

My name is Fernando Rosell-Aguilar and I am a Senior Lecturer. I work in distance learning, designing and organising courses for distance learning.

The main differences between face-to-face and distance learning are about the immediacy and how much control you have over your learning. So, if you go to a face-to-face institution you normally attend your lessons at given times. You get the opportunity to ask questions straight away if you have any doubts. So, you either have to take notes while you're listening, pay really close attention, or hope that the instructor will provide notes or materials afterwards or beforehand so you can go through those again if you need to.

In distance learning, the learning comes from a number of sources - it could be websites, books, all sorts - and you digest that information at your own pace. That means that you can go over things as many times as you want. You can do that learning also at a time that is convenient for you.

A lot of people who take on distance learning are usually people who have a main occupation, which could be just caring for children, or it could be that they're in work, so they need that flexibility to access their studies whenever it's convenient for them.

Distance learning takes place normally in people's homes, at a time that they choose, when it's convenient for them. So, they can go over the materials however they are presented - books, online, a number of ways - and they can read things as many times as they like, so they can choose their own pace that works for them, and also they can choose the most convenient time for them.

When you design materials for distance learning, you have to take into account that the student will be working on their own. So, whereas in a face-to-face context you may explain something and then be open to questions or clarifications that students need, when you are designing for distance learning, you have to take that into account as you're writing the materials. So, you try to be as clear as possible: you try to look at things from many angles, and you provide guidance and, kind of, organize things in a way that means that you put the easier stuff at the beginning and then, kind of, expand on that.

And you provide support, in the form of answers that not only just say whether something is right or wrong, but also explain why that is right or wrong; so the student has access to the explanations without needing to be in contact - direct contact - with a tutor.

There are many providers of distance education. Some are more credible than others. So, a qualification accessed through distance learning, as long as it's

from a reliable and well-known provider, will be as valuable to the learner as a face-to-face qualification.

Employers that know the kind of environments that distance learning can provide actually can be more impressed by those that have gone through a distance learning qualification, because they are normally people who have made the commitment, have found time in their busy lives to do this. It's proof that the learners are committed, and can prioritize learning among other commitments that they may have in their lives: that they have the ability to organise their lives, you know, the kind of employability qualities that you want from an employee.