



# Online Education Success Guide



# INTRODUCTION

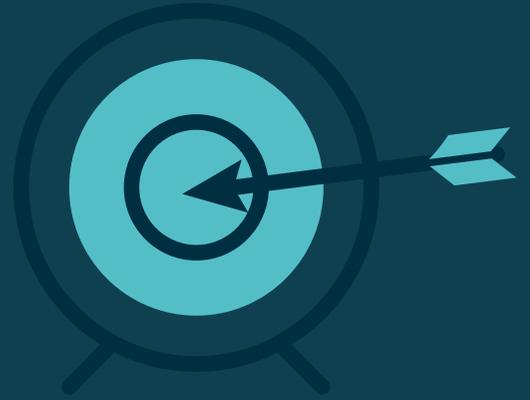
Due to the Coronavirus, many of our classes will be transitioning to virtual classrooms. Both students and teachers are challenged to maneuver through an online learning environment, which can require an adjustment period—particularly for first-timers. Though online classes have its advantages, it also has its own unique challenges. It requires more self-discipline and self-management than in-person classes. Online education can make it more difficult for students to fully engage in classes and to stay motivated. This guide is written to provide some tips and insight for students to stay focused and to have a smoother transition into online education. While some of the ideas may work for some, it may not work for everyone and that is okay. We are all experiencing unique challenges that can make some of these tips more difficult to implement.

Please note that this guide is simply a starting point. If you are finding it particularly challenging to adjust to online learning, reach out to advisors, professors, and other resources. We are all in this learning and adjusting process.



# 1. SET PERSONAL GOALS

Set a goal/benchmark for what success looks like to you for each day, and develop a plan to work toward that benchmark. For instance, if you have an exam a week from today--you can make it a goal to study for the exam for 1-2 hours each day. Make sure to make attainable goals. If you try to do too many things in one day, it may feel overwhelming and will burn you out quickly.



- Try **SMART** goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely
  - Specific: goals should be well-defined, clear, and unambiguous. Some questions to ask yourself are:
    - Who: who's involved in the goal?
    - What: what do I want to accomplish?
    - Where: where is the goal to be achieved?
    - When: when do I want to achieve this goal?
    - Why: why do I want to achieve this goal?
  - Measurable: criteria for measuring progress. To make a measurable goal, ask yourself:
    - How many/much?
    - How do I know if I've reached my goal?
    - What is my indicator of progress?
  - Achievable: goals must be achievable and attainable
    - Do I have the resources and capabilities to achieve the goal? if not, what am I missing?
    - Have others done it successfully before?
  - Realistic: goals must be realistically achieved given available resources and time
    - Is the goal realistic and within reach?
    - Is the goal reachable given the time and resources?
    - Are you able to commit to achieving the goal?
  - Timely: must be time-bound in that it has a start and finish date
    - Does my goal have a deadline?
    - By when do you want to achieve your goal?

## 2. CREATE A STUDY SPACE

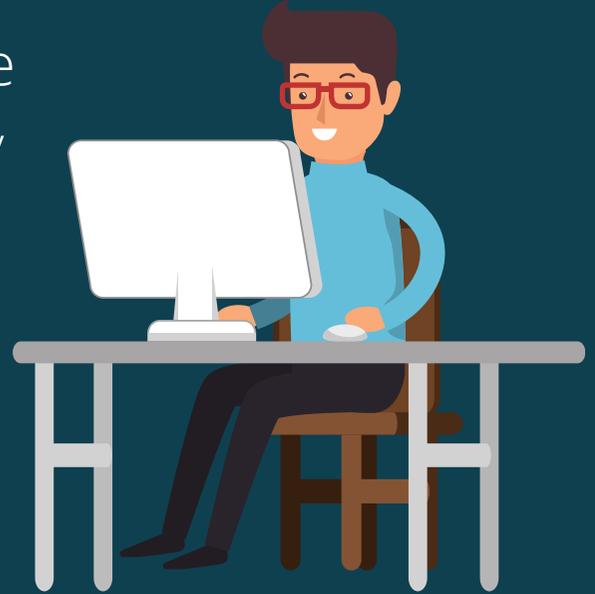


A dedicated space and routine will set you up for success. If you have the resources to find a place that's away from noise and distractions, that is great. However, if you're not able to have a personal, designated space away from distractions--there are certain things you can do to still set yourself up for success. Having a dedicated office or personal spot is ideal, but not mandatory.

