

Online Education

How to Get the Best CE Learning Experience, Virtually

By Allison M. Payne

WHETHER IT'S EXPRESSLY for learning a new technique or fulfilling requirements for licensing renewal, continuing education (CE) is an important part of the professional massage therapist's world. Today, it's likely that a good portion of that CE takes place online, which is very different from the traditional, in-person seminar.

While many people love the online education boom going on, others prefer in-person learning or just find it less complicated to engage with. You may even encounter the notion that online education is inherently of lesser quality than a face-to-face environment. Not true, said Scott Winstead, founder of MyElearningWorld.com; online education, he said, even does some things better.

"Online learning provides students with more flexibility and convenience, as they can study from anywhere at any time," Winstead said. "Additionally, online learning is often more affordable than traditional in-person learning. Overall, online learning offers many advantages over traditional in-person learning. It

is important to keep these advantages in mind when deciding whether or not online learning is the right fit for you."

MASSAGE Magazine interviewed several experts in the area of online education to compile this guide to getting the best possible experience from your online CE courses.

Test Your Tech

One very important consideration as you begin studying online is the equipment you will use to access the internet to view materials such as videos, Word files and pdfs. While you may have a smartphone that can handle these tasks, it may be better to stash your phone and do your online CE on a desktop or laptop model, ideally one that no one else in your household uses.

"Have a trusted device to work on," said Claudine Raschi, vice president of development for Panda, an online massage therapy CE site (massageceu.com). "Some people think that a smart phone is the answer to everything ... [but] If you really want to see images and be able to navigate





the learning platform with ease, grab a laptop or tablet.” [Disclosure: Panda is the company that provides CE as a member benefit for Massage Magazine Insurance Plus.]

Before attending a class, familiarize yourself with the software, and note who you can contact for help if something isn't working. For video sessions, make sure you know where the volume control and the mute/unmute functions are located.

Set Up Your Study Spot

“When studying online, it is important to find a quiet and distraction-free space where you can focus on your work,” said Winstead. “If you share the house with others, make sure they respect your work space and are aware that you need to be uninterrupted.” Figure out, too, who will be in charge of supervising pets and kids so they don't interrupt you.

Barbara M. Hall, PhD, a professor in the school of education at Northcentral University (unc.edu), also suggests using the biggest computer monitor that you have available; and, in the case of live video classes, take a look at what other people will see in the background behind you and remove any distracting items.

An inexpensive ring light affixed to your monitor, like the ones people use for shooting online videos, can help prevent shadows and improve image quality.

Whatever location you choose, keep your studying and class materials there so you don't waste time every day tracking down your supplies. If you're using a laptop, connect your computer with its power supply every time you finish a class or study session so it's ready when you return.

Even if you feel you can handle some switching back and forth between your class and other things ... you put yourself at a disadvantage if you try to multitask.

Do Not Disturb

Home can be a crazy place day to day—family members going in and out, phones buzzing, noise in the kitchen, dogs barking, kids dropping in to see what you're up to, Facebook notifications popping up and ping-pong, and more. Ensuring a distraction-free (or at least, as distraction-free as possible) environment is key to getting the most out of your online CE experience.

Start with your computer, said Hall. Shut down all unnecessary applications except for the ones you need to follow the lesson. This “will not only reduce distractions on the computer; doing so may also improve the performance of your online learning platform,” she said. “Particularly if you are not using high-speed internet, other applications—even just your email—might compromise the quality of your learning experience.”

If you get a lot of desktop notifications from apps when those apps aren't open, consider pausing or turning off notifications altogether. “You might even tell others you are unavailable during the time frame of online learning and

ask them to help you out by not sharing content [with you], tagging you, or sending messages,” said Hall. “Doing so would truly be helping you out.”

Even if you feel you can handle some switching back and forth between your class and other things, you put yourself at a disadvantage if you try to multitask, added Hall. “What you think of as multitasking is more like rapid task-switching. Your brain is unable to process multiple types of input at one time, such as the instructor's voice and a TikTok audio. While it may feel like multitasking, you aren't.

“As your brain switches attention back and forth among the various stimuli, you are missing important ... content in all the other places where your attention isn't focused for those few seconds,” said Hall. “Improve your learning by improving your attention, which means focus on one thing at a time.”

Don't forget to switch your smartphone to its “do not disturb” setting too—or, just turn it off while your class is in session.

Finally, avoid being distracted by hunger pangs during your CE time. Enjoy a light, healthy snack with some protein to keep yourself focused and alert.

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Don't Hurt Yourself

You likely think about your personal body mechanics while you work at giving a massage—but when you're on your computer at home, do you tend to hunch over it sitting on the couch or balance it on your lap while lying in bed? If you don't have a desk with an office-type adjustable chair, said Hall, movement is key. Also,

stand if you can.

“Look for surfaces high enough you can use as a standing desk,” she said. “I have worked in the closet because the closet shelf was just the right height to serve as a standing desk.”

Adjust the angle of your monitor so that your neck stays in a neutral position as much as possible. This is especially important if you wear bifocals or reading glasses.

“Consider how you raise your nose to look through the bottom half of your bifocal lenses where the magnification occurs. You might be straining your neck to look up and out of your bifocal area of your lenses,” Hall said. “You might also need to look down to see the keyboard. One tip might be to adjust the monitor, as you are able, so there is less straining of the neck to look out of the magnified area of your lenses.”

Winstead suggested other options, such as using a stability ball or an adjustable-height stool instead of a traditional chair. “A meditation cushion or bench can provide extra support and comfort for those who like to sit in a cross-legged position,” he noted.

Promise yourself a small reward when you complete your work to help motivate you to stick with it through parts that don't pique your interest.

Finally, Hall advised against resting a laptop on your legs while you work, because you will tend to bend your neck to look down at it. Plus, a laptop can get very hot or even overheat much more easily on a soft surface than on a table or desk.


Treat Yourself

Promise yourself a small reward when you complete your work to help motivate you to stick with it through parts that don't pique your interest.

Finally, make the CE experience a positive one, said Raschi. “Enjoy the experience. Don't rush through it, take your time to digest the concepts and really consider how you will apply them to your

practice. Make earning the CE certificate of completion matter.” **M**

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