

How to be a student again, this time online

There are many reasons right now for why you may be looking to upskill - social lives are currently limited, you may unfortunately be out of work, or you just might be looking for ways to spend isolation productively. To help you be better positioned to excel in or re-enter the workforce, here are some tips on where to begin, and how to succeed as a student again, this time learning in an online world.

1. Consider your goals

You may already know what knowledge or skills you're after, but if not, spend some time thinking about your goals. For instance, is there something that could help you improve your performance in your current role?

Or perhaps you have your eye on a new position or a career change. To get an idea of the skills you need, read through job descriptions for roles similar to the one you want. How well do the job descriptions fit you? What would you like to be able to add to your resume in order to better align with the qualifications?

2. Ask others for advice

This could be a great opportunity to discuss your professional development with your manager to see what would take your work to the next level in your current role or a desired role. You could also ask current and former co-workers.

LinkedIn is also a powerful resource for seeking information and advice in this area. For instance, you could see if anyone in your network works in a similar field or role to the one you're interested in. If so, what credentials have they earned? What skills do they describe in their profiles? If you know them personally or through a mutual connection, see if they would be willing to answer any questions you might have.

Once you have a good idea of your learning goals, consider the following when choosing your next steps.

3. Find a learning option that aligns with your goals

Most well-designed learning experiences will come out and state their intended learning objectives - essentially the knowledge and skills you're meant to get out of the experience. You certainly don't want to waste your time, so make sure the experience is aimed at moving you toward your learning goals.

Next, consider the scope of the learning. Is it completely or mostly focused on what you hope to learn at the appropriate depth of detail, or is it so broad that it will only touch upon topics you'd prefer more detail on?

Finally, think about the time commitment for the learning to ensure it would be realistic for you to complete the learning on the expected timeline.

4. Decide whether you need a credential

For many learning goals, it may be important to be able to share or demonstrate that you've completed the learning or are proficient at a skill. For example:

- Earning a professional certification to advance in your current job
- Pursuing a new position that requires you to hold a certain degree
- Working toward a badge or certificate to include on your resume to demonstrate that you have skills in a certain area

In these cases, it often makes more sense to pursue a more formal option like a training course, degree program, or studying for a standardized assessment that would provide you with a diploma, badge, certification, etc.

However, a credential may be less important to you. It could be instead that you simply want to acquire skills and knowledge to help you do your current job better, or that you're pursuing a topic that's of personal interest to you. In this case, the more formal learning options mentioned above could certainly work for you, but you also might consider whether you can meet your needs with online videos, books, webinars, or other similar (potentially free!) resources.

5. Look into free and discounted options

Many organizations provide free learning resources on a variety of topics to their employees to encourage professional development, so it is worth looking into what your organization already has, and whether it meets your learning needs.

Some organizations allow employees to expense all or a portion of learning costs (e.g. college tuition or enrollment in a single course). In some cases, organizations also partner with a university to provide relevant learning and training opportunities at a discounted rate.

You may also find that there are perfectly appropriate resources for your learning goals for free. Video sites like YouTube provide detailed tutorials on how to do just about anything. Webinars on a wide variety of topics are often available at the cost of simply providing your email address to a learning provider's mailing list (which you can later opt out of). Even some more formal online courses are available for free from sites like [FutureLearn](#), [Harvard Online](#), and [Coursera](#) (until May 31) and many are currently available at a discount in response to COVID-19 on sites like [Udemy](#) and [Udacity](#).

Not all learning goals will have free or discounted equivalents, but a little extra investigation could help you save money while meeting your learning goals.

6. Use strategies to stay motivated

Finally, once you've decided on a learning experience, it's important to set yourself up for success with good habits and make efforts to keep yourself motivated. If you're new to being an online student, you can find out more about that with these [5 tips to keep motivated when learning online](#) and [how to excel in online classes](#).

About the Author



John Sadauskas is a Principal Learning Designer on Pearson's Efficacy and Learning team, which supports the design and development of outcome-focused learning experiences based on evidence from the learning sciences. Before joining Pearson in 2014, he earned a PhD in Educational Technology and an MEd in Curriculum and Instruction at Arizona State University and was a middle school English instructor. His current work at Pearson is focused on helping both new and experienced professionals build skills in pursuit of their career goals.