



StraighterLine Student Handbook

(updated 05/25/2011)

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Introduction

Welcome to StraighterLine!

You have made a smart decision. Over many years, the process of earning a degree has become increasingly expensive. While a few institutions have sought to improve the options available to students, StraighterLine represents the first service of its kind to solve the challenges of cost and flexibility without limiting students to a ground-based location. The true value of our solutions will become increasingly apparent as you begin to recognize the extraordinary level of support from both our online educators and our dedicated team of course advisors. As a StraighterLine student, you are our valued partner; we promise to be there when you need us, and we will listen to your recommendations and improve our program based on your advice.

Real courses for real credit require real work.

Make no mistake; the course(s) you take through StraighterLine represent a rigorous, but exciting, learning experience. You will be challenged to perform to the best of your ability, so you can begin your degree program with the skills and abilities needed to perform at advanced levels.

Tips for success in a StraighterLine course:

Outline your goals and a timeline for completing the course.

By taking a course through StraighterLine, you have the freedom to complete courses on your own timeline. But be sure this freedom doesn't cause you to forget about the coursework. Before you start your StraighterLine course, download a copy of the suggested course timeline, enter your start date in the black cell, and use this document to help keep yourself on schedule.

Work with the Course Advisor to keep yourself on track.

The course advisor is the difference between a StraighterLine online course and all the imitators. When you sign up for a StraighterLine course, you are assigned a course advisor who is responsible for tracking your progress and ensuring you are sticking to your goals. Work with the course advisor, and you will find success in reaching your goals.

Use the SMARTHINKING hours included with the course.

When you press the SMARTHINKING button, you are directly connected to a real, live subject-matter expert. All SMARTHINKING online educators are experts in their fields, have undergone rigorous testing, and are E-structor® certified. Since 1999, SMARTHINKING online educators have conducted over 1 million archived tutoring sessions, and they are able to answer your questions in real-time. Research proves that students who use SMARTHINKING earn better grades and are more likely to complete courses.

Have a place to be free of all distractions.

Everybody has distractions, but constant disturbances can threaten your progress. Find a quiet place that allows you to focus on your coursework. If you are too distracted at home, try using Internet access at the library or work from a nearby cyber café or coffee shop.

The Basics

How Does a StraighterLine Course Work?

Unlike many online courses, StraighterLine courses are self-directed, meaning that you are responsible only to yourself. You will progress as quickly or as slowly as you see fit, but be advised: you must complete StraighterLine courses within six (6) months of your purchase. If you think you need more time—just speak to your course advisor about purchasing an extension.

Lessons and Assessments

Each StraighterLine course follows a syllabus. On “The Course” page, you will see a number of topics that constitute your StraighterLine course. Though the components of the topics vary, each topic may include a reading assignment, a lesson presentation, review activities, homework assignments, and other methods to help you learn the essential concepts. The topics represent the fundamental concepts that you will need to master in order to successfully complete the course.

Assessments are your key to successfully completing the course. Each assessment can only be taken one time and all assessments have a time limit. Additionally, you may be asked to complete a brief Identity Verification process which requires you to place a toll free phone call, enter your Student ID Number, enter the Exam Serial Number and then recite and record a brief message. Once you've completed the process the system will automatically provide you the appropriate Exam password.

Once you finish and submit the assessment, the grade you receive on the assessment cannot be changed. You will receive a final score for the course after all of the assessments have been completed. If you choose to take the course for credit at a partner college, this final score will be forwarded to the partner college, who will award credit based on their academic criteria.

Are there due dates?

All courses must be completed within the six (6) month time limit. StraighterLine does not set due dates for assignments or assessments. Once you are ready to submit an assignment or complete an assessment you may do so—take as much time as you need, or move as quickly as you would wish.

Do I have to complete all of the test and assignments?

Yes, you must complete all graded assignments and tests in order to request and be provided a transcript. While you need only 70% to pass a course, we require that students attempt every graded test and assignment. Failure to do so will prevent StraighterLine from releasing your transcript.

Can I retake a course?

