

# Online vs. Traditional Education: The Answer You Never Expected

By [Kendall Bird](#) on 2/19/2014 [0](#)

Getting on the degree path that's right for you is a big decision for many—and not something to take lightly. As employers demand more skills from employees, the demand of online degree programs has increased in [popularity](#). In fact, within the United States, 6.7 million students [enrolled](#) in at least one online course in fall 2011—an increase of more than 500,000 students compared to 2010.

What is the big difference in online versus traditional education?

“Each student learns differently and in today's era of increasing technology, the question will not be whether to offer classes online, but rather how to implement them,” says Allison Hiltz, a former online and traditional education student who writes for [The Book Wheel Blog](#).

There are several options when it comes to online or traditional education degrees. The platform offers everything from certificates and diplomas to more advanced degree options such as an associate or bachelor's degree.

With constant changes in technology from all different degree programs, let's take a look at the advantages to an online versus traditional education and examine how each type of education impacts you as a student.

## Online vs. traditional education: flexibility

One of the key components to consider when weighing the options is the amount of time you have everyday to work on your degree. Are you willing and able to attend college full-time or do you need more flexibility for your busy schedule?

Flexibility was a major concern for Casey Horton, a graduate of sociology and psychology from [Ashford University](#). Horton, a working adult, needed an online program because of the convenience it offered. “If you are raising a family, working and can't find a job that [offers] a flexible schedule, then online is the best way,” Horton says.

### Online education:

A benefit to taking online courses is that they offer flexibility to the student. This is a great option for those who already have a time commitment with family and work. Online classes will mold with your schedule—log in to your online course at a time that works best for you as opposed to having to attend a lecture at a specific time.

### **Traditional education:**

This option is best for those who have a little more time in their schedule. Even if you're hoping for a little flexibility, on-campus courses typically offer day and evening schedules so you can coordinate with your daily commitments. One thing you'll need to remember to factor in is where you live and work in proximity to the campus.

## **Online vs. traditional education: discipline**

Something else to consider while weighing your college options is how much you can discipline yourself. Do you need structure in order to be a successful student? Do you need a running to-do list every day to check things off as you go? If so, an online degree may be a great pathway for you.

Discipline is important for online degrees as well as for traditional, on-campus degrees. [University of Louisville](#) graduate Anita Hoag found the most success with a bit of both. “[Being an online college student] does require more discipline, but if you have the right technology tools ... it can be a very rewarding experience,” Hoag adds.

### **Online education:**

Being an online student will work well for those who have the ability to self-motivate. Without a plan or some type of organization, your work will suffer in the online classroom, but if you set deadlines and prioritize your school schedule, you should see success.

### **Traditional education:**

A traditional on-campus setting is probably best for you, if you know you need discipline to get work completed. This method will give you the [support](#) and will to complete assignments and tasks on a daily basis.

## **Online vs. traditional education: social interaction**

One final area to consider is if you need a classroom experience that provides one-on-one communication for success. Do you need interaction from your peers and instructors to succeed? Or are you possibly someone who can thrive in an independent study environment?

[Rowan University](#) communications student Brian Kearney enjoys the face-to-face time with other students and instructors. “Being in a classroom and engaging with others helps in the learning process, which is something online courses cannot offer,” Kearney says.

## **Online education:**

Interactions with instructors and peers will still happen as an online student. It just happens to be through online video instead. Learning through online video can help you to focus more on independently learning and your classes may even go quicker without some of the distractions of a traditional classroom education.

## **Traditional education:**

Traditional education is better for those who need face-to-face communication. When you don't have direct interactions with your instructors, you may tend to do not as well with the work you already have. If this is the case for you, success will come with a traditional education setting.

## **Online vs. traditional education: the blended education model**

At this point, you might be thinking there are pros and cons to both online and traditional education. Or perhaps both sound like a great option for you as a student. If so, a 2012 article from [Inside Higher Education](#) also *agrees* with you.

The article states that students who were part of a blended education model performed better than those who were exclusively one or the other. In fact, Rasmussen College found that its 14,000-plus students fared similarly.

*So what is a blended education model?*

Blended education combines the intimacy and face-to-face interaction of a physical classroom with the flexibility and convenience of an online one.

Schools like the blended model because it provides students with cutting-edge artificially intelligent tutoring software while allowing instructors flexibility in planning their syllabuses, the article states. Students appreciate the blended model because it offers a reprieve from dusty textbooks and mundane human lectures.

It's clear there are many options for earning your degree. The new trend in blended education in schools across the country might just be coming to a college near you.

## **The decision is yours**

At the end of the day, it's your decision on how to earn your college degree. Hopefully these side-by-side comparisons gave you a better outlook at the college degree plan that is right for you.

Before you dive into a degree, be sure to research whether online or traditional education is the best fit for you. If they both sound like a winning formula, [Rasmussen College](#) offers a blended model that might be perfect.

*For further information choosing the best school for you, be sure to check out the [Compare Rasmussen College Checklist](#)—it will help you to narrow down your college choices by evaluating factors that matter to you.*