

Online Course Student Handbook



Neillsville School District Online Services
in partnership with
Rural Virtual Academy

**Guidelines and Information for 7-12 Students taking
Online Courses**

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Welcome....

We welcome you as an Online Student!

We welcome you as a student taking courses through the Neillsville School District. We are eager to help you at any time so feel free to get in touch with us when you need an answer. This handbook has been designed to provide you with answers to many of the questions or concerns you may have and summarizes the important policies that govern online courses. Please refer to this handbook, in combination with additional information from our Guidance Counselor and/or Dean of Students. And remember, you are not alone. You are part of a “virtual community” of students and staff and we are here to help.

You will be using policies and forms adopted by the Neillsville School District's School Board.

You may be asking yourself, “So, what did I get myself into?” But don't worry. We are here to provide you with the support you need. On the other hand, any student who thinks that taking a course online will be “easy” will be surprised. An online course is different, not necessarily easier or harder, and the added factors of self-motivation and discipline may cause additional challenges.

Making Assumptions

First of all, we are making a few assumptions:

1. You have been approved to enroll in an online course(s), as stated in the Board Policy.
2. You accept your responsibilities as an online student and have read and signed the agreement attached to this information booklet.
3. Your parent(s) or guardian has granted permission to take an online course and the Parent Permission Form has been signed and given to the MS/HS School Office.
4. You have worked with the Guidance Counselor to enroll you ‘online’ and has arranged for the hardware, software, and required materials you will need to get started.
5. You are following the proper sequence for semester enrollments (i.e. Semester 1 then, Semester 2)

If these assumptions are wrong, you will need to contact the Guidance Counselor in order to get started. Otherwise, we are off and running and here are the steps to get started:

Steps to Get Started....

- **Step 1:** Make sure you have received the required course materials and login/password information. Write down the course web site, login information, and email on the last page of this Handbook.
- **Step 2:** Clarify with your local/online teacher the location(s) and hours that you will be able and expected to work on your course.
- **Step 3:** Verify the date you will need to complete the course
- **Step 4:** Create a file folder where you can store the course information, notes, and printouts.
- **Step 5:** Log on to your course and make sure everything is working.
 - If you are having computer problems, write down any error messages that appear before you ask for help. Identifying the specifics of the problem will help the Dean of Students or tech support to resolve the problem.
- **Step 6:** Print out a schedule of the course assignments and tests and set a timeline for completing them. This will help you keep on track and set realistic goals. If you find you need an extension in order to complete the course, talk with the Dean of Students, who will get in touch with the course vendor to determine if this is possible.
- **Step 7:** Complete the Course Orientation found in your online course.
- **Step 8:** Try to plan a consistent and minimum time you will work on the course each day.

Keep in mind that in classes you have a **five(5) day trial period for the course**. If after you start a course you feel that online learning is not for you, talk to your counselor. You may decide that the online course does not fit your learning needs. If you do not meet the course schedule in the first two weeks of the course, you may risk of falling behind in the class.

To be successful in your course, you will need to work independently, stay on task and maintain a regular schedule of logging on and keeping up with the readings, course assignments, homework, discussions, and other expectations. There is no way to 'sit in the back' and be silent in an online course! So good luck, and be sure to be in contact with your online and local teachers as soon as you run into any problems. Here is a summary of your responsibilities in an online class:

Daily

- Log in with your correct user name and password.
- Check your e-mail.
- Check course announcements.
- Check discussion groups for student and teacher postings.
- Access your course content and assignments.
- Begin working where you left off from in the previous course session.
- Make sure you do your own work!
- Use a notebook to take notes for assignments as well as make note of problems with the online course.
- Anticipate when you will have a quiz or test, allowing yourself enough time to complete it, without running the risk of submitting incomplete work. If time allows, check your answers before you submittal.
- Don't forget to log off.

Weekly

- Be in contact with your online instructor.
- Check your course grade book to see how you are progressing in the course.
- Discuss any questions that come up with the Dean of Students and/or online teachers.
- E-mail your instructor about any problems you encounter with the course. Be constructive with your criticism.

Please read carefully....

Important Information

Academic Integrity

The Neillsville School District expects a full commitment to academic integrity from each student. Academic integrity means:

- Your work on each assignment will be completely your own
- Your collaboration with another classmate on any assignment will be in accordance with your instructor
- You will not practice plagiarism of any form. Plagiarism is defined as follows:

Copying or using ideas or words from another online classmate, or an Internet or print source and presenting them as your own.

- If an instructor confirms that a student has plagiarized work, the student will be subject to consequences determined by the Neillsville School District Policy and you may be removed from the course with a failing grade.