Students may retake a for-credit course as many times as they choose. Final grades for retakes will be averaged with the student's previous scores in the course. \$399 students will need to repurchase the course. \$99/month students will need to pay the \$39 start fee

once more and simply continue with their monthly plan. For students who are retaking a course that they did not originally complete the following rule is applied:

- If a student has not attempted $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total possible points their re-take grade will not be averaged.
- If a student has attempted more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total possible points their subsequent attempt will be averaged with a 59% or their original course grade (whichever is higher)

Developmental courses may be taken as many times as needed without averaging final scores. Students retaking a course already with a passing grade will, upon completion, receive the average of their scores or their original score (whichever is higher).

Failure Policy

Any failed course will equal a 59 (out of 100). For re-take purposes, this means that a student must get an 81 or better to pass the course.

Where to go for help

You will quickly discover that your options for support are greater than you have experienced at any other school. Academic, Admissions, and Technical Support teams are available up to 24 hours per day/ 7 days per week. For hours and contact information, visit the Quick Reference Guide: Student Support Services at the end of this handbook.

What is SMARTHINKING?

SMARTHINKING is the premier tutoring service serving higher education students. For students at StraighterLine, SMARTHINKING provides online, on-demand academic support for all academic disciplines. Since StraighterLine students have special accounts with SMARTHINKING's service, you have access to tutors whenever you need support for specific topics and assignments. Through SMARTHINKING, you can connect to one of 700 different online educators at your convenience instead of trying to schedule time with a single professor.

SMARTHINKING Hours

Each StraighterLine course purchased for \$399 comes with up to 10 hours of instruction available for the duration of the course. The **StraighterLine for \$99 Plan** comes with 10 hours total to be used for any courses the student is taking. Additional hours may be purchased from SMARTHINKING.

To purchase additional SMARTHINKING hours, follow these steps:

1. Start at "My Home Page."
2. Click "My Account."
3. Click "Purchase more time from SMARTHINKING."
4. Select the package you wish to purchase.
5. Input your credit card and billing information.
6. Click "Purchase."

The time you use and the hours that remain in your account are tracked automatically. To see the current status of your account, click on "My Account" tab on your homepage. We

will track how many hours you have used and how many remain--and you'll be able to see this information as well. Time is deducted from the student's SMARTHINKING account according to the following:

Service Used	Charge to Student Account
Real-time Interaction with tutor	Metered to the minute plus 5 minutes for processing and archiving
Submission to Online Writing Lab	35 minutes
Pre-scheduled Sessions with tutor	30 minute increments (plus 5 minutes for processing and archiving starting)
Submission of Asynchronous Questions	20 minutes

Tutoring should not be used while completing graded exams. Tutoring is designed to help you with studying, practice exercises, review activities, and other non-graded components of the course.

Proctoring with ProctorU

As an optional service StraighterLine has partnered with ProctorU, the premier online exam proctoring service to provide an added level of authentication for those students who elect to purchase it. ProctorU is accessible through all courses; students using the optional service must register with the service and schedule their own time.

Please note:

1. If using the service for a final examination you still must complete the StraighterLine phone verification process to retrieve your Exam password. You should do this prior to your scheduled proctoring session, and
2. For your test's/exam's time limit you should adhere to the listed StraighterLine time limit or the ProctorU limit of 2 hours (which ever is shorter).

Tuition, Fees and Refund Policies

Tuition and Financial Aid

Tuition, Textbooks, and Material Costs

All StraighterLine courses require payment in advance. With some indicated exceptions, students may purchase individual courses for \$399 each or enroll in the StraighterLine for \$99 monthly program and have access to any StraighterLine course. While additional materials may be required to complete the course, **there are no hidden "student activity," "lab," or other material fees that drive up the cost of your education.** All required or suggested materials are listed on your course's syllabus.

StraighterLine recommends the purchase of the text associated with each course. Without the text you may miss out on substantial practice, review and reading materials. Although textbooks prices vary by course, used copies and eBooks can substantially reduce the cost of course materials and therefore help to keep student costs as low as possible. If so desired, new print editions and eBook copies of many of the recommended texts may be

ordered as an additional purchase from the [StraighterLine bookstore](#).

