



STUDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

Online Learning Guide

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AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR COURSE

Now that you are in an online course you may be wondering where do I start?

Typically there will be a section that refers to an introduction, course outline/syllabus, etc. That is where you should begin. However, you shouldn't be afraid to explore the course - you won't break it! Some courses may have a section to practice using some of the tools, such as the discussion forums, submitting assignments, chat, etc. Make sure you practice using those, so when you have to use them for real you are already comfortable with the tool.

Locate the important elements of the course such as outline, due dates, expectations, how to communicate with the instructor/classmates, etc. Take some time, get comfortable with the layout, establish a full picture for yourself - this will help you and your brain prepare for the course.

Assignments are very important to students, as they are a reflection of what was learned in the course, which equates to the grade achieved. Ensure you read the instructions carefully, paying attention to the question(s) being asked, how the instructor wants you to do the assignments (APA), the length, the due dates, etc. If you are unsure ALWAYS ask - an instructor would much rather you ask a question than do an assignment incorrectly. The best way to contact your instructor is listed on the course outline under "Instructor Contact Information" on page 1.

Working with your classmates online

You may be required to prepare and submit a group assignment.

While you will be using Nexus to find your group members and to submit your group assignment, it is advisable to use freely available social media tools outside of Nexus for ongoing group collaboration.

Learning to write as a group can be a daunting and frustrating process, but using social media tools can make a big difference. There are many free options available for working in an online group. [Google Drive](#) is a great way to collaborate on a group paper or presentation. You may also use [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google Hangout](#), [Zoom](#) or [Skype](#) for synchronous (you are all online at the same time) or asynchronous communication.

Review the section of this document on [Essential Skills for Group Work](#). And finally, take a look at this article that also gives some very practical and useful advice: [How to Survive Virtual Group Work](#)

ONLINE VS. CLASSROOM

Here we will introduce you to the world of online learning: we will show you how it works, debunk a few common misconceptions about online learning environments, and explore some differences you will encounter when taking courses online rather than in a traditional classroom.

How does it work?

In an online course, your instruction is delivered over the internet rather than in-person, in a traditional classroom. Seems obvious enough, right? Think of the learning management system (or Nexus) as a virtual classroom. Nexus is where your instructor will:

- > Post all of the course materials,
- > conduct online discussions and perhaps other activities, and
- > receive your assignments.

Additionally, it is where your instructor will expect you to:

- > read all of the course materials posted there,
- > participate in the activities created, and
- > use Nexus to submit your assignments.

DEBUNKING MYTHS

Online learning is not new, but it is quickly evolving to become a more and more powerful tool for teaching and learning. That's why we think it's important to start our discussion by debunking some of the more common myths about online learning. These misconceptions might already sound familiar, or they may surprise you. But they have gotten in the way of some students who then found it difficult or impossible to complete their online courses successfully. We don't want you to be one of these students. This is why we've made this introductory module: we want to give you a clear idea of what you can expect from online learning and provide you with some tips that will help you not only to succeed but to excel, in your online course.

Let's start by addressing the seven most common myths about online learning:

Myth #1: Easier

"I've heard that the online course is way easier than taking the same course on campus. You don't have to go to class, you just have to hand in assignments and you're done."

THE FACTS: the workload for any particular course is the same regardless of the way it's delivered. And if you think about it, there is more reading in online classes because you have to read all of your teacher's instructions rather than hearing them in class. In an online environment, you need to be more self-disciplined and motivated because you won't be facing the instructor every session.

The good news is that online classes will give you the flexibility to learn when you are ready to learn and at times that work with your schedule. This can be a real plus for students with busy lives. In an online class, you are not limited by "class times," so you don't have to worry about conflicts with other classes you want to take, your work schedule, or other time constraints!

Whether you decide to take your classes in a traditional or an online setting is up to you; one option isn't easier than the other. It's all about finding the best fit for your life, your time, and your habits.

Myth #2: Self-paced

"If I'm taking an online class, I can turn in assignments whenever I want, right? I'll just get all of the assignments from the instructor and blast through it in two weeks rather than wasting a whole semester."

