

Tips for Success in Online Classes

First thing

At the start of each day, check your email and eCampus course pages for any announcements, especially during this time with so much changing on a daily basis. If you use Outlook or Gmail for email, you can create folders for your classes and then set rules to forward incoming messages to a particular folder. That will help you separate the important emails from the “junk.”

Don't let online classes fool you

Taking online classes might seem like a break from having to show up to class in-person each week, but in reality, online courses often require more self-discipline and self-learning. It's tempting, for example, to do things like sleep in, stay in your pajamas all day, “skip” online lecture sessions and drop your exercise routine. Short term, these things feel good, for sure; but the long-term effects can be detrimental to your overall health and your academic success.

For example, we recommend preparing for your online exams the same way you would if they were given in person. Instructors will likely have to alter testing material to accommodate an environment where students are taking exams unmonitored. If this is the case, it's tempting to think you can rely only on notes in lieu of studying. Do not fall into this trap.

Instead, focus on staying organized to avoid academic mishaps. Organize your notes and books using tabs to mark different sections. Keeping lists, formula sheets, and vocabulary terms in one place will help you quickly reference important information whenever you need it—especially when it's time to study or during an open book/notes exam.

Spend time planning your day

Take time to create a consistent schedule for yourself. If your instructor updates their syllabus for the rest of the semester, use that syllabus as a guide. Make “going to class” a regular part of your schedule.

Whether you have a live lecture to attend online or you can watch a recorded video of a lecture at your own pace, it's important to watch the lecture at the same time every day, similar to an in-person class. If there is not a mandatory virtual lecture, then use that time for viewing online lectures, reading the required materials, working on homework, and staying current with course material. Consistency is key to success in the online environment.

If you don't have a lot of experience creating daily or weekly schedules, don't stress. Grab a calendar and watch our Fixed Commitment Calendar video to help you get started.

Create a dedicated workspace

Some of you might be living at home with parents, other family members, roommates, or possibly friends. Even if you're not, it's important to create a good working and studying environment. Find a space that you can dedicate to “attending” online classes and studying. It might be your dining

table, it might be a home office, it might be your mom's sewing room—regardless, set it up so that your brain knows “when I'm in this space, it's time to focus.”

Set boundaries

Talk with the people you live with about creating a situation that respects your time and study space. It's hard to focus if your roommate is vacuuming outside your study area while you're watching a Zoom lecture. Share your plan and schedule with everyone so they know what to expect.

Be your own advocate

While there are wide variety of resources and people available to help you with school, taking charge of your learning is the best strategy for a successful semester. Being your own advocate might sound like this:

- “Hi [instructor, SI leader, therapist], I am struggling with online classes. I am worried this will affect my academic performance. What advice are you telling other students to help them deal with this?”
- “I really don't understand x, y, z concept—can you work with me or recommend online resources to better explain it?”
- “Hi, I need to make an appointment with an academic coach because I am struggling with time management and need more accountability right now.”
- “I am not feeling well. Can we work out an alternate due date for this assignment so I can rest?”

Prepare for possible technology issues

Consider how your academic performance might be affected if you lose access to technology during important times, like taking an exam or doing online homework. If you're sharing internet with multiple people think about how that might impact your connectivity during an online exam or while giving a Zoom presentation, for example. Talk to your family/roommates about creating a schedule that gives you maximum access during those times.

If you can't submit a homework assignment or project because of technology problems, don't forget to email your instructor to let them know what's going on. Be sure to include the file/homework/project as proof that it was done on time. Screenshots are also useful tools when communicating technology problems.

Bonus tips if your course is synchronous (presented online live)

- Use your webcam if possible. Instructors read students' faces and body language to gauge if they need to slow down or explain things differently.
- Mute yourself during lecture and then unmute if you need to speak. This minimizes distracting background noises for participants.
- Resist the temptation to look at other websites during lecture. Avoid ‘multi-tasking.’
- If it's comfortable for you to do so, consider taking notes by hand despite being on a computer.

- Sign into the meeting 5-10 minutes early to ensure you can connect. Your instructor may answer questions during this time.
- Your instructor may stay connected once lecture is over to answer questions from students, so don't log out right away.
- Ask your instructor if they (or someone else) will be reading the chat box. If so, feel free to use it, but understand that there will likely be a delay.
- In Zoom you can use the 'Raise your hand' feature to let your instructor know you have a question. In very large classes this may not be as useful since your instructor can only see 49 people on their screen at a time.
- Consider using a headset with headphones and a microphone (or AirPods). This keeps the noise level down in your study area and allows for better audio when speaking.

Bonus tips if your course is asynchronous (recorded lectures posted online)

- Don't try to write down everything your instructor says. Take notes as you usually would in person (without the ability to stop the instructor or re-listen).
- Do not skip ahead in the recording. Listen to everything.
- Listen to the recording until it is done playing. Your instructor could wrap it up and say goodbye and then remember one more thing to tell you.
- Listen to recordings soon after they are posted. Your instructor could make an announcement about an assignment or opportunity for you that you could miss out on if you wait.
- If your course uses discussion boards, aim to be one of the first people to post/reply. Contribute to the discussion with thoughtful posts. Write more than 'I agree' and 'Good point.'
- Follow up with your instructor with any questions you may have. Visit their virtual office hours or send an email.