

Online learning “survival guide”

For some students, the flexibility of online learning can be an enticing and convenient option. However, **the same things that make online learning work well for some students also create unique challenges for others.**

If that’s you, take heart; you can still be a successful online learner! Here are some key things to keep in mind. (For more information, check out the links in each section.)



First and foremost: pay attention to your health!

You’ve probably heard it before, but it’s so important: **eat as well as you can, plan regular exercise, and get sufficient sleep**—even when it feels like you have no time to spare.

Link: <https://health.williams.edu/healthy-eating/living-a-healthy-lifestyle/>

Create a healthy learning environment (with thanks to the Minnesota State University Career Center):

Get some peace and quiet. You will need a quiet place to work without distractions from things like television, family, or roommates.

Control the tech:

- **Avoid games.** Consider uninstalling computer games or keep games on a different computer.
- **Turn off your cell phone.** Let friends and family know the hours that you will be "at" school.
- **Beware surfing** the black hole of the Internet. It is easy to lose track of the time!

Get comfortable:

- **Consider ergonomics.** Adjust the height of your chair, keyboard, and screen for comfort.
- **Set up good lighting and comfortable seating.** Lighting in the room should be at least as bright as the computer screen to avoid eye strain.

And don’t forget healthy snacks!

Link: <https://www.olchs.org/how-to-create-a-great-study-environment-at-home/>

Organize your stuff.

Your classes may be online, but you’ll still want supplies, and you’ll want to be able to find them when you need them. Set up your space and organize your study stuff: writing utensils, paper or notebooks, textbooks, and chargers for any mobile devices.

Your computer files and tabs need organizing, too; download and save files into folders labelled for each class, and name files thoughtfully so you won't have to hunt (or give up!) when you want to find things.

Links: <https://www.villanovau.com/resources/student-learning/how-to-stay-organized-in-classes-online/>
<http://learnmore.uncq.edu/blog/6-tips-for-setting-up-your-learning-space>

Manage your time.

College is all about time management, but online learning puts much more responsibility on the learner to keep track of due dates and to make sense of how much time to spend on work, and when. **Here are some tips:**



Use a calendar (and don't just rely on the one that Canvas sets up for you). Some people are comfortable with online calendars; many find a physical, written calendar easier to work with. Experiment to find what works best for you. And then be sure to use it!

Links: <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/using-planners/>
<https://blog.collegevine.com/how-using-a-planner-or-calendar-can-make-your-life-easier/>

Create a study schedule. Create a specific plan for studying for each of your classes and put it into your calendar. Take into account

- how much time you'll need
- **when** you prefer (or are able) to work: early in the day? afternoon? later in the evening?
- whether you do better with a long chunk of time or several smaller sessions.

Focus your attention. Studying doesn't work well if you are "all over the place." Plan for a few hours a day devoted to really focusing on your assignments.

Links: <https://www.stetson.edu/administration/academic-success/media/STUDY%20SCHEDULE.pdf>

Make time management a central focus, not just a passing promise to yourself. Treat it like you would homework: set aside time each day to review your plan and revise it as needed.

Links: <https://www.purdueglobal.edu/blog/student-life/time-management-busy-college-students/>

Be persistent & maintain motivation.

The term "persistence" in this context could be summed up as a sort of "can-do" attitude. Online learning generally requires more commitment; in most cases, you won't have regular meetings with teachers and classmates to keep you focused and on track.

Links: <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/6-effective-ways-to-become-persistent.html>

Being a good self-motivator is helpful, but setting reasonable goals can help those who struggle with staying motivated. This is called **Goal-driven motivation**

Communicate!!

It's easy to feel like it's "just you and your computer" when you're studying online. **It's important to communicate with your instructors and your classmates.** Participate fully in discussions, join "synchronous" (live online) sessions even if they are optional, and be sure to contact your instructor if problems arise. For example, if you have trouble with glitchy videos, your teacher will know only if you tell them. You'll want to become comfortable communicating in writing, or take advantage of live online office hours to share concerns.



Links: <https://www.apu.edu/articles/5-tips-for-online-courses-how-to-connect-with-your-professors/>
<https://online.purdue.edu/blog/communication/online-courses-communication-tips>

Develop a support system.

Try to keep a good support system in friends and family members, and be willing to turn to them for encouragement and help when you're feeling stressed or need someone else's input. Sometimes just knowing someone's there is a big help. If you don't live with your support system, make a point of staying in touch through text, phone calls, or a "live" communication like FaceTime or Zoom.

Some students may be living with family or roommates who don't understand how hard college classes are or who don't want to be fair about sharing technology. If this is you, do your best to develop supportive relationships outside your home, and look into options for using technology on campus.

Links: <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/developing-your-support-system.html>

<https://www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/448/buildingasupportivenetwork>