THE FACTS: regardless of what you think you may be able to accomplish at your speed, most online courses are NOT self-paced. Some instructors reveal all assignments ahead of time and others may roll out course topics and assignments incrementally. The most successful students will concentrate on their work at the pace that the teacher has laid out. Give yourself time to focus on the course material and put your best effort into assignments - don't try to rush through the course just to "get it done". The online learning world is not much different from traditional campus courses: the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

The good news is that Students who complete online courses have found that the organizational skills they learned and used to complete their online courses made them better students in traditional courses they took later on.

Myth #3: Participation

"Professors randomly call on students for answers in a lecture, but in an online class I can fly under the radar."

THE FACTS: don't be fooled by the illusion of anonymity in your virtual classroom. Even though you and your instructor may not be able to see one another, he or she can access reports on the quantity and quality of your course participation, and believe us, they will. They want to know how you're doing, and how they're doing, and participation will be a key component of any of your classes. Sometimes faculty know more about their online students than their on-campus students.



The good news is that online learning can provide you with the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with your professors and with other students taking the same course. Conversing online can seem strange or artificial at first, but once they get used to it, most people enjoy online discussions. In an online course, everyone has a chance to provide their input, and you have time to craft your thoughts before "speak." You're not bounded by the end of a class period or limited discussion time. But you'll also need to commit to participating effectively and you'll need specific strategies to make this happen.

Myth #4: Tech skills

(Myth #5 comes in two parts, but both center on your technical IQ.)

Myth #4A: "I spend a lot of time on social media and I text my friends more than I talk to them. I don't need to learn any technical skills to take a class online."

Myth #4B: "I don't know my way around a computer, but my instructor does. I'll just rely on him or her to help me figure it out during the semester. My online class will teach me any of the technical skills I need to figure it out, right?"

THE FACTS: Online learning generally do not require extensive technical knowledge, but you have to understand the basics about your computer, the internet, and how to use Nexus, UWinnipeg's course management system (LMS). Watch the [Nexus Introductory Videos](#) and [tutorial](#) for an overview of the technology you'll be using. Take the time to understand your online environment before you get too far into the semester: you won't want to wait until minutes before an assignment is due to learning which buttons you need to push to submit it.

Myth #5: Communication skills

"Email is instant, and I know my teacher checks her email all of the time. So, if I don't understand something or have a last-minute question about an assignment, I can email her and she should respond right away. She's definitely up at 10 PM, and it would only take her 2 minutes to write back with the answer."

THE FACTS: This is a misconception that we're sure all instructors would like to be cleared up from the outset. Most of your instructors provide a maximum email turnaround time, typically between 24-48 hours. As a student, you need to plan as much as possible, and be sure to have an alternate solution if you don't hear back from your instructor before an assignment is due (remember, your assignments are your responsibility, not theirs). Some instructors include a "Questions About the Course" discussion thread where they encourage students to answer one another's questions. This could be immensely helpful for you and might be a way for you to help other students in turn. (Remember what we said about building classroom relationships?) Another approach would be to reach out to another member of the class and exchange private emails to support each other throughout the semester. Because you're not meeting with each other once or more times every week, it's easy to feel isolated in an online course. Try some of these tactics so you can connect with others - you will get a lot more out of your classes if you do.

Building supportive online relationships and friendships require skill and practice. The *good news* is, students who develop good communication skills, learn to be assertive, and can cooperate and collaborate well in a virtual environment will find these skills highly transferrable (and valued) in their personal and professional lives long after their course is over.

Myth #6: Excuses

"If I didn't finish an assignment on time, I used to tell my instructor that I accidentally brought the wrong notebook to class or that my printer ran out of ink. Now I can just say that my computer crashed, that I accidentally deleted my finished assignment, or that I just sent in the wrong attachment."

THE FACTS: Probably none of these excuses will work. Remember, your instructors have not only heard every excuse in the book (probably more than once), but they are also pretty tech-savvy themselves—they are, after all, teaching a university-level online course. Make sure you fully understand your instructor's expectations and that you comply with them promptly, and keep an open channel of communication with them if you need help or have questions. Detailed



information about your instructor's policies and expectations should be included in their course syllabus. Some instructors also provide checklists for all deadlines. If your instructor does not, it might be helpful to create your assignment checklist. The organizational and study skills you develop for your first online course will put you on the road to success for all your future learning experiences, whether they are online or in a traditional learning environment.