Attendance

While students may not be responsible for daily classroom participation as in a traditional classroom setting, there is still an important need to participate on a regular basis. Your learning and the success of other students depend upon your participation.

Be aware of the guidelines and expectations set forth by your online teacher at the beginning of the course. Extended absence from an online class (failure to hand in assignments, post to discussion boards, communicate with instructors, etc.) will quickly cause problems with your grade as well as ability to finish the course in a timely manner. The minimum attendance requirement is to attend each class a minimum of five hours each week and successfully submit at least one appropriately completed assignment for each online course every calendar week.

If an unexpected situation such as illness should arise and there is an extended leave from the course, contact your Online Teacher and report the problem to your Local Facilitator. They will discuss alternatives with you regarding the next steps to take for course completion.

Assessment

As a condition of enrollment, all students must accept the ability of the local district to require that students perform tasks or undergo additional assessments in addition to those of the online teacher. If a school wishes to require other graded assessments for coursework in a proctored or un-proctored situation for any student of group of students, they may make arrangements to do so.

Copyright

Online courses use copyrighted materials that have been licensed or developed by their vendor. These materials are the property of the respective developer and are provided only for the use of students. You may not distribute, publish, or reuse the materials, audio files, images or design of any of the curriculum. You are authorized to view, copy, and print documents contained within the portal and courses, subject to the agreement that:

- Your use is for the performance of coursework as required by the instructor teaching the course for which you are registered.
- All copyright or proprietary notices are displayed on all copies
- You will not reuse any material contained on the portal or courses, including the functionality of the courses delivery system
- You will not copy the course delivery system for any commercial or noncommercial purpose
- You will not copy any codes or graphics contained in the site, except those graphics used in courses, subject to the above terms.

Cost

The Neillsville School District will require payment before starting any online class(es) based on the following scheduling plan:

- Credit Recovery: **\$50.00 (non-refundable)**
- Personal Choice: In the case that a student wants to choose a course that is not required = **\$50.00 (non-refundable)**
- Acceleration: In the case that a student wants to take a course to graduate early = **\$100.00 (non-refundable)**
- Career Focused Electives= **\$100.00 (non-refundable)**
- Scheduling conflict: **Free**
- Full-time Online: **Free**

****If a student does not complete a course or receives a failing grade for a course, the student shall reimburse the Neillsville School District for the full cost of the course.**

****Students will not be enrolled into additional online, or distance learning classes, if outstanding payments have not been made.**

Course Completion

Upon completion of your online course, email your online teachers (and notify the Dean of Students) that you have completed all requirements. The online teacher will verify by e-mail that all assignments have been completed and graded. The Dean of Students, Guidance Counselor, and Online Teacher will work together to determine your credit earned and course grade. An incomplete will be issued for any unfinished course. Please see the District Student Handbook on how to handle this matter.

It is the student's responsibility to make sure that all written assignments are properly submitted for grading. It is recommended that students keep electronic copies of all assignments in the event that there are technical difficulties with assignment submissions.

Credit and Grade Posting

The Principal and Guidance Counselor, in consultation with the Online Teacher (OT), will determine credit and grades for the course you are taking. Your Guidance Counselor will be responsible for posting your credit and grade to your transcript.

Quarterly grades will be posted to progress reports for online students, and are susceptible to any Athletic Code and Honor Role Policy.

Discipline

All students enrolled in a course are subject to the rules and restrictions implemented by the Neillsville School District.

Harassment Reporting

If you feel you are being harassed in your course environment, it is important to report it immediately to your instructor or the Dean of Students. Harassment comes in many forms, including Spam (unsolicited e-mails not pertaining to the course), threatening communications; offensive e-communications or any other kind of communication that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Be cautious about e-mail messages from anyone, particularly adults asking you for personal information, attempting to arrange meetings, or engaging in personal contact. Disclose to your Mentor and online teachers any message you receive that is inappropriate or makes you feel uncomfortable. Never give out personal information -- including your full name (first names are best), home phone number, home address or other data -- anywhere on the Internet, including your e-mail.

Netiquette

A high sense of personal honor and integrity is expected for students taking online courses. All students and teachers participating in online courses are expected to conduct their communications in a professional, respectful manner as outlined in the student code of conduct in effect in the Neillsville School District. The use of proper Internet etiquette is expected at all times. Inappropriate language or behavior will result in disciplinary action and possible termination of your course. Procedures outlined in the local school district's Acceptable Use Policy will apply to all online courses.

Remember that e-mail is not private. Never say anything via e-mail that you wouldn't mind seeing on the school bulletin board or in the local newspaper.

Security

Security on any computer system is a high priority, especially when the system involves many users. If you feel you can identify a security problem in the school's computers, network or Internet connection, notify the Dean of Students.

