

Assess Your Experience

One piece of advice - start off slow. Try signing up for one distance learning course and test it for yourself. Honestly ask yourself the following questions as you move through the course. One prime criteria for choosing your first course is to pick something you are truly interested in. Don't just take something because you think you "should". Choose something that will make you feel enriched and empowered.

Ask yourself:

- How comfortable am I feeling about learning this material on a computer?
- How much effort did the course designers put into making this course interesting?
- What do I need in a course in order to keep interested in it?
- How does my computer keep up with the demands in the course? Can it handle the programs and software used?
- Do I enjoy this sort of teacher-student interaction?
- Do I feel like I am part of a "group"?
- Is this course flexible enough to meet my personal needs?
- Could I study a whole program using this type of learning?
- Would I be better off attending courses in a class room?
- Would a mix of in-class and online courses be better for me?
- What are the greatest benefits of learning this way?
- What are the biggest drawbacks?

Once you are done the course, look over your answers to arrive at a decision about distance learning and you. It is not for everyone, but I have personally dialogued with many mothers who thought it was a priceless gift. It allowed them to be there for their children for longer hours each week plus gave them the satisfaction of developing themselves as a person. Of course, in order for this type of learning to work for you, there are a few requirements for ensuring success.



Tips for Success

- If your children are very young - you are going to need help. Your partner, nanny, mother, friend or older children will need to be involved in their care. It is important to arrange some uninterrupted time for you and your study. You will still be there at home, but if the children are taught that Mommy is studying so it is quiet time for her, you won't be staying up all night trying to sneak in study time while the kids are asleep.
- You need a special place to call your own. A special study place. Find a spot in your house where you can use the computer, your books, work on assignments, etc. in peace and privacy. A place that you can decorate to provide inspiration as you engage in your scholarly activity.
- Try to fit in a special time each day for your study. Feel your own body and assess the needs of your family. Try to work it around family members but also pick a time when your energy is at its best. If you are a "morning person" try to choose a study time before lunch, after you've gotten the kids off to school, or settled the little one after breakfast. It is important to know your body's own rhythms in order to pick the right time for you.

- Keep two calendars side by side in your study area. On one, keep your family's schedules clear and at your fingertips. On the other, record your own schedule, due dates, work for that week etc. Also keep a journal or notebook to record the details of each week's academic expectations.
- Make sure you take a stretch break at least once an hour - get up from your computer and stretch all your limbs. and look out a window at the horizon if you can to relax your eyes. If you can, keep a window open as you work, and look outside often to break the strain of gazing at the computer monitor for long periods.
- If you know other women who are also combining parenthood with study, get to know them better. Network with them. There may also be women enrolled in the same course as you who can really understand what you are going through. It always helps to have someone who can empathize with you. Or, get a friend to enroll with you.

Mothers who continue their studies are excellent role models for their own children. They clearly demonstrate the advantages of education and the importance of continual life-long learning. Our kids are going to need to develop a strong acceptance of this importance in order to prosper in the 21st century. What better gift then to couple a thirst for knowledge with tender loving Mothering? Happy Mother's Day, Ladies!

Further Links to Explore

Strategies for Learning at a Distance
<http://www.uidaho.edu/eo/dist8.html>

Research shows online programs benefit mothers
<http://www.dailytargum.com/news/2004/01/28/University/Research.Shows.Online.Programs.Benefit.Mothers-589590.shtml>

Learning Anywhere, Anytime: Distance Learning On the Rise
http://www.womenof.com/Articles/cb_3_1_04.asp

Distance Learning: Mother Case Study
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/tech/ffwd/education/distance.htm>

Women's Continuing Education Online
<http://www.worldwidelearn.com/womens-learning.htm>

Free-Ed.Net
Over 120 free academic and vocational online courses and tutorials.
<http://www.free-ed.net/>

MIT Open-Courseware
Access to course materials for over 700 courses, all free.
<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.html>

BBC Online Courses
Free unique courses ranging from "Get Confident" to "Build a Bot Techlab"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/courses/>