

**Online Course Student Handbook Example**

## “Insert Name” School District Online Services

**Guidelines and Information for Students taking Online Courses**

Welcome….

##### We welcome you as an Online Student!

We welcome you as a student taking courses through the "Insert Name"School District. We are eager to help you at any time so feel free to get in touch with us when you need an answer. This handbook has been designed to provide you with answers to many of the questions or concerns you may have and summarizes the important policies that govern online courses. Please refer to this handbook, in combination with additional information from our Guidance Counselor and/or Dean of Students. And remember, you are not alone. You are part of a “virtual community” of students and staff and we are here to help.

You will be using policies and forms adopted by the "Insert Name” School District’s School Board.

We are here to provide you with the support you need. An online course is different, not necessarily easier or harder, and the added factors of self-motivation and discipline may cause additional challenges.

To be successful in your course, you will need to work independently, stay on task and maintain a regular schedule of logging on and keeping up with the readings, course assignments, homework, discussions, and other expectations. There is no way to ‘sit in the back’ and be silent in an online course! So good luck, and be sure to be in contact with your online and local teachers as soon as you run into any problems. Here is a summary of your responsibilities in an online class:

### Daily

* Log in with your correct user name and password.
* Check your e-mail.
* Check course announcements.
* Check discussion groups for student and teacher postings.
* Access your course content and assignments.
* Begin working where you left off from in the previous course session.
* Make sure you do your own work!
* Use a notebook to take notes for assignments as well as make note of problems with the online course.
* Anticipate when you will have a quiz or test, allowing yourself enough time to complete it, without running the risk of submitting incomplete work. If time allows, check your answers before you submittal.
* Don't forget to log off.

### Weekly

* Be in contact with your online instructor.
* Check your course grade book to see how you are progressing in the course.
* Discuss any questions that come up with the Dean of Students and/or online teachers.
* E-mail your instructor about any problems you encounter with the course. Be constructive with your criticism.

# Please read carefully….

##### Important Information

***Academic Integrity***

The "Insert Name"School District expects a full commitment to academic integrity from each student. Academic integrity means:

* + Your work on each assignment will be completely your own
  + Your collaboration with another classmate on any assignment will be in accordance with your instructor
  + You will not practice plagiarism of any form. Plagiarism is defined as follows:

*Copying or using ideas or words from another online classmate, or an Internet or print source and presenting them as your own.*

* + If an instructor confirms that a student has plagiarized work, the student will be subject to consequences determined by the "Insert Name"School District Policy and you may be removed from the course with a failing grade.

***Attendance***

While students may not be responsible for daily classroom participation as in a traditional classroom setting, there is still an important need to participate on a regular basis. Your learning and the success of other students depend upon your participation.

Be aware of the guidelines and expectations set forth by your online teacher at the beginning of the course. Extended absence from an online class (failure to hand in assignments, post to discussion boards, communicate with instructors, etc.) will quickly cause problems with your grade as well as ability to finish the course in a timely manner. The minimum attendance requirement is to attend each class a minimum of five hours each week and successfully submit at least one appropriately completed assignment for each online course every calendar week.

If an unexpected situation such as illness should arise and there is an extended leave from the course, contact your Online Teacher and report the problem to your Local Facilitator. They will discuss alternatives with you regarding the next steps to take for course completion.

#### Course Completion

Upon completion of your online course, email your online teachers (and notify the Dean of Students) that you have completed all requirements. The online teacher will verify by e-mail that all assignments have been completed and graded. The Dean of Students, Guidance Counselor, and Online Teacher will work together to determine your credit earned and course grade. An incomplete will be issued for any unfinished course. Please see the District Student Handbook on how to handle this matter.

It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that all written assignments are properly submitted for grading. It is recommended that students keep electronic copies of all assignments in the event that there are technical difficulties with assignment submissions.

#### Credit and Grade Posting

The Principal and Guidance Counselor, in consultation with the Online Teacher (OT), will determine credit and grades for the course you are taking. Your Guidance Counselor will be responsible for posting your credit and grade to your transcript. **Quarterly grades will be posted to progress reports for online students.**

#### Discipline

All students enrolled in a course are subject to the rules and restrictions implemented by the "Insert Name” School District.

