You’re interested in online classes, but not sure if they’re the right fit for you. Here’s some advice for adult learners from NIU’s John Cowan.

**1. What should I consider when deciding if an online course is right for me?**

Think about what style of online learning would work for you. Are you a person who likes to work in groups, or on your own? Do you have what you need to be successful online? What basic skills and equipment are needed? Once you have thought about this, do some advance work. Seek out people who have taken online courses and ask them what they think about learning online. Seek out people who teach in the program and ask them to show you a typical course and how instruction is delivered.

**2. What challenges should I be prepared for when taking an online course?**

Learning online is different from learning face-to-face for a variety of reasons.

- Many online courses are flexible. This is part of the benefit of online learning. However, this benefit can become a liability. In face-to-face courses, students go to class once or twice a week. This cues students to get their work done in time for class. In online learning, this cue may be absent, so it’s easy to fall behind. To be successful, students need to maintain a schedule of when they will accomplish tasks.

- In a face-to-face class, students leave their lives behind and go to class, so there’s a separation from other responsibilities. When learning online, this separation does not exist. So it is important that students create a learning space in their home where they can be left alone and separate from their responsibilities. Make friends and family aware of "school time" and ask them to support you when you "go to" class.

- When you are taking a course online, it can be harder for the instructor to know if you are having difficulty. Students should reach out early and often if they are struggling.

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"Everyone learns differently. The most important thing a potential online student can do is understand how they learn best and look for a class that matches their learning style."

- John Cowen
NIU Online Learning Expert

"When choosing your class style it is important to honestly judge the type of person you are. I tend to be pretty organized and on top of my work, so for me online classes are great. For someone who tends to crave face-to-face interaction, or who isn't good with self-guidance, preparation, and most importantly prioritizing, online classes would be a less desirable choice."

- NIU alum
3. What is a common misconception people have about online courses?

Many people think online courses are not as good as face-to-face courses. But that has to do more with the student’s specific needs and how the course is designed. Whether a course is delivered face-to-face or online, the quality is determined by the instructor, the environment, and the design of the course.

4. What do you most enjoy about online classes?

I appreciate the capacity to interact with students. I actually have much more interaction with students in online courses. In a face-to-face class, we have a condensed period of time where I am in a room with all of the students. In online courses, I can make arrangements to meet online with individuals or small groups over the course of an evening.

“I believe that blended classes, being both online and face-to-face, are the best option. I find online classes to be much easier for my schedule, and I prefer the convenience, but I really do enjoy the face-to-face learning style and interaction of the on-campus classes.”

– NIU alum

FREE Second Saturday Morning Online Learning Sessions: Starting on January 10, 2015 we will offer free sessions on the second Saturday of each month. Each session will offer curious adults a chance to learn more about how to be a successful online learner. Sessions take place face-to-face at different NIU regional campuses each month. For more information, contact John Cowan at jcowan@niu.edu. Or register now [niu.actonsoftware.com/acton/fs/blocks/showLandingPage/a/4498/p/p-005c/t/page/fm/0?sid=pfX6LEYLW].

Resources to Prepare for Online Learning

NIU Online [niu.edu/niuonline/]: Take an online readiness survey to see if online courses are right for you, or take a browser test to find out if your computer is ready for online courses. You can even work through a sample online lesson!

When new to school I think that it is most important to give new things a chance and try and find your niche. Everyone will have different experiences and successes.

– NIU alum

Did you know that NIU ranks among the top 50 online colleges in the nation?

According to the Affordable Colleges Foundation, NIU ranks number 41, with an overall score of 91.72. NIU earned praise for its wide range of online bachelor’s and master’s degrees, as well as its low student-to-teacher ratio of 16:1, which means that each student gets more time and attention from the instructor.

“When it comes to online learning, these schools are the best of the best,” said Dan Schuessler, founder and CEO of Affordable Colleges Foundation.

See more at: www.affordablecollegesonline.org/best-colleges-online/ and www.niutoday.info/2014/12/04/niu-places-among-top-50-on-new-list-of-best-online-colleges/#sthash.hnGrdpPY.dpuf