

>>> 5 THINGS to Consider When Enrolling in Online Prerequisite Courses for the Health Professions

When you have to take prerequisite courses to apply to graduate programs in **Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physicians Assistant Studies**, a flexible, online format can be appealing. Due to their flexibility and convenient “location,” more students are taking these courses online. But how does someone relatively new to online learning identify a quality course, taught by a well-prepared instructor? A simple Google search can bring up a seemingly overwhelming amount of information so here are 5 important things to consider when evaluating your options:

1 THE INSTRUCTOR

Perhaps the most critical aspect of any course – never mind an online one – is an instructor *who is experienced in how basic science is used in the practice of health care* and who knows how to teach online! If you are pursuing a graduate degree in **Nursing, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy or Physicians Assistant Studies**, having an instructor who is active in health care clinical practice and/or research is invaluable. Why? Because, as you learn, you will benefit immensely as your instructor uses her/his expertise to develop course examples, question and assignments that are *directly related to authentic, real-world health care practice*.

This is especially true with science courses like Anatomy & Physiology, Biology and Chemistry as well as with things like Statistics. So be extra sure to search for courses taught by instructors who are health care clinicians or researchers. You won't regret when you enter grad school and health care is all that is being talked about!

Finally, look for experienced instructors who will adapt “traditional” skills to teach students online by:

- Giving students a great deal of independence.
- Using a variety of formats to deliver course content and materials
- Actively participating in weekly discussions between you and your classmates
- Providing regular feedback to you about your work!

2 FLEXIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE

This is a no-brainer for many but it's important to look for courses that allow you, more or less, to study where, when and how *you* want. Not having to log in at a specific time each week is what flexibility is all about. And make sure you look for courses that are organized into week-long modules that allow you to plan time for reading, reflecting, and participating in each week's activities *based on your schedule*.



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Even though it might sound counterintuitive, the best online courses recognize the importance of independence. This does not mean a good instructor will leave you alone all the time to figure everything out for yourself! Instead, throughout the course s/he will guide you and help you understand, organize and master all of the content on your own – just like you’ll be expected to do in graduate school anyway!

3 TIME TO THINK

Perhaps one of the most underrated things about online courses is that they really *give you time to think about what you are reading and discussing*. Good instructors construct weekly modules that are designed to give you time to consider the content you are learning about and discussing. This reflection time allows you to absorb fully each week’s material as you move through the course. You will be able to identify what you know, as well as what questions and topics you still need help with. This is especially important when taking science courses in Anatomy & Physiology, Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Biochemistry which can include complex ideas and topics. So consider looking closely into the format of the courses being offered if this is important to you.

4 COURSE DESIGN

Seek out courses that take full advantage of the unique benefits of online technology. These can be simple things like giving you real-time information to help you plan your day or week, offering innovative instructional technologies like virtual labs, and breaking modules and content down into manageable and understandable “chunks” that can be digested in a few minutes on a Smartphone or tablet.

5 SUPPORT

Make extra sure you will be able to get the support you need when *YOU need it!* For example, when you are struggling to understand a certain topic or problem, you will want an instructor who will reply to you within 24-48 hours. In addition to this, look into whether or not an online course offers things like personalized tutoring, student discussion groups and readily available tech support to name just a few.

Student Experiences With Online Courses

[Read some interesting stories](#) of students who have taken online courses and labs to fulfill prerequisites for graduate programs in the health professions.



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