Never snoop around in other people's files. Cases of suspected user file tampering will be dealt with through the loss of a student's ability to connect to the course for an extended or permanent period of time.

Think about the social consequences of any program you write. Never create harmful computer viruses. These actions are illegal and will be enforced. Any viruses detected as originating from a student will result in legal action against the student the immediate loss of credit in the course.

Protect your password. Keep it secret. Users are subject to all local, state and federal laws. Anything posted to the courses will be treated as public comments and are thus subject to criminal prosecution if they so warrant. The School District of Neillsville will cooperate fully with local, state or federal officials in any investigation related to any illegal activities conducted through Internet access.

And Finally....

Some Tips and Tricks

Tips for Discussion Board Posting

(This material is credited to: Michigan Virtual High School)

Constructive Criticism

It is human nature to disagree with people. However, it is important to remember that you need to respect your fellow classmates. In responding to something you disagree with, it is essential that you are specific in what you want to respond to.

Example: I thought what you said about Ahab's obsession in Moby Dick was good; however, I don't think he was crazy...

Notice how the example cites the post, and then focuses the criticism on a particular point within the post that is being responded to. In your online course environment, your classmates won't necessarily be able to reference the post you are responding to as they read your post, so you will need to help them out by making it clear yourself. Respecting your classmates is of the utmost importance when working online because your posts are the only way you get to interact with your classmates.

Posting Discussions

In a traditional classroom you are able to talk to your group members after class, or you might be given time during the class to discuss our work. However, online classes aren't conducted face to face so your communications will be through e-mail most of the time. This means that it is essential that you are communicating regularly with your group for assignments. If you are going to be out of town, are sick, or are unable to communicate with your group for any reason, you need to make them aware of this situation as soon as possible.

Example: Keith is going on vacation but he needs to be a participant in his online group project. So Keith does the responsible thing and makes arrangements with his group members prior to leaving, and he finds a way to participate from his vacation destination.

Keith is a good example of responsible group member because he has identified that there will be a lapse in his ability to participate when he leaves for vacation. He has notified his group members so that they can inform him of what they need. And Keith has tried to make arrangements so that he can participate when he is away from home. These are things that you need to take responsibility for when you are taking an online course.

Preparation for Discussion

This is really related to constructive criticism and active group participation. In the online discussions, thoughtful responses will make your posts easier to read and will also help your classmates respond to them. While some online classes may not require your participation in discussion, the majority will. This means that you will be required to make posts based on assignments, and on the information you have read.

Poor Example: I thought the article was bad.

Good Example: I thought this article was bad because the author did not address why photosynthesis is vital to the life cycle of the fern.

In the poor example, the student obviously didn't like the article, but there is no explanation of why. This would force other students and the instructor to request clarification, which would only waste time. In the good example, the student makes it clear why the article was disappointing and perhaps the instructor could even respond to this post. The ability to discuss and post clearly is an essential skill online.

Things to Avoid At All Costs

- Intentionally insulting someone
- Sending Spam
- Making offensive remarks
- Making inappropriate comments

Study Tips

- **Keep up with the daily and weekly responsibilities** outlined in the Student Responsibilities document.
- Maintain **consistent communication** with your online and local teachers.
- **Compare your weekly accomplishments to your assignment timeline.** If you are falling behind, e-mail or speak to your teacher about developing better strategies that will help you meet your deadlines.
- Spend **five to ten hours per week** on the course to meet your schedule and complete the course requirements.
- Make a **to-do list** of assignments. Break assignments down into smaller, more manageable parts. Your list will be easier to use if it has small chunks of assignments, not big ones.
- **Print out course materials** if you find it easier to read from printed materials.
- **Take notes** on the important points of the course material. Writing can help you understand the material and stay more engaged in learning.
- **Stay organized.** Print important documents and keep your notes and important information in a file folder.
- **Ask your teacher for guidance** and suggestions if you have questions or difficulties. If you are still confused about how to use the course tools or navigate through the material, revisit the Course Orientation. If you are still unclear about how to get around in the course and complete your work, ask your teacher where to go and what to do.

Motivation

One of the keys to completing your online course is to find ways to motivate yourself and continue to give yourself positive encouragement.

- **Take time to think about why you are taking the course.** Write down how completing the course will help you achieve your goals, such as completing credits for graduation.
- **Identify the source of your frustrations.** Try to think through problems yourself. If you need help, talk to your teacher or e-mail your online teacher about the problems or frustrations you are facing. Ask them for suggestions or strategies that will help you.
- **Establish a study routine** and stick to it. It will be much easier to keep up with the course requirements. It is difficult to stay motivated if you fall too far behind.
- **Pace yourself.** Give yourself breaks when you need to.
- Give yourself **positive messages** about how well you are doing. Acknowledge your accomplishments and reward yourself as you complete major assignments.

