



CAMBRIDGE MARKETING COLLEGE GUIDE TO CHOOSING A DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE

By

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DISTANCE

LEARNING

COURSE

DIRECTOR

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Distance learning is an increasingly popular way to study, and can be ideal when you are studying whilst holding a job and juggling family commitments. However, the types of courses on offer, and the support available, can vary widely. It is important to fully understand what is provided by your college.

This guide is designed to help you to understand the different methods of Distance Learning, to see which is right for you.

About the author

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Kiran has worked predominately in Financial Services with expertise in customer relationship marketing and customer communications. As a consultant, she has worked as project manager for companies including Liverpool Victoria, Barclays, London Life and Cazenove.

She has taught a wide variety of courses at the College in Cambridge since 1999 and is the Distance Learning Course Director, and a CIM examiner.



Kiran is undertaking a part-time Doctorate with Kings College, London, researching distance education theories, including specific issues facing overseas learners and the design and delivery of distance learning courses.

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Why do Distance Learning?

Distance Learning requires you to learn on your own. This suits some learners more than others.

Distance Learning will suit you if you:

- ✓ like the idea of anytime, anyplace, anywhere learning
- ✓ prefer to learn at your own pace, not feeling held back or pushed on before you are ready by other learners
- ✓ prefer to study at times that suit you
- ✓ do not have time to attend classes
- ✓ prefer not be chased for deadlines

Distance Learning may not suit you if:

- ✗ you are too busy to keep on top of your studies – a class can give you imposed deadlines
- ✗ you are not self motivated
- ✗ you are not disciplined about your work
- ✗ learning by yourself makes you feel isolated. Some learners describe this as “learning in a vacuum”

Checklist:

- 1 Do you prefer learning with others? If yes, Distance Learning may not be for you.
- 2 Can you be self disciplined?
- 3 Can you motivate yourself to study and meet deadlines?

What types of Distance Learning courses are there?

One of the problems with the term 'Distance Learning' is that it is used to describe different courses.

Open Learning

This is a self-studying option. It usually means that you are sent material to read, sometimes with podcasts or DVDs to watch. You will have tutor support, possibly by email or telephone. There may be conference tutorial calls. There will not be classes to attend.

Blended or Supported Open Learning

This combines self-study with some classroom teaching. There will be tutor support for self-study portions. Check how much classroom teaching you will receive. Are classes flexible or do you have to attend certain classes on pre-defined dates?

Online

Teaching is via the web, possibly using webinars, web-conferences, and with material available online.

Online (sometimes called Computer Mediated Learning) can provide interesting learning experiences with video, text, speech and mobile learning materials. However, some online systems are used as a single place for you to find the reading materials – little more than a virtual filing cabinet or library. This is fine, if the provider makes it clear this is what you are buying.

Mobile

This varies. It can be accessing materials on your mobile device. It can be that the college has made special material available for use when you are mobile such as iphone applications.

Checklist:

- 1 What materials are provided?
- 2 What tutorial support is offered?
- 3 Are there classes I have to attend? Are these flexible?
- 4 Are there on-line classes I have to attend? Are these flexible?
- 5 What online/mobile material is offered? How is this different from non-online/mobile material?

What support do you get?

The short answer is – it varies!

Usually you will receive literature to read and have access to a tutor via email or telephone for advice but most of the learning you will do by yourself.

Some providers include an introductory class to help you get orientated on the course. This can be helpful but may be inconvenient to attend.

Some colleges also provide additional materials online to help your learning, such as podcasts, access to tutor notes for taught courses, webinars and discussion forums.

Check also who the tutors are. Will you have the same tutor throughout your course, which gives you continuity, or will you have a different tutor for each module, which gives you access to specialist tutors?

Checklist:

Before signing with a College ask:

- 1 Are there classes I *have* to attend?
- 2 Are there classes I *can choose* to attend if I need additional help?
- 3 What literature will I receive? Who produced it?
Will I receive textbooks?
- 4 Is there a limit on my tutor access?
- 5 How can I contact my tutor?
- 6 Will I have one tutor throughout or one tutor per module?
- 7 Will my tutor comment on my work?
- 8 What other support is offered – online, podcasts, newsletters, etc
- 9 Can I contact other learners?
- 10 How long is tutorial support offered from the college?
Can I extend my support?

What do you need to study by Distance Learning successfully?

Support

From your family to allow you time to study.

From work to give you access to information and to encourage you to stick to studying.

Time

The amount of time that you need to set aside each week will vary depending on the qualification. As a rough guide, Cambridge Marketing College advises between 6 and 8 hours a week.

Be realistic about the amount of time you are able to find. If you can only spend 3-4 hours a week, it may take you twice as long to complete the qualification.

Somewhere to study

Try and establish somewhere quiet. Keeping to the same place can help support a routine and focus.

Self motivation

Be very clear to yourself and others why you are doing the course. Set yourself realistic objectives. Prepare a personal study plan. Monitor and reward your progress.

Checklist:

- 1 How much support do you have?
- 2 How will you find the time to study? What will you stop doing to make the time?
- 3 Where will you study?
- 4 Why do you want to do this course?

Appendix 1: Checklist before signing with a college

For Cambridge Marketing College, the answers are:

Are there classes I have to attend, which may not suit me?	There are no compulsory classes for Distance Learning learners.
Are there classes I can choose to attend, if I need additional help?	There are revision classes and exam technique classes which you can attend free of charge. For an additional fee, you can also attend Weekend or Saturday Seminar classes. We have 11 Study Centres offering taught sessions across the UK.
What literature will I receive?	Distance Learners receive a welcome pack, study guides and textbooks plus access to our online learning zone.
Who wrote it?	Cambridge Marketing Press publishes its own study guides.
Will I receive textbooks?	Textbooks are supplied as part of your fees, except for our World Service learners. However, we can supply (at extra cost) or help overseas learners source their textbooks.
Is there a limit on my tutor access?	No.
How can I contact my tutor?	Contact by email at any time. Telephone calls to tutors should be agreed at a mutually convenient time.
Will I have the same tutor throughout the course (gives you continuity) or different ones for different modules (gives you specialist tutors)	There are different tutors for each module. The Distance Learning Course Director provides continuity and is available to discuss any studying issues.
Will my tutor comment on my work?	Yes. For modules assessed by exam there are practice exam questions for you to submit to your tutor to be marked. For modules assessed by assignment your tutor will provide feedback on an outline and full draft of your assignment.

What other support is offered?	Through the college website, learners can access listen again lectures, podcasts, webcasts and sign up to webinars. All Distance Learners receive a study plan to guide their reading for each module. In addition, the college offers Twitter and a Blog which is written by our tutors. A college newsletter “Delegate Update” is emailed monthly with key dates and other information.
Can I contact other learners?	The college operates a Forum on the website and also maintains a Facebook group for learners.
How long is support provided from the College?	You can select 12 months or 24 months support initially but we also offer the flexibility to extend your support if necessary.

The College offers Open Learning, Blended Learning and is trialling mobile learning.

All Distance Learners receive a study plan to guide their studying for each module.