Remote Learning, Study Skills, and Managing Time

Study Challenges

When it comes to studying, discipline, responsibility, and motivation are characteristics that all students need to get the most out of their classes. However, remote learning students sometimes face additional challenges because of the degree of independence it grants them. This is why it's essential for you to honestly assess the strengths and weaknesses of your study skills and habits and to develop processes that will enable you to be your most productive.

The Maricopa Community College District is providing this page on study skills and time management to help you identify your tendencies and habits, and provide you with strategies for improvement.

Step One - Time Management Style

One of the first things you'll want to do is to identify how you manage your time. Has your previous way of doing things worked for you, or do you think it's time for a change? Remember, we can always improve! See if you fit into one of the following categories.

PERSONALITY TYPE: The Early Bird

- **Traits:** You like to make checklists and feel great satisfaction when you can cross something off of your to-do list. When it comes to assignments, you want to get started as soon as possible (and maybe start brainstorming before that), because it lets you stay in control.
- **Strengths:** You know what you want and are driven to figure out how to achieve it. Motivation is never really a problem for you.
- **Challenges:** Sometimes, you can get more caught up in getting things done as quickly as possible and don't give yourself enough time to mull over issues in all of their complexity.
- **Tips for Success:** You're extremely organized and on top of your schoolwork, so make sure you take time to really enjoy learning in your classes. Remember, school isn't all deadlines and checkboxes—you also have the opportunity to think about big picture intellectual problems that don't necessarily have clear answers.

PERSONALITY TYPE: The Balancing Act

- **Traits:** You know what you're capable of, and are ready to get the most out of your classes. Maybe you're naturally gifted, or maybe it is a skill that you have developed; in any case, you should have the basic organizational skills to succeed in any remote class, as long as you keep your balance.
- **Strengths:** Your strength lies in your ability to be well-rounded. You may not always complete assignments perfectly every time, but you are remarkably consistent and usually manage to do very well in classes.
- **Challenges:** Because you're so consistent, sometimes you can get in a bit of a rut where you begin to coast in class, rather than challenging yourself.
- **Tips for Success:** Instead of simply doing what works, use each class as an opportunity for growth by engaging thoughtfully with the material, and constantly pushing the boundaries of your expectations.

PERSONALITY TYPE: The Pressure Cooker

- **Traits:** You always get things done, and almost always at the last minute. Hey, it takes time to come up with good ideas!
- **Strengths:** You work well under pressure, and when you finally do sit down to accomplish a task, you can work for hours. In these times, you can be extremely focused and shut out the rest of the world to get done what needs to be done.
- **Challenges**: You sometimes use your ability to work under pressure as an excuse to procrastinate. Sure, you can really focus when the deadline is tomorrow but is it the best work you could produce? Imagine if you had a couple of days of cushion?
- **Tips for Success:** Give yourself small, achievable deadlines and stick to them. Make sure they're goals that you could (and would) achieve in a day. Then don't allow yourself to make excuses. You'll find that it's a lot more enjoyable not to be stressed out when completing schoolwork. Who would have known?

PERSONALITY TYPE: The Improviser

- **Traits:** You frequently wait until the last minute to do assignments, but it's because you've been able to get away with this habit in many classes. Sometimes you miss an assignment or two or pretend to have done reading that you haven't, but everyone does that sometimes, right?
- **Strengths:** You think quickly on your feet, and while this is a real strength, it also can be a crutch that prevents you from being really successful in a class.

- **Challenges:** As the saying goes, old habits die hard. If you find that you lack a foundation of discipline and personal accountability, it can be difficult to change, especially when the course material becomes difficult or you find yourself struggling to keep up with the pace of the class.

- **Tips for Success:** The good news is you can turn this around! Make a plan to organize your time and materials and stick with it. Also, don't be afraid to ask your instructor for help, but be sure to do it before, rather than after, you fall behind.

Step Two - Create a Schedule

After evaluating how you have done things in the past, you'll want to create a schedule for managing your time to improve on it! The best schedules have some flexibility built into them, as you will undoubtedly have unexpected situations that arise.

Regardless of the level of detail that you find helpful, there are some things—due dates, exam dates, and discussion times, for example—that you should include in your schedule, no matter what. But you also might find it helpful to break down assignments into steps (or milestones) that you can schedule as well. Again, this is all about what works best for you. Do you want to keep a record of only the major deadlines you need to keep in mind? Or does it help you to plan out every day, so you stay on track? Your answers will vary depending on the course, the complexity of your schedule, and your own personal preferences.

Your schedule will also vary depending on the course you're taking. So pull out your syllabus and try to determine the rhythm of the class by looking at the following factors:

- How often does your instructor expect discussion board contributions?
    - When are initial discussion board contributions due?
- Will you have tests or exams and when are those scheduled?
- Are there assignments and papers and when are they due?
- Are there any group or collaborative assignments?

Note: Pay particular attention to the timing of any assignments that require you to work with others. They take longer to complete when you are learning remotely because it can be more complicated to schedule times to get together.

