

A Glossary of Online Education Terminology

Academic & Technical Terms	Definition
A	
Academic Term	An academic term or “ session ” is a portion of an academic year, the time during which an educational institution holds classes. A “ semester ” system (from the Latin meaning “six-monthly”) divides the academic year into two terms, which are usually 14–20 weeks each. Some schools follow a trimester (three terms a year) or even a quadmester (four terms a year) schedule.
Accelerated	Many institutions offer accelerated courses, which are traditional 16-week semester courses that have been condensed into half the time. Accelerated courses allow you to complete your degree or program sooner, but they cover the same amount of material in less time and can be demanding.
Accreditation	Accreditation is a process by which a school is determined to have met predetermined quality standards determined and monitored by nongovernmental agencies authorized by the U.S. Secretary of Education. There are two types of accreditation: Institutional, for the school as a whole, is granted by a national or regional accreditation-granting organization. Programmatic or specialized accreditation acknowledges that a specific program within the school has successfully completed the accreditation process relevant to its field.
Adjunct	Adjunct Instructor or Adjunct Professor signifies that the individual may be a part-time employee of the school.
Antivirus	An antivirus program is an example of a utility used to spot and erase computer Viruses from your system.
Applied Learning	Applied Learning , or Practice-Based Learning can be defined as experiential, hands-on, active learning that integrates deep academic and rigorous technical content in problems and projects that connect school to life and work—learning on the basis of one’s own reflections on one’s own actions. ¹ Applied Learning may be complemented by Theory-Based Learning. <i>See also: Theory-Based Learning.</i>
Apps	App is short for “application,” which is the same as a software program (not to be confused with an application for entry to a school).
Assistant Professor	Assistant Professor is the post held by a faculty member who is on the tenure track but has not yet received tenure. After serving, on average, three to seven years, an individual is considered for promotion and tenure.
Asynchronous	Asynchronous learning is a general term used to describe forms of education, instruction, and learning that do not occur in the same place or at the same time. This means you do the work when it’s convenient for you. Most online courses are asynchronous in nature, though instructors may include synchronous components, such as weekly meetings, and require attendance or participation. <i>See also: Synchronous.</i>

A Glossary of Online Education Terminology

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B	
Blended Learning	When considering a program, consider the difference between a fully online and a blended learning program . Fully online means just you and the screen—you complete all the work online. You could, for instance, enroll in a course at a school that’s physically located far from you. Blended learning combines online screen time and traditional “seat time.” Faculty members appreciate blended formats because they can move portions of instruction online, thus freeing up class time for other activities such as group work on projects, a lab, or class discussion.
Blog	An online journal (blog is short for web log) that may be available to the general public or entirely private, open to select friends and family. You can usually adjust your blog settings to restrict visitors from commenting on your blog entries.
Browser	To get around online, you use a software program called a browser . Many browsers are available, and they are free. Names of browsers include Internet Explorer (IE), Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, and Opera. Browsers offer tools to help you navigate from website to website and from one web page to another.
C	
Cache	On a computer, the cache stores recently used information so that it can be quickly accessed at a later time. Computers incorporate several different types of caching in order to run more efficiently, thereby improving performance. Common types of caches include browser cache, disk cache, memory cache, and processor cache. ²
Capstone	Also called a <i>capstone experience</i> , <i>culminating project</i> , or <i>senior exhibition</i> , among many other terms, a capstone project is a multifaceted assignment that completes, and is the high point of, a student’s academic program or learning-pathway experience.
Citation Format	Citation formats —the style you use to cite sources—depends on your instructor and your academic discipline. Commonly used styles include American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), American Medical Association (AMA), and Chicago Manual Style (CMS).
Cohort	The term cohort refers to a set of individuals who are treated as a group. In education, a cohort of students start a degree or certificate program at the same time and are in the program together throughout their degree. These students may be together for a year or more.
Cookies	Cookies are tiny files that a site uses to track your online activity and recognize you when you return to the source site. Trusted sites are sites that you allow to download cookies to your computer even though the privacy setting you’ve made might not allow any other sites to do so.