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PREPARATION STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Step 1 Look at your schedule of all your courses and plan how to study for each of them.

Step 2 Write your plan down on a calendar or make a schedule.

Step 3 Put the calendar or the schedule where you do your work at home and with each of your courses.

Step 4 Do your readings for the next class – that is - preview

Step 5 Do any homework or assignments for the next class.

Step 6 Think of a good question to ask in each of your courses for next week.

ONLINE READING STRATEGIES

In an online educational environment, you're probably going to do more reading than listening. You may do some of your reading in printed form—say, an assigned novel or textbook—but some of it might also be online in the form of a webpage. Reading online isn't the same as reading in print, so you should practice some strategies that will improve your online reading comprehension and speed. And some of the tactics you learn about here will help you with any kind of reading you might do, not just the online stuff.

After completing this module, you'll:

- › Understand some of the differences between reading print versus reading online,
- › Learn strategies for staying focused when reading online, and
- › Discover ways to maximize your reading speed and comprehension.

Print vs. Online

- › What do we mean when we say that reading print is different from reading online?
- › First, when you read something—let's say, a book—that's been printed by a reputable publishing house, you can assume that the work is authoritative. The author had to be vetted by a publishing house and multiple editors. But when you read something online, it might have been written or posted by anybody. This means that you have to seriously evaluate the authority of the information you're reading. Pay attention to who was writing what you're reading—can you identify the author? What are his or her credentials?
- › Second, in the print world, texts may include pictures, graphics, or other visual elements to supplement the author's writing. But in the digital realm, this supplementary material might also include hyperlinks, audio, and video, as well. This will fundamentally change the reading experience for you because online reading can be interactive in a way that a print book can't. An online environment allows you to work and play with content rather than passively absorbing it.
- › Finally, when you read in print, you generally read sequentially, from the first word to the last. Maybe you'll flip to an index or refer to a footnote, but otherwise, the way you read is fairly consistent and straightforward. Online, however, you can be led quickly into an entirely new area of reading by clicking on links or related content. Have you ever been studying for class and fall a Wikipedia rabbit hole while looking for unfamiliar terms? You might have started by investigating the French Revolution, but half an hour later you find yourself reading about the experimental jazz scene in 1970s New York. You can't do that with a book.



Why, What, How?

Now that you've heard about how reading online differs from reading print, you should know that this has some really practical consequences for reading comprehension—how to understand and apply what you're reading. Improving your online reading comprehension will save you time and frustration when you work on your assignments. You'll be able to understand your course subject matter better, and your performance on your quizzes and exams will improve.

Consider the "why, what, and how" of reading comprehension:

Why? *Why am I being asked to read this passage?* In other words, what are the instructions my instructor has given me?

What? *What am I supposed to get out of this passage?* That is, what are the main concerns, questions, and points of the text? What do you need to remember for class?

How? *How will I remember what I just read?* In most cases, this means taking notes and defining key terms.

When you keep the "why, what and how" of reading comprehension in the forefront of your mind while reading, your understanding of the material will improve drastically. It will only take a few minutes but it will not only help you remember what you've read but also structure any notes that you might want to take.

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ONLINE STUDY SKILLS & MANAGING TIME

Studying is essential to any educational endeavour, but the online learning environment presents some unique studying challenges that you might not face in a traditional classroom environment. This means that to excel in your online class, you'll need to make sure your study skills are top-notch!

Discipline, responsibility, motivation—these are characteristics that all students need to get the most they can out of their classes. But online students sometimes face additional challenges because of the degree of independence that the online learning system grants them. This is why it's so important for you to be able to honestly and effectively assess your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to your study skills and habits and to develop a process for yourself that will enable you to be most effective.

We've created this section on study skills and time management to help you identify your tendencies and habits, and provide you with strategies for improvement.

