# 22 Online learning

## A What is online learning?

What makes studying online different from **face-to-face** study is that it uses the internet as the primary **means of communication**. Learning is often organised through a **virtual learning environment** (VLE)[1]. This provides discussion areas and **links** to **readings** and other **resources** as well as letting students **submit assignments**[2] **electronically** and take **quizzes** online. Online courses are often **collaborative**[3] with students **posting messages**[4] for each other to read and working together to **construct knowledge**[5]. As a result students in **virtual**[6] **classrooms** develop a sense of being part of an **online community** and feel much less isolated than they might in traditional **distance courses**[7]. The teacher's role is to **set appropriate tasks**, to **moderate**[8] discussions and to **provide feedback**[9]. Teachers may also conduct **online tutorials**[10].

[1] software that allows staff and students to interact (e.g. WebCT or Blackboard) [2] hand in essays or other work [3] involve students working together [4] making a contribution to an online discussion [5] build up understanding of the topic [6] online [7] courses where the student studies at home using materials sent by the academic institution [8] gently control, by asking questions and encouraging learners to make connections [9] comment on students' work [10] teaching sessions for individuals or small groups of students

## B Key terms

| *term* | *meaning* | *word combinations* |
|---|---|---|
| **hybrid/blended course** | a course that combines both online and face-to-face (f2f) teaching and learning | enrol on a hybrid/blended course<br>take/do a hybrid/blended course |
| **a (mailing) list** | online discussion group managed through a software program – each message or contribution is sent to a common email, then forwarded to all members | post a message to a list<br>subscribe to a list[1]<br>unsubscribe from a list[2] |
| **discussion forum** | area of website or VLE where you can post a message for other participants to read and reply to | participate / take part in a discussion forum |
| **username** | form of your name the software recognises and so lets you go further – it can be case-sensitive[3] | enter your username |
| **a thread** | an ordered row of comments in a discussion forum on a specific topic | start a new thread<br>contribute to a thread<br>follow a thread |

[1] join a list [2] leave a list [3] the use of upper and lower case letters must exactly match what was entered as the username when setting up the account [upper case = capital letters]

## C Netiquette [rules for effective online communication]

- Reread your message before **hitting send**.
- Use an appropriate **subject header**.
- In a mailing list '**lurk** before you leap', i.e. observe the conventions others use before joining a discussion yourself.
- Obey the **KISS** principle (Keep it Short and Simple).
- Don't **flame** other posters. [be very rude to other members of an online group]

**TIP** Could you do well as an online student? Read the profile of a virtual student at www.virtualstudent.com/html/profile.html. Note any useful vocabulary there.

# Exercises

**22.1** Look at A and fill in the gaps in this email from a student on an online course.

Hi Jean,

My online course is brilliant. We use Moodle which is VLE software – that means (1) _____ learning environment. You get to know the other students well even though the web's our only (2) _____ of communication. I really feel I'm part of an online (3) _____. It's also great as you don't have to go to the library – all the readings and other (4) _____ are online and there are (5) _____ to them in Moodle – just click and you've got them. We work in groups – the teacher sets various collaborative (6) _____ and then provides (7) _____ on our work. We have to take a (8) _____ every week but it's just a set of easy multiple-choice questions. At the end of the course we have to (9) _____ a big assignment. Anyway, it's really fun.

Ellen

**22.2** Match the first part of the expression from the left-hand box with the second part on the right.

| | |
|---|---|
| construct | post |
| enrol | start |
| enter | subscribe |
| hit | take part |
| moderate | unsubscribe |

| | |
|---|---|
| from a mailing list | a new thread |
| in a discussion group | knowledge |
| the send button | messages |
| to a mailing list | your username |
| discussions | on a hybrid course |

**22.3** Now choose word combinations from 22.2 to complete these sentences. Change the verb form where necessary.

1 When you log on you will be asked to _____ and password.
2 A long time ago I _____ for marine engineers. I don't want to receive messages from it any more but now I can't remember how to _____ .
3 I really enjoy _____ for language teachers and yesterday I _____ about teaching grammar online.
4 I decided to _____ as I thought it would be good to experience a course with both online and face-to-face elements.
5 You will save yourself a lot of embarrassment if you get into the habit of always rereading what you've written before _____ and _____ .
6 Online instructors must be good at _____ so students can work together to _____ .

**22.4** Answer these questions.

1 How would you feel if someone flamed you? Why would you feel like that?
2 Are your computer usernames and passwords case-sensitive?
3 Why do you think the KISS principle is important for online posts?
4 Is lurking online a good or a bad thing? Why?
5 Why is it important to choose subject headers carefully?
6 Have you any experience of being in a virtual classroom? What was it like?

**FOLLOW UP** Use an online search engine (such as Google or Yahoo!) to do a search on *online courses* + the subject you are interested in. Click on one of the links it finds. Note any interesting vocabulary relating to online study that you find on that site.