A Glossary of Online Education Terminology

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Credit Hour	A “ Credit hour ” is the unit of measuring educational credit, usually based on the number of classroom hours per week throughout a term. ³
D	
Degrees: Certificate, Associate’s, Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctorate,	Schools offer a variety of degree programs . Determining why you are going back to school will help guide what type of education you need. Certificates are miniature degrees that offer only what you need for a specific professional field or task. Typically, a certificate is much shorter than a traditional degree. Some certificates can lead to other degrees. Associate’s degrees typically require around 60 credit hours and may represent the first two years of a bachelor’s degree. Bachelor’s degrees require 124–128 credit hours. Master’s degrees require 32–36 hours beyond a bachelor’s degree. Some programs require as many as 44 credit hours. Doctorate degrees require around 60–75 credit hours beyond a bachelor’s, plus successful completion of a comprehensive examination and a written dissertation of original research.
Discussion Thread	The term “ thread ” in computing refers to a series of related postings (sharing comments) in an online discussion. Your instructor may provide students with a private discussion forum to communicate with one another. You can organize this forum by creating new discussion threads specific to conversation topics.
F	
FAFSA	The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the universal application for financial aid. Applying for FAFSA is free at www.fafsa.ed.gov .
Financial Aid	Financial Aid is any grant or scholarship, loan, or paid employment offered to help a student meet his/her college expenses. Such aid is usually provided by various sources such as federal and state agencies, colleges, high schools, foundations, and corporations. ⁴ Sources of financial aid include Scholarships, Grants, and Loans. Explore your options and eligibility for Financial Aid at studentaid.ed.gov .
For-Profit University	Both non-profit and for-profit schools confer degrees, but their focus and composition are quite different. For-profit colleges operate more like traditional businesses. These schools have investors who expect to make money (hence for-profit). ⁵
Fully Online Learning	Fully online means just you and the screen—you complete all the work online. You could, for instance, enroll in a course at a school that’s physically located far from you.

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G	
GI Bill	Many benefits are available to advance the education and skills of Veterans and Service members. Spouses and family members may also be eligible for education and training assistance. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 , known informally as the GI Bill , was a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as GIs). Veterans who have served at least 90 days of active duty service after September 10, 2001 and received an honorable discharge will qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
Graduation rate	Graduation rate is the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who complete their program within 150% of the published time for the program. For example, for a four-year degree program, entering students who complete within six years are counted as graduates. ⁶
H	
Hyperlink	A hyperlink is a word, phrase, or image that you can click on to jump to a new document or a new section within the current document. Hyperlinks are found in nearly all Web pages, allowing users to click their way from page to page.
I	
Instant Messaging (IM)	Instant Messaging (often called just IMing) used to be referred to as real-time e-mail. IM is ideal for quick, little messages for touching base and saying hi or getting an answer without a formal e-mail.
Instructor	An Instructor , or Lecturer, usually focuses on teaching rather than research, although, unlike an adjunct, may serve on academic committees. These positions are usually non-tenure track.
Instructor-Led Classes	In instructor-led classes, an instructor determines what happens with the content, pace of instruction, and evaluation. <i>See also: Self-paced Instruction.</i>
Interdisciplinary	Interdisciplinary study means combining or involving two or more academic disciplines or fields of study.
Internet	The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard IP address (Internet protocol) suite (TCP/IP) to link several billion devices worldwide. Contrary to popular thought, the World Wide Web is not synonymous with the Internet but just one of its features, along with email, IM, and FTP. ⁷

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L	
Links	Link is short for Hyperlink .
LMS (Learning Management System)	A Learning Management System (LMS) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting and delivery of e-learning education courses or training programs. ⁸ The technology platform through which students' access online courses, a LMS generally includes software for creating and editing course content, communication tools, assessment tools, and other features for managing the course. ⁹
M	
Matriculating	A Matriculating student is in a college or university as a candidate for a degree. Non-matriculating students are not actively working towards completion of a degree. Some schools limit the number of credits that a non-matriculated student may take in a semester. ¹⁰
Modality	Learning styles and learning modalities are often spoken of interchangeably. We commonly consider four modalities: <i>visual</i> (seeing), <i>auditory</i> (hearing), <i>kinesthetic</i> (moving), and <i>tactile</i> (touching). Educational environment must consider whether the student learns best through hearing, seeing, moving, and touching. ¹¹
N	
Netiquette	Netiquette is a set of rules or standards people follow to keep the online environment pleasant and safe. Netiquette is all about communicating respectfully and politely and avoiding stereotyping. Setting those ground rules early can prevent misunderstandings.
Non-Profit University	Both non-profit and for-profit schools confer degrees, but their focus and composition are quite different. Non-profits are the traditional schools you likely picture when you think of college– such as liberal arts colleges, community colleges, and state universities. These schools receive funding from a variety of sources such as the government, tuition fees, and donations. The money that these schools earn often goes directly back into the schools themselves. See also: For-Profit University . ¹²
O	
Online Education	Online education is about connecting the student to instruction and educational materials by way of the Internet. Other terms used include Virtual learning, Cyber learning, and E-learning.
Operating System	An operating system (OS) is the software that allows you to start and shut down your computer and work with all the other software programs, manage files, and connect to the Internet. Windows, Apple's Mac OS X, and Linux are common computer operating systems.

