Strategies for Success in Remote Learning Environments

Though Centre College is a highly residential liberal arts environment, COVID-19 has presented new challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning. Some of your classes may be fully online and some may be a hybrid of in-class learning and online learning. To better help you in these uncertain times, we’ve prepared some helpful tips and resources to guide you through your college experience during the time of COVID and help maximize your potential. It’s important to know that many of our habits need to change to become effective learners in this new environment.

Get Organized/Set a Schedule
One of the most important first steps you can take is organizing your course materials, due dates, and schedule to stay on-top of important deadlines and make time for important things in your life.

• **Use a daily or weekly calendar!** Whether you use your phone, a physical planner, or sticky notes, make sure you have a schedule. Here is a sample schedule to get you started.

• **Make sure you include breaks and rest.** Self-care is important. Make time for exercise, rest, and fun.

• **Showering, getting dressed, and eating** is a helpful routine to let yourself know you are beginning your day.

• **Time Zones:** If you are not on campus, be mindful of class meeting times, group project meetings, and due dates. Centre is on Eastern Time. Make use of Google’s secondary time zone and world clock features to schedule with ease.

• **For more information on the importance of scheduling:** Read this article published in Psychology Today by Nancy Darling, Professor and Chair of Oberlin College’s Psychology Department.

Finding your Focus
When you’re not in the classroom and doing more work on your own time, you will likely find that your time is less structured. It can be easy to get distracted; sometimes we even convince ourselves that these distractions are helpful (false!). Developing new habits and methods of finding focus when learning remotely will help you overcome these common pitfalls.

• **Multitasking** is essentially a myth. When we give part of our focus to multiple tasks, no task gets our full attention.

• **Micro-tasking** (what we’re really doing when we think we’re multi-tasking), is when we switch between tasks. The problem with micro-tasking is that we’re distracted and much more likely to make mistakes. Ultimately, the original task or assignment will take much longer to accomplish than if we simply focus on that task, taking breaks when appropriate. A helpful method for focusing in 25-50-minute increments with dedicated 5-10-minute break is the pomodoro method.
• **Video Lectures** are indeed class periods. Treating your synchronous and asynchronous video lectures as you would an in-person class will help you focus.
  o Put your phone away or on Do not Disturb
  o Close other tabs, windows, or applications you have open on your computer
  o Take notes during the lecture as if you were sitting in class (you are responsible for the content or they wouldn’t be providing these videos)
  o Be engaged! Find out how to ask questions or contribute to class conversations.

• **Consider your study space**: Is your dorm room or your bedroom the best place to study? Do you find yourself getting distracted by your roommate, the desire to nap, or other common distractions?
  o **Study area**. A clean, organized space will help you focus on the tasks in front of you. By eliminating unnecessary clutter, you’ll be better prepared to work.
  o **Find a quiet place**. If you are easily distracted, studying in a common area where people are constantly moving around or there is a lot of noise may not be the best location for you to study. Maybe try a bench outside, a different room of your house, or maybe a quiet nook on campus.
  o **Group Study sessions** can be beneficial and motivating when you struggle to find focus on your own. They can also be a huge distraction if you are socializing and talking about last night’s game instead of tomorrow’s test. Know yourself and what works for you. Some habits may need to change.

**Stay Connected**
Maintaining connections with others is even more important when you are learning remotely. During this time of COVID, when social interactions are extremely limited, finding those moments to connect with others is critical for maintaining academic effectiveness and preserving your mental health.

• **Group collaboration** can be an effective way to work on projects, homework, and just to stay in touch. Consider forming a small group in your classes to meet regularly via Zoom or Google Meet to connect. Keeping your video on will increase the feeling of connectedness as well as allow you to see facial cues from one another when speaking.

• **Schedule regular video calls with family and friends**. It can become very easy to isolate and disconnect from reality when you aren’t physically able to be with those you care about. Making a regular schedule to catch up with family and friends can help you feel more connected to the world around you, laugh, and generally boost your mood.

• **Attend virtual/online office hours**: Most faculty have created opportunities for students to connect with them virtually for office hours if they are not in-person. Reaching out to professors to ask questions, go over homework, or prepare for papers and exams is an excellent way to stay connected with your professors, get to know them, and stay on top of your work!

**Take Care of Yourself**
Stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression can very easily overwhelm us, particularly during a worldwide pandemic. It’s critical that you remember to find and maintain balance, taking care of your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health as you navigate these troubling times.

- **Adequate sleep and nourishment** are just as important, if not more important now.
- **Exercise** can help relieve stress and anxiety, boost your mood and your mind, and keep your body healthy. Be creative – walk, skip, jump, run. Put your headphones on and have a one-person dance party!
- **Consider your posture** and how it can greatly affect how your body feels. The cumulative effect of hunching over a desk or typing a paper in bed can lead to headaches, neck pain, and general body aches.
- **Take time for yoga, meditation, quiet time, coloring, or mindfulness.** Moments of rest are necessary for our minds and bodies to not only process information, but also recharge and reconnect with the world around us.
- **Reach out if you need help.** If you are struggling, don’t wait and don’t keep it to yourself; tell someone. Tell a friend, a classmate, a professor. Remember you can reach out to us for help at any time. We are all here for you!
  - Dr. Brian Cusato, Dir. of the Centre Learning Commons (b.cusato@centre.edu)
  - Centre Counseling.
- **Wash your hands and wear your mask!!**

**Additional Resources**
You may find some of the information contained in the following links to be useful as well on your journey.

- [Online Student’s Manual for Success](#)
- [11 Techniques to Be Successful in Online Courses](#)
- [What Makes a Successful Online Learner?](#)
- [Learning During COVID-19: Academic Support and Learning Advancement at Northwestern University](#)

Tips From The Center For Teaching and learning (CTL) at Centre College

- [Strategies for Remote Learning Success](#)
- [Zoom Your Way to Academic Success](#)
- [Tips From Orientation Leaders for Online Learning](#)
- [Additional Online Support Materials and Documentation](#)