Time management

Create a schedule

Now that you've evaluated how you have done things in the past, you'll want to think about how you might create a schedule for managing your time to improve on that! The best schedules have some flexibility built into them, as you will undoubtedly have unexpected situations and circumstances arise during your time as a student.

Your schedule will be unique to you, depending on the level of detail you find helpful. There are some things—due dates, exam dates, and discussion times, for example—that should be included in your schedule no matter what. But you also might find it helpful to break down assignments into steps (or milestones) that you can schedule as well. Again, this is all about what works best for you—do you want to keep a record of only the major deadlines you need to keep in mind? Or does it help you to plan out every day so you stay on track? Your answers to these questions will vary depending on the course, the complexity of your schedule, and your personal preferences.

Your schedule will also vary depending on the course you're taking. So, pull out your syllabus and try to determine the rhythm of the class by looking at the following factors:



How often does your instructor expect discussion board contributions? When are initial discussion board contributions due?

- › Will you have tests or exams in this course? When are those scheduled?
- › Are there assignments and papers? When are those due?
- › Is there any group or collaborative assignments? You'll want to pay particular attention to the timing of any assignment that requires you to work with others: they take a longer time to complete when you are learning online because it can be more complicated to schedule times to get together.

You can find many useful resources online that will help you keep track of your schedule. Some are basic, cloud-based calendars (like Google Calendar, iCal, Outlook), and some (like [iHomework](#)) are specialized for students.

We all have exactly 168 hours per week. How do you spend yours? And now that you're a student, how much time will be willing to devote to your studies?

Prioritize your time

Due dates are important. Set your short and long-term goals accordingly. Ask yourself:

- › What needs to get done today?
- › What needs to get done this week?
- › What needs to get done by the end of the 1st month of the semester?
- › What needs to get done by the end of the 2nd month of the semester?
- › What needs to get done by the end of the semester?

Your time is valuable. Treat it accordingly by getting the most you can out of it.

Above all: avoid PROCRASTINATION.

Procrastination is the kiss of death to the online learner because it's incredibly difficult to catch up once you've fallen behind. Do you have a problem procrastinating? We're going to ask you a few questions in this final segment and if you find yourself saying, "Sounds like me," more often than you say, "No way," you'll want to be on your guard so that procrastination doesn't become an issue for you.

Procrastination Check List

Consider the following issues:

1. My paper is due in two days and I haven't started writing it yet.
2. I've had to pull an all-nighter to get an assignment done on time.
3. I've turned in an assignment late or asked for an extension when I didn't have a good excuse not to get it done on time.
4. I've worked right up to the minute an assignment was due.
5. I've underestimated how long a reading assignment would take and didn't finish it in time for class.
6. I've relied on the internet for information (like a summary of a concept or a book) because I didn't finish the reading on time.

If these sound like issues you've struggled with in the past, you might want to think seriously about whether you have the tendency to procrastinate, and how you want to deal with it in your future classes. You're already spending a lot of time, energy, and money on the online classes you're taking—don't let all of that go to waste!

But don't worry! We are here to help. The following five pieces of our "procrastination pie" provide some strategies for overcoming these challenges:

1. Keep your studying "bite-sized": when confronted with 150 pages of reading or 50 problems to solve, you may understandably feel overwhelmed. What if you decide that you will read for 45 minutes, or that you will solve 10 problems? That sounds much more manageable.



2. Turn off your phone, close your chat windows, and block distracting websites. The best advice we've ever heard is to treat your studying as if you're in a movie theatre—just turn it off!
3. Set up a reward system: if you read for 40 minutes, you can check your phone for 5 minutes. But keep in mind that reward-based systems only work if you stick to a code of self-honour.
4. Study in a place reserved for study ONLY. Your bedroom may have too many distractions (or the ever-present temptation of a quick nap...), so stay out of there when working on school assignments.
5. Use checklists: Make your incremental accomplishments visible. Some people get great satisfaction and motivation from checking items off a "to do" list. Be very specific when creating this list, and clearly describe each task one step at a time.

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Assignment Calculator

COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS

Your instructor may request that you communicate with them in a certain way, make sure you are aware of that and follow it. That will ensure any messages you send are seen and responded to in a timely fashion.

