



How Does This Class Work?

The concept of “distance learning” seems to throw many for a loop, for good reason, perhaps, because there are so many different ways that online courses are structured.

MERG courses follow a tried and true method of distance learning called *Computer Mediated Distance Learning* (cmdl for short). Think of a CMDL course like you would a professional continuing education seminar which meets weekly. What would you expect if this was live: Lecture? Discussion? Reading? Homework? Quizzes? Exams? Camaraderie? Yes!

CMDL has almost the same structure. The difference is MERG courses are not held in “real time.” Instead, the classroom interaction takes place over an easy-to-use computer network over a period of time, usually eight or nine weeks.

Here is a snapshot of what to expect:

1. Be sure to complete the new-user orientation exercises noted in your confirmation letter. The exercises are found in the *MERG Courses* -> *FC Web Orientation* classroom. If you are an experienced Internet user, you can knock these off in 15 minutes or so. If you're a beginner, allow an hour or two. It is important that you know how to send messages inside the network and to your classroom discussion areas. Both skills are covered in this short introduction, along with opportunities to practice. Feel free to have a friend help you with this part.
2. Classrooms are “locked” until the first day of class. (Patience is a virtue!)
3. On the first day of class, you can log in anytime you wish. CMDL classes do not meet live (in real time). There is no set time when you must be logged in. However, you must keep up with your course on a weekly basis.
4. Allow about three hours weekly to keep up. This includes reading, homework, online discussion, and quizzes/exams. Some students work faster; others take longer.
5. Some courses have short e-lectures, which are easy-to-read, easy-to-print introductions to the units. Not all faculty use e-lectures, so don't worry if you don't see any posted.
6. All faculty will have a schedule posted for you, including reading assignments, due dates for discussion participation, homework, and testing.
7. Reading is either out of a textbook, online, or both.
8. Discussion is always online, but remember, this is not a live discussion. Think of it more like a bulletin board.
9. Homework usually is submitted online.

10. Testing is either online or completed offline and faxed to your instructor.

11. Assignments are official only when posted inside our network. You can send messages from your Internet address until the cows come home, but they are not considered received unless completed on our network. It isn't that hard. You CAN do it! Why? Our network has lots of internal controls. (Lost something? A copy will be in your mailbox. The instructor says it wasn't received? No problem, you can check a message history and see if/when it was read. Make a mistake and wish you hadn't sent something? No problem, you can unsend your message. Cool!)

How Will I Know How I'm Doing?

Beginning at week two, by Wednesday of each week your instructor will post a "supervisor" report in your classroom listing everyone in the class using your MERG login ID. The report shows exactly how you did during the previous week. Be sure to review this report! If you are missing something, it is YOUR responsibility to get the work in to the instructor. Mistakes can happen, so be sure to speak up if you think you completed something that didn't show up!

Many supervisors have requested that they receive a copy of this report each week. It is your responsibility to give your login code to your supervisor. The report is posted on our web site for your supervisor to download anytime at <http://www.mergonline.com>.

How Do I Earn My Certificate?

This one is easy. Do the work and pass the quizzes and final exam! MERG courses are entry level courses. The material is neither rocket science nor brain surgery, but successful completion requires that you complete the reading, homework, discussion, and exam on time and that you do so thoughtfully and completely.

MERG courses are instructor led and highly interactive. Your success in the course is dependent on your active and timely discussion participation and completion of all homework. While you may log in anytime during the week to do your work, your instructor will post due dates and deadlines.

If you fall two weeks behind, for whatever reason, you may drop the class or restart. The restart tuition is 50% of the original cost of your course. Check with John Shaheen for details if you need to restart.

Certificates are mailed to your agency approximately two weeks after the course end date.

Are You Having Fun Yet?

You bet! Study hard, keep up each week, get to know your classmates, and you'll enjoy the course. Thanks for joining us!

John Shaheen, Course Facilitator

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