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P	
Practicum	A practicum is a course of study for teachers, doctors, nurses, etc., that involves actually working in the area of study and using the knowledge and skills that have been learned in a school. ¹³
Professor	Professor denotes full-time, tenured faculty. <i>Also see: Instructor and Adjunct.</i>
R	
Retention Rate	According to the FAFSA , the retention rate is the percentage of a school's first-time, first-year undergraduate students who continue at that school the next year. A low retention rate should raise a red flag when you are exploring programs. Other criteria considered are Graduation rate and Transfer Rate . ¹⁴
RSS Feeds	Technically, RSS stands for "RDF Site Summary," but it is commonly referred to as "Really Simple Syndication." An RSS feed will alert you when a site you're interested in adds new content. It's a convenient way to stay up to date on news or opinions from various sources.
S	
Self-paced Instruction	Self-paced instruction allows you to determine your schedule. <i>See also: Instructor-Led Classes.</i>
Semester	A " semester " system (from the Latin meaning "six-monthly") divides the academic year into two terms, which are usually 14–20 weeks each. Some schools follow a trimester (three terms a year) or even a quadmester (four terms a year) schedule. <i>See also: Academic Term.</i>
Session	<i>See: Academic Term.</i>
Skype	A video, voice and instant messaging software application to communicate with people over the internet.
Social Networking Site	A Social Networking Site is a website that allows people to build and maintain a web page and create networks of people with whom they share a connection—their friends, work associates, and/or other members with similar interests. Most social networking sites also host blogs and have social networking functions that allow people to view information about others and contact each other. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and more.
Software	Computer software is a general term that describes computer programs.

A Glossary of Online Education Terminology

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Spyware	As the name implies, spyware is software that “spies” on your computer. Spyware can capture information such as Web browsing habits, e-mail messages, usernames and passwords, and credit card information. If left unchecked, the software can transmit this data to another person’s computer over the Internet. ¹⁵
Synchronous	In Synchronous learning , the learning experience takes place in real time, although not always in the same place (as by Skype or webinar, for instance). Even in asynchronous courses, instructors may include synchronous components, such as weekly meetings.
T	
Theory-Based Learning	Theory-based learning is learning on the basis of systematic knowledge development by others. Using scientific knowledge is the foremost example of theory-based learning. <i>See also: Applied Learning.</i>
Transfer Rate	Transfer rate is the percentage of a school’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who transfer to another college within 150% of the published time for the program. For example, a student who is in a four-year degree program is counted as a transfer if the student goes to another college within six years. ¹⁶
Tuition Reimbursement (TR)	A tuition reimbursement (TR) plan is a human resources benefit offered by some employers. Employees who meet certain criteria may get assistance or reimbursement by their employers to help pay for education.
U	
URL	URL stands for “Uniform Resource Locator.” A URL is the address of a specific Web site or file on the Internet, usually, though not always, beginning with “http://www.”
Utilities	Utility programs , commonly referred to as just “ utilities ,” are software programs that add functionality to your computer or help your computer perform better. These include Antivirus , backup, disk repair, file management, security, and networking programs, as well as screensavers, font and icon tools, and desktop enhancements. ¹⁷
V	
Viruses	A virus is an online program that replicates itself and infects components of a computer system through emails, attachments, and internet browsers. <i>See also: Antivirus.</i>

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W	
Webpage	A web page is an electronic (digital) document created with HTML and, therefore, accessible with a browser. In addition to text and graphics, webpages may also contain downloadable data files, audio and video files, and hyperlinks to other pages or sites. A website is usually a collection of webpages. ¹⁸
Website	A website is a collection of webpages. ¹⁹ For instance, this webpage that you are reading is one of the many pages on this university's <i>website</i> .
Wiki	A wiki is a website that allows anyone visiting to contribute (add, edit, or remove) content. Wikipedia, for example, is a virtual encyclopedia built by users providing information in their areas of expertise. Some classes, both online and classroom based, use a wiki to share and communicate information and work.
Y	
Yellow Ribbon Program	The Yellow Ribbon Program is a provision of the law that created the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Yellow Ribbon Program is available for Institutions of Higher Learning (degree granting institutions) in the U.S. or at a branch of such institution located outside the U.S. The program allows approved institutions of higher learning and the VA to partially or fully fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed the established thresholds under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. A helpful source of information on GI Bill benefits can be found here .

Except for those sources noted below, the definitions in the Glossary of Online Education are referenced from: Johnson, Kevin, and Manning, Susan. *Online Education for Dummies*®, Copyright © 2010 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana; Muir, Nancy. *Computers For Seniors For Dummies*®, Copyright © 2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ

¹Joyce Malyn-Smith, "Applied Learning In Middle Schools" 1997; ²TechTerms.com; ³The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved. Quoted from thefreedictionary.com; ⁴nysfaaa.org; ⁵mycollegeoptions.org; ⁶fafsa.gov; ⁷Wikipedia.org; ⁸Wikipedia.org; ⁹Northwest Educational Technology Consortium, 2005; ¹⁰dictionary.reference.com; ¹¹education.com; ¹²www.mycollegeoptions.org; ¹³merriam-webster.com; ¹⁴fafsa.gov; ¹⁵TechTerms.com; ¹⁶fafsa.gov; ¹⁷TechTerms.com; ¹⁸businessdictionary.com; ¹⁹TechTerms.com

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