You may also be communicating with your classmates in various ways: discussion forums, chat sessions, live sessions, group work, etc. Make sure you know the expectations of those communications, understand them and if any special software (Google Docs, Skype, etc.) is needed you are prepared for that.

Answering a question in a classroom may take you seconds, however responding to questions in a written format could take you much, much longer. There are stages to

Why do you need a writing process?

- › It can help you organize your thoughts.
- › It can help you avoid frustration and procrastination.
- › It can help you use your time productively and efficiently
- › Things to think about:
 - › How do you like to go about writing?
 - › How long does it take you?
 - › How many drafts do you like to write?
 - › Do you write rapidly or slowly?
 - › Are you usually satisfied with what you have written?
 - › What kind of papers is easy for you to write? Which are difficult?
 - › Do you like to get feedback from others?

Two types of communication can be used in an online class:

- › Asynchronous communication is when you, your classmates, and your instructor participate in online discussions at different times, rather than in real-time. So if you send your instructor a question via email, participate in an online discussion forum, or post to a blog for your class, you are communicating asynchronously.
- › Synchronous communication happens in real-time, like having a class discussion in a traditional setting or talking to a teacher after class. But you can communicate synchronously in an online environment too, through the use of tools like online chat; Internet voice or video calling systems like Skype or Google Hangouts; or through the use of web-based video conferencing software like WebEx, Zoom, or Collaborate.



Discussion Boards

The discussion board (also known as a discussion forum, or message board) is one of the most popular features in an online course, and it's one place where your asynchronous classroom discussions can occur. Your instructor may post the first message (or prompt) and ask students to reply to their initial post, or they may choose to allow students to post a topic (or thread) and engage the class in the online conversation that way. Both methods are equally effective, and discussions in your online courses are likely to vary, just like your discussions in a traditional class can differ depending on your instructor and their teaching style

Discussion board video resources

[Discussion board etiquette](#)

[Participating in discussion boards](#)

Blogs

Think of a blog as a website journal or diary. Blogs are usually run by an individual or a small group. Entries are made periodically and typically displayed in reverse chronological order (so, the most recent post will appear first). Most blogs are set up to allow readers to post comments below each entry, and it is often just as informative to read the comments and criticisms of fellow readers as it is to read the initial blog post. Some instructors may require you to post or review blogs during your online course, and they can be a useful source of information. Keep in mind, though, that blogs are typically personal communication platforms, so be sure to double-check facts or information you might find on a blog with a verified source before using it in your research.

Now that we've talked a little bit about different kinds of asynchronous communication, let's talk about some forms of synchronous communication.

Chat

A course may have a text-based chat feature that will allow you to exchange messages with others who are online at the same time as you. Sometimes instructors will use the chat feature as a way to hold office hours or a study session. Because chat happens in real-time, there is a sense of immediate gratification—you don't have to wait several hours (or more) for a response like you might have to with email.

Video calls

Skype is a free software application that will enable you to make voice and video phone calls over the internet. Once you download, register, and install the software for Skype, you'll probably want to plug in a headset or a microphone and speakers so that you can hear others and they can hear you more clearly. If you are using video, you'll need a webcam, but many newer computers and laptops now include this as part of their standard equipment.

Video conferencing

Video Conferencing software applications like Zoom, Collaborate, or WebEx are designed to support larger groups than Skype. They can provide a virtual experience that closely replicates an on-campus classroom. Many videoconferencing applications include useful features like:

- > the ability to share desktops,
- > the ability to share files
- > online chat windows
- > break-out rooms for small group work

So your computer can truly become a window into a live classroom where students and instructors can interact and collaborate at the same time.



Netiquette

Finally, "netiquette", which is the correct or acceptable way to communicate online—it's the code of online etiquette you should abide by, especially when in an academic or professional setting. This goes for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Netiquette includes respectful behaviour, appropriate language, and an acknowledgement of other people's privacy interests. Remember, your classroom discussions should be much more formal than the type of discussions you may have with your friends on Facebook or Twitter.

