

ACTIVITY 3 Studying an Example Comparison Essay

This essay compares online classes with face-to-face classes. Discuss the Preview Questions with a partner. Then read the essay and answer the questions that follow.

Preview Questions

1. What was the last online class you took? Was it a good experience?
2. Can you think of one course that would be better online than face-to-face? Can you think of one course that would be better face-to-face than online?
3. Do you think online classes will completely replace face-to-face classes in the future? Why or why not?

Essay 10

Online and Face-to-Face Learning in the Digital Age

1 As computers become increasingly important in education, many

schools, colleges, and universities have begun offering online courses and allocating resources for the development of online degrees. In this new type of education, some students need never set foot on campus to earn a degree. Online learning is causing a revolution in education, but its benefits need to be measured against its liabilities when compared to traditional face-to-face instruction. Students should not assume that either online or face-to-face classes are inherently superior; instead, students should focus on what they need to learn from a particular course and which learning paradigm will best facilitate their education.

2 Although face-to-face courses are more familiar to many students, online courses offer several advantages. One of the most important of these advantages is that online courses offer greater convenience. In online courses, students may do their coursework according to their own schedules. Because so many of today's students have work and family responsibilities beyond their coursework, it is vital that they have the necessary flexibility to fulfill their other obligations while also tending to their studies. As a result, some students complete their coursework on weekends or in the middle of the night after they have finished their work and family duties. They no longer have to choose between school and work or between school and family and can pursue their commitments to both as their schedules allow. Clearly, online courses are more convenient than face-to-face classes.

3 Contrary to many lecture classes, online courses can increase student participation. In large classrooms with fifty or more students, it is often impossible for many students to say anything because the room is so big that not everyone can hear other students well. In addition, some shy students who would hesitate to speak up in a big class may feel more comfortable contributing to class discussions in which they can type their thoughts without having to speak them. In their investigation of online learning strategies, Hiltz and Shea (2005) concluded that many online courses "elicit more active participation from students than does the typical face-to-face course (at least those conducted on the lecture model)" (p. 145). Online courses allow students to participate in forums and discussions where they do not feel the pressure of public speaking.

to allocate: to divide out to someone or something
a liability: a disadvantage
inherently: naturally
superior: better
a paradigm: an example that serves as a model
to facilitate: to make easier
beyond: more than
vital: essential; necessary
to fulfill: to complete
to tend to: to take care of



4 Another prime difference between these two types of education involves the lack of face-to-face communication, which can be a **drawback** to online classes. Despite some students' **reluctance** to speak in class, communicating with others in person is a vital skill for the real job market. Students who **isolate** themselves during learning situations may lack the necessary communication skills to succeed in the future. Also, many courses are more difficult to offer online than in face-to-face settings. For example, courses in foreign languages benefit from classroom environments where students practice speaking to one another. Many science classes require laboratories where students **conduct** experiments, and drama classes allow students to perform plays. **Duplicating** these experiences online is challenging for even the best instructors.

5 While face-to-face classes typically do not rely on technology in the classroom to a great extent, online courses require students to have certain computer skills as well as sufficient technological access to take the courses. Computer usage is **widespread**, but even today, not all students have their own computers, and many may lack sufficient computer literacy to **navigate** a course's website easily. Under these circumstances, some students may require so much time to find an accessible computer or to learn how to use the course's online tools that they end up with insufficient time and opportunity to complete the coursework.

6 Finally, one very important difference between traditional and online classes is that students in online courses do not enjoy as many opportunities to build personal relationships with teachers and classmates throughout the duration of their education. In fact, because teachers do not know their students personally, many educators worry about

a drawback: a disadvantage
reluctance: hesitation to do something
to isolate: to separate from all others
to conduct: to perform; to complete; to do
to duplicate: to copy

widespread: common; in many places
to navigate: to move through

the potential for cheating in online courses. It is quite easy for students to register for an online course and then to hire someone else to take the course for them. Furthermore, many professors hesitate to write recommendation letters for their online students, even those who earn the highest grades in their classes, because they feel uncomfortable **advocating** for people whom they have never met in person. Teachers of online courses cannot comment on a student's punctuality, presentations before groups, or interpersonal skills due to the online environment, which does not promote live, human interactions.

Both face-to-face and online courses share the same goal of educating students. While students may prefer either online or face-to-face courses as a matter of personal taste, it is essential that online courses **address** some of their liabilities and that face-to-face courses take advantage of some of the opportunities available from online learning. Some schools and universities offer mixed-mode courses that combine face-to-face courses with online **components**. However, mixed-mode courses do not necessarily offer a simple solution to a complex problem, as they have their own set of benefits and liabilities. Students need to **assess** their learning styles, and teachers need to assess their instructional styles, so that both students and teachers can create learning environments where everyone is likely to **prosper**. In the future, these instructional modes could **merge** in interesting ways, as Lever-Duffy, McDonald, and Mizell (2005) suggest: "Eventually, perhaps, there will be no distinctions among traditional education, alternative education, and distance education" (p. 372). In such a future, only the best features from these worlds will survive.

References

Hiltz, S., & Shea, R. (2005). The student in the online classroom. In S. Hiltz & R. Goldman (Eds.), *Learning together online: Research on asynchronous learning networks* (pp. 145-168). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lever-Duffy, J., McDonald, J., & Mizell, A. (2005). *Teaching and learning with technology* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson.

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to address: to discuss; to deal with
a component: a key part
to assess: to evaluate
to prosper: to be successful
to merge: to blend together to form one

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