Please note that you must register at the <http://www.StraighterlineBooks.com> site in order to purchase course text and/or ebooks.

Partner College Fees

Certain partner colleges require the payment of an application fee prior to awarding credit for a StraighterLine course. Please check with your course advisor to confirm whether your selected partner college will require an application fee. StraighterLine does not determine or exercise authority over partner college admissions fees.

Financial Aid

StraighterLine does not directly participate in federally funded financial aid programs; therefore, StraighterLine tuition may not be paid for with funds dispersed through financial aid programs. Partner colleges do offer financial assistance to students once officially enrolled.

Employee Tuition Reimbursement

StraighterLine is happy to partner with companies and employees interested in establishing tuition reimbursement relationships. Please contact David Parento, at dparento@straighterline.com or 202-507-7020, ext. 602 regarding reimbursement programs.

Refund Policies

Tuition Refunds

For single course purchases at \$399: The cost is fully refundable but dependent on the following terms:

1. The first course assessment has not been attempted.
2. Refund is requested within two weeks of the initial purchase.

For courses purchased through the \$99 subscription service: A StraighterLine course purchased for \$99 is automatically billed once per month; rebilling occurs every 28 days. You may cancel at any time before your next rebilling by sending an email to your course advisor requesting cancellation. Completed assessments or assignments will not be saved if billing is canceled prior to the full completion of course.

To terminate your monthly subscription and cancel your recurring billing, you need to log on to your StraighterLine account (login at <http://www.straighterline.com/site/login.cfm>) and under your "Manage Subscriptions" tab click the Cancel button next to your Status. If you have any problems you must email your Course Advisor before your next re-billing.

No refunds will be granted for subscription based services (this includes the course initiation fee). However you may cancel your subscription any time prior to the rebilling date. As a student it is your responsibility to cancel your course subscription. Completing a course, requesting a transcript nor completing the end of course evaluation will prompt a cancellation of subscription services.

Refunds are not available based upon grades earned or other student performance concerns, including issues related to academic integrity or the Student Code of Conduct.

Textbook Refunds

We do not provide textbooks or facilitate textbook sales to our students. All texts should be procured through our 3rd party affiliates, where applicable. For books and ebooks purchased through the <http://www.straighterlinebooks.com> site please review the refund policy there.

Refund of Partner College Fees

Requests and processes must be handled directly with the college itself.

Award of Credit and Transferability

Awards of Credit

Credits for completed StraighterLine courses are awarded only from StraighterLine's regionally accredited partner colleges. A student wanting to take a course for credit at a partner college will work with a course advisor to determine which partner college is best for his/her individual needs and academic goals. Upon successful completion of coursework, a course advisor will work with the student to officially gain admission to the partner college, submit a StraighterLine transcript, and ensure the credits are awarded as applicable.

Grades

StraighterLine scores assessments based upon a percentage of 100%. Your StraighterLine transcript will reflect the percentage score and corresponding grade as set forth below:

Score	Grade
93-100	A ¹
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C- ²
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
Below 60	F

Certain partner colleges, including Fort Hays State University and Jefferson Community and Technical College, will post the StraighterLine grade on your transcript when you enroll there. Others will reflect a P/F only. You should review our [partner college page](#) for specific policies related to those institutions. If you plan to request credit from another institution via ACE, you should check with that institution regarding grade posting policies.

Transferability of Credit

¹StraighterLine does not award A+ grades.

²70% or higher average required to be recommended for credit by ACE and most partner colleges

StraighterLine does not award academic credit itself. All credits awarded are transferable according to the awarding partner college's articulation agreements with other institutions. Students wishing to confirm transferability of course credit should contact the institution that will receive the transferred credit; they should confirm that the chosen institution will accept credit from the StraighterLine partner college for the course(s) they intend to complete. StraighterLine, along with colleges and universities, cannot guarantee the transferability of credit between regionally accredited institutions.