- Have headphones ready to block out noise and to participate in group calls
- Communicate to others in your home that you will be studying or participating in a lecture
- Keep water and snacks available so that your mind is fueled as you study and engage in lectures
- Treat it like an in-person class by: getting up the same time each day, taking a shower, getting dressed, eating breakfast, and "going to class". As silly or unnecessary some of these steps may seem, doing the physical motions to prepare yourself for class can make a huge impact on productivity. Going through the motions and getting your body used to a routine can mentally motivate you and cultivate a better sense of discipline.

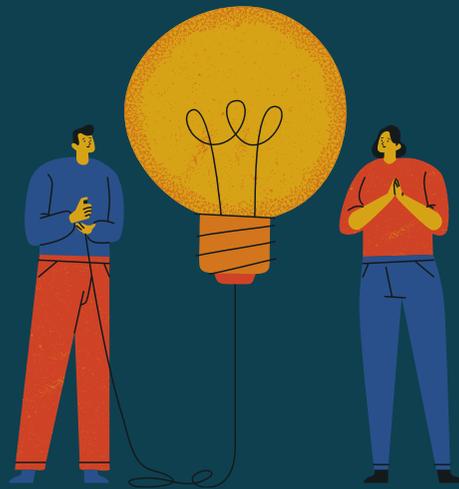
# 3. AVOID DISTRACTIONS

Part of creating a space conducive to studying is making the necessary steps to avoid and prevent distractions. As noted before, having your own private space--free from distractions can be a luxury. However, there are some further steps you can take to limit distractions.



- Turn off your phone/use airplane mode if possible, to eliminate outside distractions
- If you find yourself browsing on other websites or chatting with friends during lectures, there are apps available that can temporarily limit yourself from going on other apps
  - StayFocused and BlockSite are third party extensions on Google Chrome that can help you create a blacklist of distracting websites that you can activate when it's time to study or be in lecture
- There are timer-based concentration techniques like Pomodoro: which can be helpful to utilize when studying
- A cluttered work environment can distract you. Keeping your desk clear of empty mugs, scattered papers, and other items can make a huge difference.

# 4. CONNECT WITH PEOPLE



Though you may not be seeing a lot of your peers and professors face to face, there are several ways you can still connect with people during this virtual learning period:

- Create virtual study groups using Skype, Google Hangout, Zoom, and much more
- Access professors and career center advisors via virtual office hours and scheduling online appointments. Teachers and advisors are here to help you succeed and genuinely want to support you. Reach out for support when you need it

## **Note on Study Groups:**

Study groups can be a great, effective way to study, to stay motivated and focused, and to be engaged in your class material.

To make an effective study group you can:

- Make an explicit agreement to check on each other and ask for back up
- Meet regularly over online video tools
- Set a purpose for meetings and use a shared notes document
- Be sure to review together: go over difficult homework questions, address problems group members face during class
- Remember that this isn't a class so feel free to have a little fun and take breaks with your group as well!

# 5. STAY ON TRACK

- When everything is done online, deadlines, due dates, and exam dates can become easy to miss. Keep yourself organized by utilizing a physical planner or online calendars (ex: google calendar) /planners/project management tools like Trello. You can sync online tools to your phone so that it will update you on specific times and dates for deadlines
- At the start of your semester, read through your syllabus and find out all major exam and assignment dates and add these to your calendar! At any notice of career fairs/online workshops and information sessions that you'd like to attend, add them to your calendar right away. Making a habit of adding important dates and activities on your online calendar can be incredibly helpful to your success
- Other time management/project management apps include: Focus Keeper - Time Management, Power Planner, Todoist, Toggl
- Keep a to-do list for each day to keep you focused and to help with productivity
- Check your email regularly: often times professors will remind you of upcoming deadlines and due dates in person when we have physical lectures. However, since you are taking an online course--you may not have these verbal reminders. Instead, professors may send reminders via email, or updates to due dates, new guidelines for assignments, and other resources. It's crucial to check your email often to make sure that you're not missing out on any important information

# 6. PARTICIPATE!



It can be tempting to be a silent observer by muting yourself, turning off your screen, and taking your focus elsewhere/multitask. However, doing so will not only make it more difficult for you to retain information learned in class, but you miss opportunities to ask questions and to actively engage in class. Engaging in class will make your virtual learning a lot more valuable than being a silent observer.

