

READINESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Ryan Watkins

Abstract: Today, online learning opportunities are commonly available as a means for satisfying our educational desires and/or training requirements, but there is often a question of whether or not learners are likely to succeed. Deciding whether or not online learning is "right" for someone is rarely a straightforward process. This self-assessment provides trainers and supervisors with a quick, yet comprehensive, way to help respondents analyze their readiness for success in an online environment. It can be used to appraise not only respondents' technical preparedness for the online learning environment, but also to examine their online communication skills and study habits. It also provides a guide for examining which, if any, online learning environments offer respondents the best opportunities for success.

In response to consumer demands and technological advances, many organizations (including educational institutions, corporations, and government agencies) have moved toward offering employees, students, and others the opportunity to learn at a distance. Offering valid and useful learning opportunities at a time and place more convenient for the learner has become a priority for many organizations and is offering learners unprecedented access to learning experiences.

However, anticipating someone's success as a learner at a distance is not always easy. The online learning environment can be much different from those learning environments most of us have experienced previously. The potential online learner, however, should not be intimidated, as most online learning environments are designed so that learners with a variety of learning styles and preferences can find success.

The likelihood of success does, nonetheless, depend on a variety of factors. Several are necessarily related to technical proficiencies, while others are indicators of preferences as a learner. The Readiness for Online Learning Self-Assessment provides a quick, yet comprehensive, analysis of respondents' preparedness for success in an online learning environment.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

The assessment is designed to assist trainers or supervisors in asking the "right" questions, both about respondents' preparedness for an online learning experience and about which types of online learning experiences they are best prepared for. The assessment is based on the fundamental characteristics for success that the author has identified through experience both as an online learner and as an instructor.

The self-assessment is divided into two sections. The first is designed to assist the respondent in determining whether he or she is ready for an online learning experience. The second is to assist him or her in choosing the desirable characteristics of an online learning experience, given his or her personal characteristics. This will enable instructors or supervisors to choose learning experiences that will best suit the individual.

ADMINISTRATION

Give respondents copies of the Readiness for Online Learning Self-Assessment and pencils and ask them to complete both sections as honestly as possible, based on their own experiences online as well as in the conventional classroom. Tell them to use only their own learning experiences as a basis for their answers, rather than what they have read or heard from others. Tell them it will take between ten and fifteen minutes to complete the assessment.

When everyone has finished, give them all copies of the Scoring Sheet and ask them to total their scores for each part of the assessment. When everyone has written his or her scores in the proper places, hand out copies of the Interpretation Sheet. Let everyone check his or her own results and lead a discussion of the implications for respondents for how they should approach upcoming online classes. Ask for the range of scores, as you may want to provide extra help for those who scored especially low and/or provide additional technical resources so that they will be successful.

Use the results to plan events best suited to the respondents' needs and abilities. The assessment can be taken again at a later date after respondents have had more experience online.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

This instrument has some face validity in that the author and others he has known concur that the items are important for success with online learning. The assessment has not been statistically validated nor scientifically tested, but the author's experience is that taking these questions into account when considering online learning for any individual or group can be extremely useful.

References and Related Readings

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READINESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT*

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Part One

Instructions: As you read the questions below, ask yourself: "Am I ready for on-line learning?" Answer by circling the appropriate number from 1 (low agreement) to 6 (high agreement).

Low Agreement			High Agreement		
1	2	3	4	5	6

Technology

1. Do you have adequate bandwidth (speed of access to Internet resources) to access the files required for the learning experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. If needed, will you have access to technical assistance (either through the learning experience or elsewhere)? 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Do you have the basic computer skills for navigating the Internet and the learning experience itself (e.g., search engines, downloading files, installing software)? 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Do you own the software necessary for completing the learning experience (Adobe Acrobat, MS Office, QuickTime, Flash, and so forth)? 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Does your computer have the required components for the learning experience (enough RAM, speakers, desktop video conferencing)? 1 2 3 4 5 6

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Low Agreement			High Agreement		
1	2	3	4	5	6

6. Do you have anti-virus software that can protect your computer from a variety of viruses? 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Can you download files from the Internet to the hard drive of your computer? 1 2 3 4 5 6

Self-Directed Learning

8. Will the learning experience you are considering provide you with enough useful skills and knowledge so that you can stay motivated throughout? 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Are you able to invest the time to complete the daily/weekly required activities of the learning experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. Would your friends/colleagues say that you successfully finish challenges that you take on? 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. Are you committed to learning and applying what you learn? 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Do you have a personal support structure in place to assist you in keeping motivated throughout the learning experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6

Online Relationships

13. Do you feel comfortable knowing that other learners will most likely only know you through online discussions? 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. Are you able to express your mood, emotions, and humor accurately through your writing? 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Would you be able to remain motivated knowing that the instructor was not online at all times and was therefore unable to provide immediate responses to questions and concerns? 1 2 3 4 5 6

Part Two

Instructions: As you read the questions below, ask yourself: "Which types of on-line learning experiences am I ready for?" Use the same scale as before, with 1 as low agreement and 6 as high agreement.