You can find many useful remote resources that will help you keep track of your schedule. Some are basic, cloud-based calendars (like Google Calendar, iCal, Outlook), and some (like iHomework) are specialized for students.

You have 168 hours in each week. It's up to you to decide the best way to use them. Schedule wisely.

Step Three - Prioritizing Time

The final step is to get better at prioritizing your time.

Due dates are important. Set your short- and long-term goals accordingly. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What needs to get done today?
- What needs to get done this week?
- What needs to get done by the end of the 1st month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the 2nd month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the semester?

Your time is valuable. Treat it accordingly by getting the most you can out of it.

Above all: avoid PROCRASTINATION.

Procrastination has doomed many a remote learner because it's incredibly difficult to catch up once you've fallen behind.

Do you have a problem procrastinating? We're going to ask you a few questions in this final segment and if you find yourself saying, "Sounds like me," more often than you say, "No way," you'll really want to be on your guard so that procrastination doesn't become an issue for you.

Procrastination Checklist

Consider the following issues:

1. My paper is due in two days, and I haven't really started writing it yet.
2. I've had to pull an all-nighter to get an assignment done on time.
3. I've turned in an assignment late or asked for an extension when I really didn't have a good excuse not to get it done on time.
4. I've worked right up to the minute an assignment was due.
5. I've underestimated how long a reading assignment would take and didn't finish it in time for class.
6. I've relied on an online summary of a book or concept because I didn't finish the reading on time.

If these sound like issues you've struggled with in the past, you might want to think seriously about whether you have the tendency to procrastinate, and how you want to deal with it. You're already spending a lot of time, energy, and money on the remote classes you're taking—don't let all of that go to waste!

Procrastination Tips

But don't worry! We are here to help. The following five tips provide some strategies for overcoming these challenges:

- **Keep your studying bite-sized.** For example, when confronted with 150 pages of reading or 50 problems to solve, you may understandably feel overwhelmed. Break the task into smaller chunks. Why not read for 45 minutes each study session? Or solve 10 problems? That sounds much more manageable.

- **Turn off your phone, close your chat windows, and block distracting websites.** Treat your studying as if you're in a movie theater—just turn it off!

- **Set up a reward system.** If you read for 40 minutes, you can check your phone for 5 minutes. But keep in mind that reward-based systems only work if you stick to a code of self-honor.

- **Study in a place reserved for studying ONLY.** Your bedroom may have too many distractions (or the ever-present temptation of a quick nap), so stay out of there when working on school assignments.

- **Use checklists to make your incremental accomplishments visible.** Some people get great satisfaction and motivation from checking items off a to-do list. Be very specific when creating this list, and clearly describe each task.

Student Questions & Answers

Ok, let's switch gears here and spend a little time with a time management Q&A. Here are some of the questions students most frequently ask :

Student Question 1:

Do I really need to create a study schedule when I'm taking a remote course? I can honestly keep track of all of this in my head.

Answer: Yes, you really should. When you take a face-to-face course, you are expected to attend class and an instructor will give you reminders about assignment due dates and exam times. In a remote class, you don't have this built-in structure. You're going to have to take responsibility for tracking class requirements yourself.

Student Question 2:

Realistically, how much time should I spend studying for this class?

Answer: This is a good question, and a tough one to answer. Each hour of class (per week) is equal to one unit of credit, which means that you can think of each credit as an hour. A general rule is to study two hours for every hour of class. So if you enroll in twelve units, you should allow for twenty-four hours of study time every week.

Student Question 3:

Ok, so aside from class time requirements, should I account for anything else as I draw up my schedule?

Answer: This depends on how detailed you want your schedule to be. Is it a calendar of important dates, or do you need a clear picture of how to organize your entire day? We think the latter is more successful, as long as you stick with it. This is also why it will be helpful to determine when you are most productive and efficient. When are you the most focused and ready to learn new things—in the morning, afternoon, or evening?

Student Question 4:

My life and school requirements change on a week-to-week basis. How can I possibly account for this when making a schedule?

Answer: Try creating a variable schedule in case an event comes up or you need to take off a day or two.

Student Question 5:

The way you've talked about scheduling and time management makes it sound like a good idea, but it's also totally unrealistic. What's wrong with cramming? (It's what I'll probably end up doing anyway)

Answer: Cramming, or studying immediately before an exam without much preparation beforehand, has many disadvantages. Trying to learn any subject or memorize facts in a brief, but intense period of time, is basically fruitless. You simply forget what you have learned much faster when you cram. Instead, study in smaller increments on a regular basis; your brain will absorb complex course material in a lasting and more profound way because it's how our brain functions.

Conclusion

Congratulations! On this page, we've provided many ideas for time management, assignment organization, and avoiding procrastination, but there are still hundreds of additional resources online to assist with remote learning. Seek out some of these for further help – you're sure to find tools and strategies that will work well for your individual style.

Adapted from *https://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei*