

Successful Online Learning Strategies

Set Yourself Up for Success from the Beginning

1. Establish a productive learning environment Working on assignments from a slouched position and streaming Netflix at the same time is not ideal if you aim to be productive. It is recommended that students choose an area in their homes that's free from common distractions.

Set up a dedicated learning environment for studying. By completing your work there repeatedly, you'll begin to establish a routine. Not all students are alike—some work best listening to music, while others need peace and quiet. Experiment to discover which type of setting boosts your productivity. Whether your workspace is your kitchen table or the corner booth in a local coffee shop, just make sure you have a strong internet connection to access your coursework.

2. Figure Out How You Learn Best

Once you've established where you'll learn, think about when and how you accomplish your best work. If you're a morning person, make time to study first thing. More of a night owl? Set aside an hour or two after dinner to cozy up to your computer. If the kids require your morning and evening attention, try to carve out a study session mid-day while they're at school. Brew your usual cup of coffee, put on your go-to playlist, and do whatever you need to get into the zone and down to business.

Not everyone learns the same way, so think about what types of information help you best grasp new concepts and employ relevant study strategies. If you're a visual learner, for example, print out transcripts of the video lectures to review. Learn best by listening? Make sure to build time into your schedule to play and replay all audio- and video-based course content.

3. Stay Connected

Just because you aren't physically in the same location, doesn't mean you can't get to know your fellow classmates. Build relationships with other students by introducing yourself and engaging in online discussion boards. Make an effort to ask and answer questions to enhance your understanding of the course material and build a bond with other students. Your peers can be a valuable resource when preparing for exams or asking for feedback on assignments. Make connections with the other students in your online classroom and you'll have a built-in study group at your fingertips.

Studying with a group of peers in the library or simply receiving on-the-spot clarifications from classmates is obviously not possible during this time. However, forming virtual interactions through platforms such as GroupMe or Microsoft Teams is a feasible action you could take in order to maintain that sense of collaboration and community.

Don't be afraid to reach out to your instructor to introduce yourself or ask questions, either. They are eager to engage one-on-one with their students, whether online or in person. And, if you do fall behind, speak up. Don't wait until an assignment is almost due to ask questions or report issues. Email your professor and be proactive in asking for help.

4. Set a schedule for completing and reviewing assignments Working on three courses at the same time can cause for an individual to experience a high level of stress, but this can be avoided if you allocate specific times to work on each class. For example, consider working on one class between the hours of 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. This schedule allows students to create a type of structure often seen with traditional, in-person classes.

Along with the time you set aside to complete assignments, it's also suggested to have a set time to look over the tasks for every one of your classes so that you can set up an agenda for each week. In doing this, you won't mistakenly forget to turn something in.

5. Make a schedule. Consider using the 'chunking' strategy to section out tasks

The term "chunking" refers to taking a large task or a large amount of information and dividing it into smaller units. Instead of staring at a computer screen for three hours at a time, "chunk" your time by following a specific pattern.

Work on one class, figure out a task and then reward yourself at the end. Get up, get some coffee, get a snack, go for a run or just get away for a half hour. Then come back and do the next chunk.

Without a professor regularly checking in, it's important to leverage your time management skills. Glance over the syllabus before your first day of class and make note of major assignments. Mark them on a calendar you check regularly so you know what workload is coming in the weeks ahead. Don't forget to factor in prior commitments that may interfere with your regular study schedule, such as weddings or vacations, so you can give yourself enough extra time to complete assignments.

Commit to making your online coursework part of your weekly routine. Break up your workload into chunks by dedicating certain hours each week to reading, watching lectures, writing assignments, studying, and participating in forums. Then, set reminders for yourself to complete the tasks. Treat these blocks of time as seriously as you would a face-to-face lesson by showing up, letting others know you are unavailable during those times, and consistently using your designated workspace. Set a timer and give yourself permission to move on to other tasks once the time is up.