American Council on Education (ACE)

The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT) has reviewed all of Straighterline's courses. Thousands of colleges award credit for ACE approved courses. To be sure that your future or current institution will award credit for our courses check the website or call the college in which you wish to enroll and ask if they accept ACE recommended coursework. To use the ACE process:

1. Be sure the college in which you want to enroll will accept ACE recommended courses. If not, consider one of Straighterline's partner colleges.
2. Successfully complete a Straighterline course.
3. [Sign up for the ACE Transcript Service found here](#). There will be a \$40 fee to sign up which includes the submission of one transcript. (<https://www.acenet.edu/transcripts/>)
4. Have the transcript sent to the college in which you want to enroll.

For more information about our credits please visit www.StraighterLine.com and click the "Earn College Credit" link.

CLEP, AP, and other standardized tests for credit

Many individuals have successfully earned college credit by taking a standardized test, which is accepted for credit at many regionally accredited universities. These tests usually require additional fees and are usually administered at a testing center. Although StraighterLine does not offer these tests, courses taken through StraighterLine will prepare students seeking a test-for-credit option. As with transferability, StraighterLine cannot guarantee individual scores or credit acceptance. For more information about these tests, please visit:

- CLEP: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/clep/about.html>
- AP: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>

Academic Honesty and Student Code of Conduct

Academic Honesty

Honesty and integrity are as highly valued at StraighterLine as they are at any of StraighterLine's partner colleges. Every student enrolled in StraighterLine courses is subjected to random plagiarism checks through SafeAssign plagiarism software. SafeAssign compares student work to several sources, including ProQuest ABI/Inform databases, various institutional archives, the Internet, and the Global Reference Database. Plagiarism, cheating, or other types of academic fraud will constitute in immediate failure of the assignment in question. Deliberate or sustained plagiarism will result in automatic failure of the course.

Academic integrity violations include all forms of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to:

- Plagiarism - Use of another person's work or ideas without proper acknowledgment of the source.
- Fabrication - Falsification or invention of any information, citation, data, or document.
- Cheating - Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance or attempting to give or receive such assistance in connection with the performance of any academic work. SMARTHINKING tutoring should not be used while completing graded exams.
- Collusion - Helping or allowing another student to commit any act of academic dishonesty.

StraighterLine employs its own telephone-based Identity Verification system. This ensures a high level of accountability with our students, ensuring that student work is completed by, and only by, the individual signed up for the course.

As a student you will utilize this identity verification once per course.

Student Code of Conduct

StraighterLine has created a Student Code of Conduct, the tenets of which apply to all student conduct, whether academic or administrative. By taking a course at StraighterLine, all students agree to comply with these policies.

- Students agree that all answers to application or registration information questions are true.
- Students agree to keep passwords and other account access information for StraighterLine and its partners confidential.
- Students are responsible for completing and submitting all graded assessments personally and will not permit another student, a family member, or other person to act on his or her behalf in the completion of graded work.
- Students will avoid actions that create a hostile or threatening learning environment for others.
- Students will report known violations of this code of conduct as soon as possible to course advisors.

Investigation of Violations

StraighterLine staff members, and those of our assessment-focused partners will review student work and identify possible violations of the Academic Honesty Policy using SafeAssign plagiarism identification, StraighterLine's Student Identify Verification system and other tools as applicable.

In the event that the Academic Honesty policy or Student Code of Conduct have been breached, staff will take steps to notify the student via email. The student will receive a grade of zero for assignments deemed to be academically dishonest. The administration of StraighterLine and/or the StraighterLine affiliate involved will determine any additional charges or penalties at their discretion. If further infractions are discovered StraighterLine reserves the right to remove students from courses and cancel their account (no refunds will be made available).

Sanctions

The following sanctions may be levied in reaction to students breaking the policies laid out in this student handbook:

1. **Warning:** students will be warned of further or pending discipline as a result of their behavior or actions using the StraighterLine course management system. The assignment(s)/work in question will be immediately investigated.
2. **Grade reduction:** students may receive a zero for a specific assignment.
3. **Restriction:** Violations of the Student Code of Conduct may result in the immediate removal from StraighterLine's learning management system and restrictions to any of StraighterLine's affiliate websites.

