuck In Front of Your Computer

Take a break. Schoolwork can get tough if you’re spending all your time sitting if front of a computer. Many people opting for more of an online education do so because of work schedules that don’t permit for attending classes face-to-face. If you’re working on a computer, studying on a computer and playing on a computer chances are you’ll need to step away and clear your head and give your eyes a break from staring into the glow of a computer monitor. Hybrid courses are about having the best of both educational worlds so if you’ve been spending too much time in front of the computer give face-to-face a try.
8. Do Talk With Your Instructor

One quick and simple way to get a feel for how things are going with any course is to talk with your instructor and hybrid courses are no exception. You'll have quite a number of options to do this. You can chat with them through emails, in online forums/discussions, in person during regular office hours or in class during normal regular class hours. Instructors can help with any number of topics and should not be shied away from. Don't forget there to help you; instructors’ goal is for you to succeed not to fail.

9. Don't Flake

It's easy to hide out in both face-to-face and online classes and not get a lot done. A major portion of a successful hybrid class is the interaction between all involved. If you’re distancing yourself from the class it makes it that much harder for everyone else. Make sure when you a lot time to be a part of the course to actually show up and do your best to be a part of the class. Hybrid courses can have group assignments, discussions boards, forums, emails discussions and presentations all of which need every student to be involved to the most effective for everyone.

10. Do Have Fun

You're taking this class for a reason, whether it is a need for a specific degree program or personal interest; so enjoy the class you've chosen to take. Utilize all the available tools of the hybrid structure to make the most of the class. If you're a face-to-face student opt for a class or two online or pair up with another student that’s primarily online and vice versa if you’re planning on being primarily an online student. Classes you enjoy you’re more likely to participate in, keep up with your assignments and overall do better in the class.
Tips for Participating in Hybrid Classes

By Kate Miffitt

The HyFlex course format affords a lot of flexibility in how you manage your coursework and your schedule. You will find that classmates participate in different ways, with some mostly online, others mostly in-person, and a few who will participate in both formats evenly. Below are some tips geared towards the varying participation styles. Read through them, and think about what approach might work best for you.

Mostly/Only Online

When deciding if you will participate exclusively online, consider your personality in addition to your schedule. Students who work well independently, manage their time, and communicate effectively thrive in the online environment. If you like a lot of feedback and interaction or find the course material challenging, you should consider attending class in-person.

*Set a schedule, and stick to it.* Because you don’t have a face-to-face meeting to prepare for every week, it is easy to procrastinate and put off assignments until the last minute. While you may be able to get by with this approach, ultimately you will find that you cheat yourself out of richer discussions and valuable feedback by not being involved in the class in a timely manner. Set a realistic schedule of about 8 - 10 hours a week, and then meet your deadlines. One approach is to designate a day for reading/working on assignments, a day for participating in discussions, and a day at the end of the week to reply to classmates and revise your posted assignment.

*Think quality, not quantity.* When participating in discussions, focus on writing quality posts, even if it means you will post fewer times. If you are posting to a discussion that is about a reading for the week, try to write something different than what others are writing, even if you don’t necessarily agree with it. Another way to contribute original posts is to relate the reading to an experience you had in the workplace; just be sure to tie your example back to the reading. Playing devil’s advocate or highlighting a different point from the reading will keep the discussion fresh and will ultimately benefit all participants. If you are giving feedback to classmates on posted assignments, take the time to really review one or two and give critical feedback. It is more valuable to help one classmate improve his/her project by giving detailed feedback than it is to tell five classmates “good job”, and you will learn more by applying the class concepts thoroughly to other projects.

*Get familiar with classmates’ projects.* It is likely that as the semester progresses, more discussions will relate to giving classmates feedback on their project progress. One way to make it easier to interact with whoever is online for the week is to have a basic idea of what most of your classmates’ projects are about. Remember that early in the semester, everyone will post a brief project description, which is a good resource to go back to in order to be able to give feedback to different classmates.

*Don’t wait to ask questions, or ask for help.* It is imperative that you be proactive and reach out to classmates or the instructor if you have questions or need help. If you are having trouble with a discussion topic, explain your confusion as clearly as possible so that others can respond. If you are stuck on an
assignment, email the professor right away. It is likely that your confusion can be cleared up rather easily, even though it feels like it is just easier to just give up when you are alone.

**Mix of Online and Face-to-Face**

If you plan to participate face-to-face some weeks and online others, you will be getting the best of both mediums. However, it will require some work on your part to be able to change gears from online to in-class.