#### Harassment Reporting

If you feel you are being harassed in your course environment, it is important to report it immediately to your instructor or the Dean of Students. Harassment comes in many forms, including Spam (unsolicited e-mails not pertaining to the course), threatening communications; offensive e- communications or any other kind of communication that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Be cautious about e-mail messages from anyone, particularly adults asking you for personal information, attempting to arrange meetings, or engaging in personal contact. Disclose to your Mentor and online teachers any message you receive that is inappropriate or makes you feel uncomfortable.

Never give out personal information -- including your full name (first names are best), home phone number, home address or other data -- anywhere on the Internet, including your e-mail.

#### Netiquette

A high sense of personal honor and integrity is expected for students taking online courses. All students and teachers participating in online courses are expected to conduct their communications in a professional, respectful manner as outlined in the student code of conduct in effect in the "Insert Name"School District. The use of proper Internet etiquette is expected at all times. Inappropriate language or behavior will results in disciplinary action and possible termination of your course. Procedures outlined in the local school district’s Acceptable Use Policy will apply to all online courses.

Remember that e-mail is not private. Never say anything via e-mail that you wouldn’t mind seeing on the school bulletin board or in the local newspaper.

# And Finally….

*Some Tips and Tricks*

##### Tips for Discussion Board Posting

***(This material is credited to: Michigan Virtual High School)***

Constructive Criticism

It is human nature to disagree with people. However, it is important to remember that you need to respect your fellow classmates. In responding to something you disagree with, it is essential that you are specific in what you want to respond to.

*Example: I thought what you said about Ahab’s obsession in Moby Dick was good: however, I don’t think he was crazy…*

Notice how the example cites the post, and then focuses the criticism on a particular point within the post that is being responded to. In your online course environment, your classmates won’t necessarily be able to reference the post you are responding to as they read your post, so you will need to help them out by making it clear yourself. Respecting your classmates is of the utmost importance when working online because your posts are the only way you get to interact with your classmates.

Posting Discussions

In a traditional classroom you are able to talk to your group members after class, or you might be given time during the class to discuss our work. However, online classes aren’t conducted face to face so your communications will be through e-mail most of the time. This means that it is essential that you are communicating regularly with your group for assignments. If you are sick, or are unable to communicate with your group for any reason, you need to make them aware of this situation as soon as possible.

Preparation for Discussion

This is really related to constructive criticism and active group participation. In the online discussions, thoughtful responses will make your posts easier to read and will also help your classmates respond to them. While some online classes may not require your participation in discussion, the majority will.

This means that you will be required to make posts based on assignments, and on the information you have read.

*Poor Example: I thought the article was bad.*

*Good Example: I thought this article was bad because the author did not address why photosynthesis is vital to the life cycle of the fern.*

In the poor example, the student obviously didn’t like the article, but there is no explanation of why. This would force other students and the instructor to request clarification, which would only waste time. In the good example, the student makes it clear why the article was disappointing and perhaps the instructor could even respond to this post. The ability to discuss and post clearly is an essential skill online.

Things to Avoid At All Costs

* Intentionally insulting someone
* Sending Spam
* Making offensive remarks
* Making inappropriate comments

##### Study Tips

* **Keep up with the daily and weekly responsibilities** outlined in the Student Responsibilities document.
* Maintain **consistent communication** with your online and local teachers.
* **Compare your weekly accomplishments to your assignment timeline.** If you are falling behind, e-mail or speak to your teacher about developing better strategies that will help you meet your deadlines.
* Spend **five to ten hours per week** on the course to meet your schedule and complete the course requirements.
* Make a **to-do list** of assignments. Break assignments down into smaller, more manageable parts. Your list will be easier to use if it has small chunks of assignments, not big ones.
* **Print out course materials** if you find it easier to read from printed materials.
* **Take notes** on the important points of the course material. Writing can help you understand the material and stay more engaged in learning.
* **Stay organized.** Print important documents and keep your notes and important information in a file folder.
* **Ask your teacher for guidance** and suggestions if you have questions or difficulties. If you are still confused about how to use the course tools or navigate through the material, revisit the Course Orientation. If you are still unclear about how to get around in the course and complete your work, ask your teacher where to go and what to do.