	Low Agreement			High Agreement		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Online Video						
1. Do you feel comfortable taking notes while watching a video on the computer?	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Will you be comfortable relating the content of short video clips (one to three minutes, typically) to the extensive information you have read online or in required texts?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Chat Rooms						
3. Would you feel comfortable reading online while typing?	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Can you follow along with more than one online conversation at a time?	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Are you comfortable knowing that you may not be able to participate in all of the conversations occurring online at the same time?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Discussion Groups						
6. Can you accurately express your ideas, comments, and questions through writing?	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Can you keep focused on the topic of a discussion, even when there are time delays between comments?	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Do you perform better when you are given additional time to compose a response to a question?	1	2	3	4	5	6

	Low Agreement			High Agreement		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Online Readings						
9. Are you comfortable reading documents longer than one page on a computer screen?	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Do you have access to a printer for those documents that are too long for you to read online?	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Do you take notes on challenging material while reading it on the computer?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Peer Evaluations						
12. Would you be comfortable providing a fellow learner with constructive feedback on his or her work?	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Would you be comfortable receiving constructive, but potentially less favorable, feedback on your work from fellow learners whom you do not know personally?	1	2	3	4	5	6
Group Projects						
14. Do you know how to use the attachment features of your email (view email attachments and attach files to an email message)?	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Would you be comfortable knowing that part of your grade would be based on the contribution/input of another learner with whom you only interact online?	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Will you be comfortable working with other learners in different time zones?	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Is your schedule such that you can provide prompt and timely feedback to and ask questions of project team members?	1	2	3	4	5	6

Low Agreement High Agreement
 1 2 3 4 5 6

Learner Support

18. Will you feel comfortable if the online learning experience offers you little contact with the instructor (or tutor)? 1 2 3 4 5 6
19. Are you confident that you will not require much technical and administrative support for a successful online learning experience? 1 2 3 4 5 6
20. Has the prospective learning experience been designed to keep you actively involved throughout the learning process? 1 2 3 4 5 6

**READINESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING
 SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORING SHEET**

Part One

Instructions: Enter the response value you chose for each item in Part One of the Readiness for Online Learning Self-Assessment in the table below:

Question Number	Response Value
Question 1	
Question 2	
Question 3	
Question 4	
Question 5	
Question 6	
Question 7	
Question 8	
Question 9	
Question 10	
Question 11	
Question 12	
Question 13	
Question 14	
Question 15	
Total	

Part Two

Instructions: Enter the response value you chose for each item in Part Two of the Readiness for Online Learning Self-Assessment in the table below:

Question Number	Response Value
Question 1	
Question 2	
Question 3	
Question 4	
Question 5	
Question 6	
Question 7	
Question 8	
Question 9	
Question 10	
Question 11	
Question 12	
Question 13	
Question 14	
Question 15	
Question 16	
Question 17	
Question 18	
Question 19	
Question 20	
Total	

READINESS FOR ONLINE LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT INTERPRETATION SHEET

Part One

Scores from 81 to 90

A variety of online learning environments will likely be supportive of your interests and comfortable for you as a learner. Still, you should attempt to choose your online learning experiences based on your strengths in the second section of the self-assessment. Matching your strengths with the offerings of the online learning experience will still be essential for choosing an environment in which you are likely to succeed. Viable online learning experiences should provide you with a list of both the technologies required and the types of learning events offered.

Scores from 71 to 80

Entering an online learning experience is likely a good opportunity for you to expand your skills and knowledge, although you may have to spend additional time gaining the skills required for the online environment. If your score was low due to a lack of available technology, then finding additional technology resources (perhaps at public libraries) may be an alternative. If you responded that multiple dimensions of self-directed learning might be challenging, then study habits and time management may be a good place to start. The additional time required should be factored into your decision to take an online course.

Scores from 15 to 70

There are likely several areas in which you may want to gain additional experience before entering an online learning environment. Review the factors for which your response was 4 or below, and look for opportunities to expand on your experiences in those areas.

Part Two

Scores from 108 to 120

You are likely to benefit from a variety of online learning experiences. You already have many of the skills required for successful participation in an online course, so you can focus on the learning experience itself. You should

still try to match the components of the online learning experience with the strengths you have identified. Viable online learning experiences should provide you with a list of both the technologies required and the types of learning events offered during the experience.

Scores from 96 to 107

Some aspects of an online learning experience may be a challenge, but overall you should have the skills for successful participation in the majority of course activities. You will likely want to spend some additional time during the learning experience to gain the skills in those areas that you identified as being 4 or below, so factor this into your choice of online learning experience.

Scores from 20 to 95

There are likely several areas in which you may want to gain additional experience before entering an online learning environment. Review the factors for which your response was 4 or below, and look for opportunities to expand on your experiences in those areas.