

Online and On Track

As schools around the world move classes online, students everywhere are learning to adjust to studying at home—and everything that comes along with it. We are all in this boat together.

Turning your living room into a classroom is no easy feat. This is true, especially if you're sharing your newfound workspace with family and/or roommates. But don't let this get you off track. Being a productive student at home has its challenges, but you can still transition to online classes and complete your courses without getting behind. A few simple tips can make a big difference.

Get in touch

If you have concerns, get in touch with your instructor. They're adjusting to distance learning too and understand the challenges. Additionally, many teachers have access to online resources that can help you.

Inside Higher Ed notes that instructors are keen to facilitate student-to-student communication during this transition. Many of your classmates are probably feeling overwhelmed and reaching out could be just the push they need to keep them on track too. Setting up an online study group keeps you in touch with the outside world and helps stave off procrastination. If you have kids, seek out others who do too--they might want to meet online later, after putting the little ones to bed. If you're still working, ask your group if there are others deemed "essential." Accommodate each others' schedules when you can. There's power in numbers!

Become the teacher

According to a study by the University of California San Diego's psychology department, one of the best ways to become an expert in a topic is to teach it to someone. Try involving yourself in your housemates' studies, and vice versa--kids, partners, roommates alike! Sonia is a restaurant worker with two elementary school-aged children. They are now all at home. "Today I made a Spanish bingo game," she said. "My older daughter knows her Spanish numbers and colors from school, so I'm trying to help her retain it. We did an art lesson, and then we went on a walk and talked about the signs of spring. Other days we read a story and then I make little reading comprehension quizzes (we just talk about it, not like a paper quiz) to see what they remember and understand. I'm trying to keep things fun and light for everyone because the last thing we need is more stress!"

Embrace technology

The amount of resources available online to students today is unprecedented. Utilize as many of these technologies and platforms as possible.

Are you tired of being on the phone? Zoom is a free video-conferencing platform. Meet up with fellow students online for face-to-face study sessions. Maybe a housemate will make a guest appearance! Don't be self-conscious--this is the "new norm" for everyone, and a cameo from a toddler or a cat could be just the comic relief needed during a stressful study session.

Are you studying at home late? Maybe you finally just got the kids in bed or worked a long shift, and it's the only time you have to study. Flux is a free download that makes your computer display's brightness adapt to the time of day. The adjusted screen light can alleviate headaches, prevent eye strain, and help you get to sleep quicker after a late-night study session.



Learningscientists.org offers creative resources for students (and teachers and parents!) adjusting to learning at home, including online flashcards and other platforms for rejuvenating your study techniques.

Eliminate distractions

According to a report by Stanford University, multitasking decreases productivity and can impair your cognitive control. Eliminating distractions and disruptions at home will help you make the most of your study time.

Lisa is a speech-language pathologist in metro Detroit. Her family is adjusting to the new norm. She is sharing her work-from-home space with two children, one in middle and one in high school. "My kids and I all have to be dressed and ready for the day by 9:30 am. All schoolwork is done in the morning and then they can have free time. My kids are older, which is a huge advantage, but I have still had to create boundaries (setting timers so they don't barge into my study time, etc.) to be productive," she said.

SelfControl is an app developed to limit your time on mail servers to keep you from being distracted by email while studying. NimbleWorks offers apps to keep you off social media during your allotted study time.

Keep your eye on the end-game

The desire to attain your dreams got you started and can help you maintain your motivation. Approach your assignments, large and small, with conviction. Try organizing your time by identifying small, achievable goals that align with the big picture.

Enjoy the process

Reward yourself as you go. Forgive yourself when you think you fall short, and practice thinking long-range.

An international compendium of online college students' strategies includes the following: "Playing happy music keeps me alert and in a good mood. Keeping good vibes going while I study, make the studying go by faster, and much more enjoyable." Another: "My tip is coffee, coffee, coffee and more coffee. Well, OK, that's just for me. And, if you don't have a quiet room because you have noisy children who do not come with a volume control, try noise canceling headphones." Or: "I like to study with coffee. Coffee is my treat for myself when I need to study hard. By starting my studying with something I enjoy, it makes my entire study session better."

The bottom line is persevere, but have some fun. It is exciting and rewarding to be in school and pursue your goals while learning new skills. Above all else, enjoy the process, the opportunities and the unique experiences!