

Thinking about Online Course Rigor

How much time should I expect students to spend working on class materials?

At Kent State, courses are organized on units of credit hours (ch).

- **1ch = 15** hours of class time.

In **face-to-face courses**, for every credit hour, it is expected that a student will spend an additional 2-3 hours on work outside of the classroom.

- **1ch = 30** hours of work outside of class (minimum)

Most Kent State courses are 3 credit hours. So, for a 3-credit, face-to-face class, that means

- **45** hours of class time
- **90** hours of work outside class (minimum)

A 3-credit hour course, whether online or face-to-face should require a total of approximately 135 hours of work by each student (45 in class and 90 outside of class, for face-to-face classes).

Total Time spent on a 3-credit hour course each semester = 135 hours

If we look at that total time by week:

A **15-week, 3-credit hour, face-to-face** class requires students to be in class approximately 3 hours each week and spend 6 hours outside of class working on assignments. So, students should schedule approximately *nine hours total per week* for a 15-week course, whether it's online or face-to-face.

A **7-week, 3-credit hour, face-to-face** class requires students to be in class approximately 7 hours and spend 13 hours outside of class working on assignments. Students, then, should schedule approximately *20 hours total per week* for a 7-week course, whether online or face-to-face.

Course Duration (3 ch course)	~ Student total time spent on coursework each week	~ Student total time spent on coursework per semester
15-week course	9 hours	135 hours
7-week course	20 hours	135 hours

Instructors are encouraged to advise students that taking two, 7-week courses at the same time is the equivalent of working a full-time job. Students who are working are highly encouraged to take only one 7-week course at a time.

So, what does this mean for online courses, where there is no “in class” and “outside of class” time?

It’s easiest to approach online course rigor by thinking about the ***total amount of time students will spend completing the course***. Most faculty compute *how much time students should spend in the course each week*, based on course duration and number of credit hours.

For example, in an online, 3-credit hour, 15-week course, students should spend approximately ***nine hours each week*** on online course activities, including assignments and content. Although online classes do not have physical classrooms, many online activities can be equated to the classroom experience.

The first step in calculating how much time students will be spending each week in your online course is to first list all activities and materials that have “set times”, such as a narrated presentation or video that has a set length, or an online quiz or exam that is open for a specified time.

Next, look at any written material you have in your course, such as scholarly articles, textbook chapters, pdfs, etc. Since an adult reads about 250 words per minute on average, that should give you a starting point to estimate how long it will take students to read course material. Keep in mind, however, that the number of words per minute will likely decrease as the material grows more complex. Also, it’s good to remember that you’re estimating how long it will take *students* to read the material. Unlike you, this material will be new for students, they may not be able to read material as quickly, and students will be both reading to understand and also working to apply this information in assignments. The point is to consider the students in *your* class; graduate students, for example, will be able to read and process more information than undergraduate students.

Speaking of assignments, this is the next thing to estimate, and perhaps the most difficult. In the first iteration of your online course, you will have to give this your best estimate. However, it is highly recommended to include anonymous surveys at the end of each week or module, asking your students how long it took them to complete all the work, how long each assignment took, etc. You can then use this highly valuable information to either cull or add materials to future revisions of the course.

Remember that many online classes are actually more rigorous than their face-to-face counterparts, largely due to the ease of adding content to the Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard, resulting in courses being “stuffed” with content. When faced with too much content for the time allotted, most students will select what to read and what to leave. It’s often better to wisely choose *essential* materials and include other content as optional, while focusing learner time on completing assignments, where they can *apply* what they’re learning.