

Characteristics of High Quality Online Courses

Not all online courses are equal. When looking at the quality of an online program, here are some things to consider.

Teacher Training – Have the teachers taken a graduate level course to learn online teaching and learning best practices?

Online teaching requires different skills than classroom teaching. New online teachers need professional development training to learn to teach effectively in an online environment.

Student/Teacher Ratios – Is the student/teacher ratio and allotted teaching time sufficient to allow teachers to assess individual student work, provide personalized feedback, engage students in discussions, and proactively address individual students' challenges with the materials?

High quality online courses should have similar student/teacher ratios to classroom training. Effective online teachers should be spending more of their time on high-value interactions with students – and less of their time on rote lectures and classroom management.

Local Support – Is there an adult locally available to monitor student progress and help identify and troubleshoot any problems?

The most successful online programs involve a dedicated teacher, counselor, parent, or mentor who is physically present with the student on a regular basis to help monitor progress and troubleshoot any issues or problems.

Time Management – Are courses scheduled in a way to allow students to manage their time effectively and keep up with their course work?

Scheduled online learning with allotted time during the school day, weekly assignments, and a fixed semester or year-long schedule can help students keep up with their course work and manage their time effectively. Students who have successfully completed an online course can show colleges and employers that they have learned to manage their time and assignments effectively.

Peer Support – Are students completing the course together as a group so that they can learn from and support each other, participate in discussions, and work together on projects?

When students complete online courses together as a class they get to know each other. They help each other with assignments, encourage each other to keep up with their work, engage each other in discussions, and work together on projects. Online courses can provide even the shyest students with opportunities to express their views and interact with their teachers and peers. All students gets a chance to formulate their thoughts and be heard, not just those students with the confidence to raise their hand in class.

Global Understanding – Are students and teachers coming together from a wide variety of cities, states, and countries so they can be exposed to different points of view and broaden their understanding of themselves as global citizens?

When students and teachers from different cities, states, and countries come together in an online course, they share their different perspectives on the world. In local schools, teachers and students often share similar perspectives and experiences. Participating in a global online classroom allows students to expand their horizons and prepare to live and work in a diverse world and a global economy.

New Opportunities – Are online offerings allowing students to take interesting courses, explore potential college majors or careers, and select courses of study not otherwise offered by their schools?

Most schools can't offer a wide range of courses to students. Online courses can expand opportunities for students to study languages like Chinese, take less popular Advanced Placement courses like Physics or Art History, or explore college or career interests through courses in law, engineering, veterinary medicine, or other subjects that interest them. Students who are interested in their courses will be more engaged in their studies and are more likely to be successful and stay in school.

Technology Skills – Are students learning valuable computer and technology skills that they will be able to apply in college and in the workplace?

Well-designed online courses give students practical, hands on experience using computers and online resources effectively. When students graduate they will need these skills to succeed in college or in the workplace.

About Virtual High School

The Virtual High School Global Consortium (www.govhs.org) is a high quality online course provider that works in cooperation with local schools to provide enriching online courses that pass all of these tests.

For more information, visit www.govhs.org or call 1-978-897-1900