

## Tips for Taking College Courses Free of Charge

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No matter what your age – it's never too late to take a college course – one that truly interests you (not one that's required). And the great news is that you can take any of 8,000 college courses at the very best universities, with professors handpicked for their good teaching, at the time and place of your choice—FREE! Thanks to the generosity of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the work of the OpenCourseWare Consortium of universities worldwide, you can get the same courses others are paying \$5,000 for right in the comfort of your living room. Here are some tips you'll need to get you started:

1. **Get Started.** Begin by searching the master list of all courses provided by the OpenCourseWare Consortium (<http://www.ocwconsortium.org>). Here you'll find courses offered throughout the United States and the world. You'll find courses offered at 18 American Universities, including: MIT, Yale, Notre Dame, Carnegie Mellon, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Irvine, Utah State, and Stanford University.

Extra Tip: Negotiate credit. If you're planning to do all the work, and if you're enrolled at a college, see if you can get credit for the course as a directed or individual studies course. At some universities, especially if your university doesn't offer the course you're taking, you'll be able to sign up with a professor at your own school and get course credit.

2. **Play to their strengths.** Every college has some fields it's strong in and other fields in which it's less distinguished. You won't be surprised to hear that biology, chemistry, physics, statistics, and math are strong at MIT and Carnegie Mellon; philosophy, religion, and history at Yale, Notre Dame, and Berkeley; and biological and irrigation engineering at Utah State. If you're up to it, try to take the courses you want at the best schools that offer them.

3. **Take something that interests you.** You'll be more motivated to listen to all the lectures if you pick a subject for which you have a true passion. Some samples of actual classes now offered include Donald Kagan's Introduction to Ancient Greek History (Yale, classics), Amy Hungerford's American Novel Since 1945 (Yale, English), Asma Afsaruddin's Women in Islamic Societies (Notre Dame, Middle Eastern studies), Science whizzes (or wannabe whizzes) will enjoy MIT's Eric Lander's Introduction to Biology, Walter Lewin's Physics I: Classical Mechanics, and Sylvia Ceyer and Catherine Drennan's Principles of Chemical Sciences. And at Berkeley, there's Cymie Payne's International Environmental Law (law), John Kihlstrom's Scientific Approaches to Consciousness (cognitive science), and Fletcher Ibsen's Introductory Probability and Statistics for Business (statistics).

4. **Pick your modality.** Some of the courses offer full video downloads, others just audio, and still others just print materials. Check to see that the course you're interest in is offered in the mode you can deal with.

**5. Pick your language .** Some of the courses offer translations into foreign languages (especially at the MIT site), including Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese (traditional and simplified), Persian, and Thai. So if English is not your native language, you might enjoy the top-notch courses in your native tongue. On the other hand, the OCW Consortium website offers courses at universities in countries ranging from Afghanistan to Vietnam-with special concentrations in France, Iran, Japan, Korea, and Spain. So if you want to take courses in some language other than English, here's your chance to improve your second-language skills.

Extra Tip: Some of the sites even have closed-captioning—good if you're hearing impaired or if you find it easier to learn with subtitles.

**6. Learn the layout.** Course Web pages are usually arranged in the standard order of the college semester. You'll typically find on the left of your screen the course description, instructor bio, syllabus, topics and readings for individual lectures, tests and papers, and downloads. Also, on the right of the screen, look for related resources that often provide a wealth of material for additional study on topics of interest.

**7. Customize your learning.** Some learners will like to listen only to a portion of the lectures—those on a topic they're especially interested in. Some will like to look at the midterm and final first so that they'll know in advance what points the professor thinks are most important. And still others will like to batch lectures together and have an eight-hour marathon of all the lectures on some topic. One of the great advantages of courses on the Web is that you control the speed and intensity of the learning. Make the course fit your learning style.

**8. Make it a community activity.** A few courses offer online communities of fellow students taking the course in cyberspace. If you're lucky enough to have hit on one of these, join the community. If not, why not invite a friend to take a class with you? You can set up your own viewings, discussion or study groups, and even (if you have a few friends) a Facebook or MySpace page for the course. You can even take a course with your parents or kids - try James Marshall's Marriage and Family Relationships, Alena Johnson's Family Finance, or Glenn Latham's Power of Positive Parenting (all at Utah State).