Here are some tips to keep you engaged in class:

- Take notes: during online lectures, it can be tempting to skip taking notes since everything should be available online. Taking notes during lectures can be extremely helpful as it 1) Helps you actively engage with what you're learning, 2) Helps you study the material that you're learning in class, 3) Can help you better retain the information that you're receiving, and 4) Synchronous lectures may not be recorded and uploaded afterwards, so you may not be able to view the lecture once it is finished
- Ask questions: while taking notes, it can be helpful to flag material that is confusing to you. If you are able to, write your questions down in the chat room function on Zoom, or if your professor allows for some questions after lecture--ask him/her right when the information is fresh in your mind. If it's not possible to ask questions during class, save them in your notes so that you can ask during office hours or in a separate email
- Come to lectures on time or a bit earlier if possible to ask questions or greet your peers/professor!

# 7. MAKE HEALTHY HABITS

Digital burnouts are real. Having several lectures per week, different zoom meetings, and excess of computer screen time can make you feel exhausted and burnt out. While it may not be possible to lessen computer usage time, there are some healthy habits to start implementing that can help with online burn out.

## Some Tips to Keep in Mind:

- During lectures/meetings, if you find yourself feeling exhausted or unfocused, get up for a quick stretch if possible. If you have breaks in between lectures/during class, get up to get some more water and snacks, and if time allows--take a walk!
- It can be helpful to schedule 5-15 minute breaks during your studying/remote work. Try to find other activities you can do to give yourself a break from the computer. Whether that be reading, painting/drawing, going on walks/runs, doing yoga or other physical activities, cooking/baking, and etc. doing things other than being on the computer can be some time to give yourself a break from the computer
- If you find yourself getting headaches from the computer screen, try investing in blue light glasses or adjusting your computer screen
- Avoid overscheduling: assume that each class will require the same amount of time as an in-person class. If you find yourself feeling exhausted after several online meetings and a lecture, try your best to not book too many online meetings in one day. You know your limit!
- Do not procrastinate: Taking a full online course load can be unsettling and difficult to adjust to. Without having regular class meetings and the structure of physical meetings that you may be accustomed to, it may be very easy to fall deeply into procrastination. While it may be tempting to procrastinate, it can turn into a world of pain when trying to cram a whole semester of learning into one night or just a few days before the exam. To avoid this situation, create your own schedule for completing all your work (see step 1) and stay on track of everything by utilizing online resources (see step 5)



## 8. BE FLEXIBLE

Professors may be improvising just as much as you are. Many professors have never taught online and have years of extensive experiences only in in-person formats. It's important to acknowledge that this is all new to them as well, and that they are doing the best they can to provide quality education for you.

Professors and other faculty also understand that you are trying your best to adjust. This is a time where both students and professors are moving forward in a challenging and obscure time.

- You will find some unexpected occurrences along the way: internet can get disconnected, your dog/family member can run into unexpected, urgent circumstances--requiring you to leave your class or meeting, you can accidentally forget an assignment due to online scheduling errors. Give yourself grace and communicate with your professor. These unexpected things can and will happen. The best thing we can do is be transparent and continue to move forward
- Distance education can be tough for yourself as well, and it's understandable if you find yourself struggling online. Keep trying new things to find out what works best for you, and reach out for help and support.

# RESOURCES:

It may take some time to adjust and there may be many mistakes before you find yourself accustomed to online education. That is okay. We want to emphasize again to reach out for help as early as possible. Whether that be reaching out to your professors, advisor, the career center, counselors, or anyone else-- if you are struggling to keep up, please reach out for help.

## **Resources to get you Started:**

- [Economics Career Services](#)
- [UIUC Career Center](#)
- [Counseling Center](#)
- [Disability Resources and Educational Services](#)