**Get on a schedule that works for both.** If you plan to go back and forth between meeting online and in-class, you will probably find that the deadlines for each are a little different. Because many online students participate on the weekend, they are often posting assignments and discussions after the face-to-face class has met. Therefore, you need to find a working schedule that allows you to be prepared on time for the weeks you attend in-person. That will likely mean posting ahead in the online forums so that you are also on schedule with the face-to-face class.

**Be strategic in deciding in-class weeks.** The hybrid approach is great in that it allows you to accommodate things that come up in your schedule (events, illness, etc) while still participating in class. It is valuable, though, to be strategic in deciding the weeks you will be in-class in advance. If there will be a guest speaker, for example, or if the class will be going over a topic that is particularly challenging, those are good times to prioritize making it to the face-to-face session.

**Mostly/Only Face-to-Face Class**

Attending face-to-face classes enhances the social experience for many students. Because the class makes use of a robust LMS like iLearn, it is a good idea to think of yourself as an online student who participates in-person.

You will still be expected to access course resources and post assignments online.

**Check out the online discussions.** It is a good idea to skim the online discussions, even if you are not going to participate in them. Keep in mind that classmates participating online have more time to craft responses to weekly topics. While the in-class discussion is likely to be more dynamic, the online discussion is more likely to be thought out and summarize key concepts. Use it as a resource and to potentially get a different perspective on topics.

**Get familiar with the online format.** Even if you plan to be in class every week, it is likely that you will participate online at least once. Don’t wait until week 9 with a looming deadline to try to figure out how to post. Make sure you know how to use the various online tools and resources.

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*Editor’s Note:* Kate Miffitt is a 2007 graduate of the ITEC MA program. Kate completed 3 HyFlex courses during her program of studies.
HyFlex Tips for Success

Do

1. DO plan to attend class when you can.
   - Peer interaction is invaluable. (They may know things you don’t.)
2. DO turn in assignments ASAP regardless.
   - More time for peer feedback.
   - Time to revise, means a potentially better grade.
3. DO make sure that you have all the necessary plug-ins for your computer to play the videos or audio files that are recorded during the live class.
4. DO take advantage of the HyFlex environment if you can’t drive into the city for class. There is a lot to gain from the online learning opportunity.
   - After all, this is instructional technology.
5. DO use the online assignments even if you do attend the live class.
6. DO use headphones if possible during online classes.
   - It helps to minimize the echo.
7. DO try completing online materials during the normally scheduled time.
   - If you already have the time blocked out, then you’ll get it done and won’t have to try to fit it into your busy schedule later.
8. DO plan ahead for online classes.
   - Try to go through all the motions while in the classroom to see how it will work from home.

Don’t

1. DON’T wait till the assignment is due to post it.
   - You can’t take advantage of peer feedback.
   - You can’t revise it to get a better grade.
2. DON’T keep your microphone on during online classes if you aren’t speaking.
   - It creates a lot of feedback and can disrupt the class.
3. DON’T wait to do online work for the night before a scheduled class.
   - It’s often more work than you think.
4. DON’T try to attend an online class if you aren’t sure about how to use the technology.
   - Get one of your peers to help you in class first.
   - It takes away from the real learning opportunity because too much time is spent helping everyone get set up.
5. DON’T let the fact that you aren’t attending the in-person instruction fool you into thinking that it’s ok to procrastinate.
   - It’ll all pile up before you know it, and you’ll be pulling all-nighters to finish your semester.
6. DON’T be the last to join an online learning session if there are limited seats. (You may find yourself left out.)

General Advice

When trying to determine if attending online is for you, consider how you feel about working on assignments on your own. If you tend to be a loner, then by all means, try an online class assignment day instead of driving to campus. If you are the type of person who likes meeting new people and sharing ideas with others, then definitely try to attend class in person more.

There is a lot to gain from in-class interaction with your peers. Often they have ideas that you may not have heard before, or they can give you valuable feedback to make your project better than it otherwise would have been. (This was definitely the case with my projects.) Others can also potentially ask you questions about your work that helps you to develop it into a more complete work. They may ask questions that you might not have considered, or they can shed light on holes in your theories.

In a HyFlex environment, you get the opportunity to choose whether to attend in person or not. Often if I didn’t have the necessary time to drive across town to get to class, I would just listen from home. Or just plan to listen to the lecture after it is posted. Try the assignments and read the book as though you were attending in person every day. It’s easy to forget that you have class when you aren’t attending in-person.

When online instruction is given, where it’s fully interactive, treat it as you would a corporate conference call.

- Mute when you aren’t speaking
- Stay on topic
- Gather your thoughts before you begin speaking
- Don’t monopolize the session
- Do take advantage of the technology and share your desktop, or a website that others might really appreciate knowing about.