

ONLINE CLASSES

READY OR NOT



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W e all hear about the convenience of online learning. So why do so many of us balk at actually taking an online course? Do we fear technology? Do we lack motivation?

Recent surveys of IRWA class participants confirm the fact that many employees no longer have employer support for travel expenses or the time away from the office needed for classroom-based courses. This requires some right of way professionals to use their personal time, and even their personal funds, in order to attend IRWA classes and expand their career opportunities.

Despite its conveniences, online learning is not for everyone. There are many factors to consider, so it's important to weigh the pros and cons. One disadvantage is the lack of supervision involved. For someone who tends to procrastinate, online courses may not be a good fit. If you are goal-oriented, then an online course will be a breeze. And of course, you will need access to a computer and high-speed internet, as using dial-up usually leads to technical problems and a high degree of frustration.

In terms of advantages, flexibility ranks at the top. If you want to fast-track your credentialing goals, you can take an online course at your convenience, spreading it out over several nights or lunch hours. This eliminates interference with work and time away from home. Another advantage is the cost savings. With no travel expenses, it's an ideal option for those with limited training budgets or if you have to pay out of your own pocket.

Taking the Plunge

For me, keeping up with technology has been a huge hurdle. I enjoyed a longstanding relationship with my outdated Motorola flip phone, but its limitations started to make me feel like a dinosaur.

Technology moves on, with or without us. I finally realized that I had to get with the program. After experimenting with different options, I finally took the plunge and got a smart phone, which I love. It lets me read and respond to emails, access Facebook and even read the news. I can even speak into it and it will translate my words into text.

So why was I so resistant to change? What was my roadblock? Well, besides the financial investment, I was worried about the steep learning curve. In the beginning, I experienced a lot of frustration while trying to learn to use it. I missed the ease and comfort of my old phone. But as time passed, I got more comfortable with it and my feelings changed. I appreciated all the conveniences it gave me and I learned to love it.

Most of us would prefer to stay in our comfort zone rather than to venture out and try something new. Showing up in a classroom and having the instructor tell us everything we need to know is very familiar. We know what to expect. It's very low risk. Of course, there are some major differences between online and classroom based learning. Trying it on for size is not as easy as going to the local store and seeing which phone you like. It may be a risk, but if you never try taking a class online, how will you know whether you will like it?

Before you take the plunge into online learning, however, I suggest you complete the brief self assessment (on page 36) of your learning style and comfort level with technology to help determine if you are ready for online learning.

Self-Assessment Questionnaire

To help you determine whether online learning is right for you, take a moment to answer these questions. This is strictly a self-assessment tool, so be sure to answer honestly.

Give yourself one point for each “yes” question.

A) Learning Style Considerations

	YES	NO
Are you self-starter, able to motivate yourself to complete a task?		
Do you enjoy working and learning on your own rather than as a part of a group?		
Can you budget your time and set schedules for yourself to get work completed on time?		
Are you good at setting priorities?		
Can you speak up when you have a question?		
Do you usually read and understand textbooks without assistance?		
Can you understand and follow instructions in a written format rather than orally?		
Subtotal your YES answers here		

B) Technical Considerations

	YES	NO
Are you able to locate information on IRWA's website without a problem?		
Do you have more than one email address?		
Have you been able to access your course history on the website?		
Are you comfortable making online purchases?		
Do you know how to manage pop-ups using the blocker feature?		
Are you comfortable with searching for information online?		
Are you able to print selected pages within a document?		
Are you at ease when navigating back and forth between windows?		
Are you able to create, save and manage files on your computer?		
Have you ever installed or upgraded computer software?		
Are you familiar with using email, including sending and receiving attachments?		
If you do not own a computer, can you arrange to use one at least two hours per day?		
Do you have high-speed internet?		
Subtotal your YES answers here		
Total YES answers		

SCORING:

If your “yes” score was:

17 or more points: You are a good candidate for success in an online class.

13-16 points: You may want to strengthen some areas, but overall, an online class is probably a good choice for you.

Less than 13 points: This indicates that your chances for success would be greater in a traditional class setting. As your skills and experience grow, you may want to revisit your options.

So, think you're ready? If so, check out the growing list of classes available online on the adjacent page. For detailed course descriptions, visit www.irwaonline.org. Also, be sure to check for monthly online education specials.