Netiquette video resources

[Email in Real Life](#)

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ONLINE COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET

1. **Participate.** Understand the participation expectations of your instructor. For example, you may be required to participate in a minimum of one chat, create one original discussion forum posting, and respond to at least two posts created by your classmates. Be sure to complete at least the minimum requirements for participation in the course.
2. **Be insightful.** Understand the expectations of your instructor for the quality of communication in the course. If there is a communication rubric or marking guide, be sure to read it before you begin. In general, responses such as "I agree" in either a synchronous or asynchronous environment are unproductive. Consider supporting your ideas and opinions concerning readings, research or course materials. Additionally, you may ask probing questions or make connections to the real world in your response.
3. **Be timely.** This is especially important when communicating asynchronously because it is not useful to join a discussion forum that is already finished. Be aware of deadlines for asynchronous communications and scheduled synchronous events. This will ensure that you are actively participating and gaining as much as possible from the experience.
4. **Communicate clearly.** Avoid acronyms, slang, and abbreviations in your communication. This is your classroom, so your language choices need to be clear, appropriate and presented in full sentences. When composing an asynchronous message, it is advisable to proofread and edit your work before sending. Always follow netiquette, the code for acceptable conduct in your online communication.
5. **Remember the human – ask questions.** Your instructor and classmates are not simply names on a class list; they are people and are part of this experience. If there is an icebreaker activity that involves introducing yourself, jump right in! Get to know the people you are working within the course and be prepared to share your experiences, resources and questions with them as you work through the course materials. Making human connections in an online course will help you to feel less isolated and will provide you with additional support for your learning.

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COURSE WORK TIP SHEET

Course work in an online classroom is not easier than course work in a traditional classroom; in fact, it may take you longer. Extra time is needed when completing online course work because you are working more independently. You may be required to search for answers to your questions, wait for communication from your instructor and peers, and make assumptions about written instructions. This is a time-consuming process, and if you make false assumptions or cannot find an answer to your question, you may waste study time. To make sure that you are completing your course work, follow these simple tips:

1. **Read** through the course materials to become familiar with the course requirements. Look for details such as assignment deadlines, quizzes and exams, readings, technology requirements and grading policies. Also, use the course syllabus or outline to give you a broad picture of the course's key concepts.
2. **Set deadlines** for yourself either using the calendar tool in your learning management system, a cloud-based tool such as Google Calendar, or by noting it in a day planner or wall calendar. A good tip is to set your deadlines at least a day earlier than the actual due date just in case you run into some challenges.
3. **Track your progress** using your course checklist. The course checklist tool will list all of the assignments for the course with their due dates. Depending on your learning management system, you might be able to track your progress through the course by clicking off each assignment as it is completed. If your course does not have a checklist, make your own.
4. **Preview assignments** before you complete your weekly readings. This will focus your reading and note-taking. As you read, look for the information that will help you complete the assignment(s).
5. **Compose assignments and postings** as Word documents so that you have a back-up copy of your work saved to your computer.
6. **Understand** in advance where and how assignments should be submitted. If you are not certain how to do this, ask for help early if you need it.
7. **Review feedback** provided by your instructor and apply any suggestions for improvement to your next assignment.
8. **Seek help** through your instructor's office hours or your institution's student support services if you are encountering difficulties in your studies.

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ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR GROUP WORK

In some courses, your instructor may assign you to complete an assignment with other students as a group project. You may already have done group projects in the face to face courses you have participated in. Working online presents some particular challenges since you will be communicating with the other members of your team mostly in text.

You will need to plan and organize the tasks that have been assigned to you and meet the deadlines for doing your part of the project, but there are some other things you need to consider.

Be accountable: if you have agreed to take on a task and complete it by a specific date, respect that the other members of your team are counting on you.

Offer and request feedback: It is expected that you will ask questions to clarify what you will be doing and help other members of your team. Be respectful of the viewpoints of others and ask questions when you are uncertain.

Explain your ideas: you may find that you need to be a little more persuasive when collaborating in writing than face to face. Again, be respectful of the opinions of the other members of your team, and make an effort to explain your point of view.

It will take longer: group projects usually take more time to complete than assignments you work on alone. There is more planning and negotiating required. So, plan to spend some time communicating with your team members in addition to completing your part of the assignment.

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