Managing Your Time

In an online course, **time management is critical** to success because most activities can be accomplished asynchronously—you don't have to be online at the same time as your instructor or other students. The advantage of learning "anytime, anywhere" also makes it easier to put off logging on and participating in class. As with any traditional course, you risk earning a lower grade if you fall behind.

One of the best ways to manage your time in an online class is to **plan out your day** and see where the online course best fits in. You may have an actual class period during the school day to work on your online course, but you may have to find the time to work on your online classes at home (even if you have time during a scheduled class, you'll probably still have online homework.)

With traditional classes it is easy to get into student study groups and work together. In an online environment, this requires a different kind of approach. Luckily, with the Internet, every lecture, discussion and communication may be archived online for you to review. This gives you an advantage because you can look back through everything that was ever said or written in class leading up to the test.



Student / Parent Contracts for Online Courses

Local Contact Person(s): Mrs. Backaus or Mr. Hanson

Students are expected to attend and participate in their online courses as fully as they would attend in a traditional classroom course. Students must agree to the following guidelines to be eligible for participation in an online course. **This and Parental Contract must be completed with payment before the class can start.**

Yes	No	I currently have a 2.0 GPA and/or have successfully passed previous online classes prior to this semester (Retaking only once).
Yes	No	I will make a commitment to log in and work in my online class at least 5 hours throughout the week or as often as I need to remain on schedule.
Yes	No	I am responsible for making up all work that I have missed if I am absent from school.
Yes	No	I will follow my district's Acceptable Use Policy that sets guidelines for Internet and e-mail use.
Yes	No	I will NOT change my password because the only way that I will receive credit for the course is by having my teacher check my progress.
Yes	No	I will NOT use any other student's login or password.
Yes	No	I will NOT use e-mail for personal use if the school prohibits it.
Yes	No	I will try to be as clear as possible and use courteous language when I communicate with my teachers and online classmates.
Yes	No	I will review e-mail before I send it.
Yes	No	I will always include my first and last name so the instructor knows who I am.
Yes	No	I will abide by the rules of both my online and local teachers and the person who is in charge of the room I work in (library, study hall, computer lab, etc.).
Yes	No	I will notify the online and local instructors with any problems that I have with the class or computer.
Yes	No	I will make sure to keep in contact with the online and local teachers at least once a week and to ask questions as they come up.
Yes	No	I will make a commitment to complete this course by _____ (date).

The student and Guidance Counselor will review and discuss this document. Upon completion of the discussion, if both understand and agree to the conditions of the course, they will each sign the bottom in an agreement of mutual understanding.

Registration of Online Courses for _____
(Student's Name)

** I understand the needs and expectations of the course and agree to fulfill my responsibilities and will work to successfully complete this online course.

Purpose for Class(es): (Check one)

- Credit Recovery-CR (\$50.00)**
- Personal Choice-PC (\$50.00)**
- Career Focused Elective-CF (\$50.00)**
- Credit Acceleration-CA (\$100.00)**
- Scheduling Conflict-SC (NC)**
- Full-time Online-FO (NC)**

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

Guidance Counselor: _____ **Date:** _____



Parental Permission for Participation in Online Learning

My child _____ has my permission to take online course(s). I understand that this is an alternative instructional delivery method that involves self-motivation and personal responsibility on my child's part. I agree to fulfill and to take responsibility for my child when the course requires either online or offsite learning experiences which may be held outside of the regular school day (as specified in the course description). I further acknowledge that both my child and I understand and will fulfill the obligations of the Neillsville School District's Internet/Technology Acceptable Use Policies.

As the parent/legal guardian of this student, I understand and give permission for the Neillsville School District to save and share information about my child. This information will be shared with the school or company who is providing the course for registration, course progress, course completion, and grading purposes and may include demographic information such as age, race, and home contact information; upon completion of the course, the school district will receive copies of the information for my child's student record and transcripts. Additional information may be collected for reporting to funding agencies. Such information will not include the student's name and other personally identifiable information or home contact information, but may include family income level, race, or whether the student is gifted or talented or receives district services such as special education or ESL programming. I further understand that researchers such as those working with the University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction or the United States Department of Education may be studying this program, and that non-distinguishing information may be shared for these purposes.

Course Information:

Cost for each online class, as explained earlier, may require a fee of \$50.00 or \$100.00 to be paid before log-in information is released for the course. Each class is itemized on the back of this form.

Other Important Information regarding this course:

****If the course(s) requirements are not met, student/guardian will be responsible for the cost of the course, which could be more than \$300.00.**

Signed: _____ Date: _____