Appeals

Any student charged with violation of the Code shall have the opportunity to appeal. The appeals procedure shall provide both substantive and procedural fairness for the student or student organization alleged to have violated the Code and shall provide for resolution of cases within a reasonable period of time.

To submit an appeal the student must send an email to the course advisor presenting the following:

- The student's account of events;
- Any additional materials or evidence that may substantially alter a decision.

The course manager, course advisor and one additional SL staff member will review the appeal and render a decision on the appeal within 30 days.

All documentation concerning a question of student conduct and the academic honesty policy will be added to a student's online file, including original submissions, alleged plagiarism sources, grades, partner reviews of information, appeals, email conversations, and any other supporting materials.

Glossary

- **Accreditation** – See Regional Accreditation
- **ACE** – The ACE National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training contains ACE credit recommendations for formal courses or examinations offered by various organizations, from businesses and unions to the government and military. The American Council on Education has reviewed all of StraighterLine's courses and has listed them on their site (www.acenet.edu/nationalguide) within the National Guide. ACE review and acceptance means that our courses are accepted at any college or university that has accepted the ACE CREDIT recommendations on their site.
- **Course Advisor** - The primary administrative point of contact serving StraighterLine students; Course advisors assist in the transfer of student records to partner colleges, and ensure that all student questions and concerns are addressed while enrolled in StraighterLine.
- **National Accreditation** – Many national accrediting bodies exist for various types of specialized educational institutions including trade schools, arts and humanities schools, healthcare schools, law schools, and more. National accreditations are not as widely recognized among universities as regional accreditations.
- **Online Educator** - Highly-qualified and well-trained academics serve as the primary points of contact for subject matter questions; log in to the SMARTHINKING service to for this support and purchase more time as needed. Students have the flexibility to determine exactly how much support to utilize to complete a course.
- **Partner College** – A regionally accredited college or university which has reviewed and confirmed the rigor of StraighterLine courses as equal to those it delivers itself. The partner college further agrees to award academic credit for successfully completed StraighterLine courses.
- **Regional Accreditation** – The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. Regional accreditation is the highest level of quality an educational institution can achieve. There are six regional accrediting bodies, each serving one of six defined geographic areas of the country and each being responsible for accrediting the schools, colleges, and universities in their regions.

Quick Reference Guide: Student Support

Academic Support

StraighterLine provides up to 10 hours of one-on-one academic support through SMARTHINKING. At this time, SMARTHINKING does not provide live voice services but manages live interactions through an innovative learning platform called the WhiteBoard. [Click here](#) to see scheduling availability with SMARTHINKING Tutors.

Technical/System Requirements

Internet: A high speed Internet connection (DSL or Cable Modem) is recommended.

PC: Intel Pentium (1.8 GHz) or AMD Athlon 64, 512MB Memory (2GB Recommended), Windows XP/Vista.

Mac: PowerMac G4 (1.25 GHz), 512MB memory (2GB recommended), OS 10.3 or later.

Software Requirements: Supported web browser (Internet Explorer 7 or later or Firefox 2 or later), Microsoft Word Reader, Microsoft PowerPoint Viewer, Microsoft Excel Viewer, Adobe Flash Player, Adobe Shockwave Player, QuickTime, Adobe Reader, VitalSource Bookshelf eBook Reader. Pop-ups and cookies must be enabled.

Tech Support

There are specific support paths for the various systems employed by StraighterLine.

SMARTHINKING Support

Telephone: 202-543-5034 opt. 1 or 1-888-430-7429 opt. 1

Email: support@smarthinking.com

Hours: M-F 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM EST

Course Purchase/Bookstore Support

Telephone: 1-800-274-9104

Email: customerservice@edmap.biz

Live Help: M-F 8:00 AM – 9:00 PM EST

Saturday 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM EST

Website: <http://www.straighterlinebooks.com>

Admissions/Administrative Support

Telephone: 1-877-Str8erline (877-787-8375)

Email: advisor@straighterline.com

Hours: M-F 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM EST