##### Motivation

One of the keys to completing your online course is to find ways to motivate yourself and continue to give yourself positive encouragement.

* **Take time to think about why you are taking the course.** Write down how completing the course will help you achieve your goals, such as completing credits for graduation.
* **Identify the source of your frustrations.** Try to think through problems yourself. If you need help, talk to your teacher or e-mail your online teacher about the problems or frustrations you are facing. Ask them for suggestions or strategies that will help you.
* **Establish a study routine** and stick to it. It will be much easier to keep up with the course requirements. It is difficult to stay motivated if you fall too far behind.
* **Pace yourself.** Give yourself breaks when you need to.
* Give yourself **positive messages** about how well you are doing. Acknowledge your accomplishments and reward yourself as you complete major assignments.

##### Managing Your Time

In an online course, **time management is critical** to success because most activities can be accomplished asynchronously—you don’t have to be online at the same time as your instructor or other students. The advantage of learning “anytime, anywhere” also makes it easier to put off logging on and participating in class. As with any traditional course, you risk earning a lower grade if you fall behind.

One of the best ways to manage your time in an online class is to **plan out your day** and see where the online course best fits in. You may have an actual class period during the school day to work on your online course, but you may have to find the time to work on your online classes at home (even if you have time during a scheduled class, you’ll probably still have online homework.)

With traditional classes it is easy to get into student study groups and work together. In an online environment, this requires a different kind of approach. Luckily, with the Internet, every lecture, discussion and communication may be archived online for you to review. This gives you an advantage because you can look back through everything that was ever said or written in class leading up to the test.

**Student / Parent Contracts for Online Courses**

##### Local Contact Person: “Insert Name”

Students are expected to attend and participate in their online courses as fully as they would attend in a traditional classroom course. Students must agree to the following guidelines to be eligible for participation in an online course. **This and Parental Contract must be completed before the class can start.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Yes No** | I will make a commitment to log in and work in my online class at least 5  hours throughout the week or as often as I need to remain on schedule. |
| **Yes No** | I will follow my district’s Acceptable Use Policy that sets guidelines for  Internet and e-mail use. |
| **Yes No** | I will NOT use any other student’s login or password. |
| **Yes No** | I will NOT use e-mail for personal use if the school prohibits it. |
| **Yes No** | I will try to be as clear as possible and use courteous language when I  communicate with my teachers and online classmates. |
| **Yes No** | I will review e-mail before I send it. |
| **Yes No** | I will always include my first and last name so the instructor knows who I am. |
| **Yes No** | I will abide by the rules of both my online and local teachers |
| **Yes No** | I will notify the online and local instructors with any problems that I have  with the class or computer. |
| **Yes No** | I will make sure to keep in contact with the online and local teachers at least  once a week and to ask questions as they come up. |
| **Yes No** | I will make a commitment to complete this course by  (date). |

The student and Guidance Counselor will review and discuss this document. Upon completion of the discussion, if both understand and agree to the conditions of the course, they will each sign the bottom in an agreement of mutual understanding.

\*\* I understand the needs and expectations of the course and agree to fulfill my responsibilities and will work to successfully complete this online course.

**Student: Date:**

Guidance Counselor: Date:

**Parental Permission for Participation in Online Learning**

**My child** has my permission to take online course(s). I understand that this is an alternative instructional delivery method that involves self-motivation and personal responsibility on my child's part. I agree to fulfill and to take responsibility for my child when the course requires either online or offsite learning experiences which may be held outside of the regular school day (as specified in the course description). I further acknowledge that both my child and I understand and will fulfill the obligations of the "Insert Name” School District’s Internet/Technology Acceptable Use Policies.

**As the parent/legal guardian of this student,** I understand and give permission for the "Insert Name” School District to save and share information about my child. This information will be shared with the school or company who is providing the course for registration, course progress, course completion, and grading purposes and may include demographic information such as age, race, and home contact information; upon completion of the course, the school district will receive copies of the information for my child's student record and transcripts.

**Signed: Date:**

⬜ Parent ⬜ Legal guardian ⬜ I am a student of legal age (18 years or older)