

Adapting your approaches to remote learning: Study strategies for Oberlin students in your new context

Oberlin College Center for Student Success – Spring 2020

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We know that transitioning to an online learning environment on short notice can come with many challenges, while also creating potential opportunities. Please remember to take care of yourself. Be patient with yourself and others. We are all in this together. Making a plan and adjusting your study habits can help you feel more in control. We hope that the following guide will help you navigate this transition as smoothly as possible.

Use this resource as a starting point.

In this guide, we'll talk about:

- Staying organized
- Avoiding multitasking
- Making the most of video lectures
- Setting a schedule
- Trading your strategies for new ones
- Working with a group or team
- Staying connected to other people

Your study habits may need to change. While your coursework and teamwork have to be online and remote, here are some strategies to keep in mind:

1. Staying organized

With so many things changing in your courses, you might be reliving that first-week-of-class confusion at finals-week pace.

Here are some things you might want to keep track of for each class:

- What were the in-person parts of this course (lecture, lab, etc.) and how has that changed?
- Where can you find it or how do you access it? (live-stream, lecture capture, etc)
- Is it at a specific time or can you watch it anytime?
- Are assignments changing?
- Are there new due dates
- How will you be submitting your assignments online?
- How are quizzes or exams being offered virtually?
- What should you do if you need help?
- Is your course offering virtual office hours? If so, when and on what platform?
- Is there an online forum for asking questions?

2. Avoiding multitasking

If you're doing more work on your own and your time is less structured, you might be more tempted to multi-task. Many people think they can do multiple things at once. But research shows us that only about [2% of the population can multitask](#). Even if you feel like you're multitasking, you're probably not... really, you're switching between tasks very quickly (some call this "micro-tasking").

The downsides of multitasking and microtasking:

- **Assignments take longer.** Each time you come back to an assignment (from Instagram for example), you have to get familiar with it, find your spot, remember what you were going to do next, etc.
- **You're more likely to make mistakes.** Distractions and switching between tasks tires out the brain.

You'll remember less. When your brain is divided, you're less able to commit what you're learning to long-term memory (because [it doesn't get encoded properly into your brain](#)).

What to do instead

When you need to study something important, consider [The Magic of Monotasking](#).

- Focus on one thing at a time.

- Take breaks between tasks.
- Consider the [“pomodoro method”](#) to help you focus for 25- or 50-minute periods and then reward your-self with 5- or 10-minute breaks.

3. Making the most of video lectures

- **Stick to your instructor’s schedule as much as you can.** Staying on a schedule will help you have a feeling of normalcy and prevent you from falling way behind.
- **Find out how to ask questions.** Is there a chat feature? Is there a discussion forum?
- **Close distracting tabs and apps.** Humans are not as good at multitasking as they think! (See #2 above.)
- **Continue to take notes as you would if you were there in person.**
- **Watch recordings at normal speed.** Research shows that playback speed of 1.5x can lower your retention and can result in lower scores on assessments. Faster playback speeds are worse for complex, multi-step material (which most of your lectures probably are). Remember: this is all about 1.5x. There hasn’t even been research on 2x playback speed, which is probably even worse.

4. Setting a schedule

As the situation unfolds, you may have fewer social-commitments, group meetings, or work hours. Setting a schedule for yourself can help provide structure and keep you motivated.

- **Keep a weekly or daily calendar**, here is an example of a weekly schedule many of our students find very helpful.
- **Include breaks and down time.** Exercise, fun and self-care are necessary.
- **Showering, getting dressed, and eating** can be a helpful routine - a way to signal to yourself you are getting started with your day.
- **Time zones:** Don’t forget potential time zone differences, whether you are outside of the Eastern time zone, or classmates you might be working with on a group project or study group are in a different time zone. Keep this in mind when planning on classes and making appointments. Google Calendar offers [secondary time zone and world clock](#) features, so you can see both times at

once! Keep time zone differences in mind for group projects with your fellow remote students, too.

- **For more on the importance of scheduling:** Nancy Darling, Oberlin's own Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department, recently published this helpful [article](#) for Psychology Today on the importance of scheduling your day while at home:

5. Trading your strategies for new ones

Your routines may have to adjust during this time. Look for ways to adapt your usual habits or form new ones. What opportunities do you have in your day where you already have defined habits? Look for ways to stack other habits onto existing ones. For example, taking a walk right after you eat lunch.

For example:

- **If you usually study in a coffee shop or library**, ask yourself what kind of environment helps you study. See if you can recreate that at home. Maybe it's studying in a chair, rather than on your bed or couch, or moving to a new spot when you change tasks. If you feel you need background noise, consider a white noise app.
- **If you always study in groups**, try a virtual or even phone-based study session with your group.
- **If you thrive on tight timelines**, but now have a more open schedule, think about how working with others or setting up a schedule can recreate that for you. When that gets hard, see if you can even do fifteen minutes at a time.

6. Working with a group or team

Remote collaboration will look a little different, but it is definitely possible.

- **Try not to procrastinate.** That group project may be out-of-sight, out-of-mind if you aren't seeing each other regularly. Resist the urge to put it off. Make small progress and stay in touch.
- **Meet regularly**, especially if you usually touch base during class or lab. Consider a quick text on your group chat about progress every couple of days. Ideally, have real conversations over video any week you're working together. Check out tools you have access to as Oberlin students.

- **Set a purpose for meetings and use a shared notes doc.** Meetings might feel different when using video, even if your team was really good at working informally in the past. Try to set the purpose of your meeting in advance. Take notes in a shared doc so you can all contribute and follow along.
- **Keep videos open when you can.** As long as you can see whatever you need to collaborate, aim to keep the video visible on your computer screen. It'll help you see the expressions of your teammates and stay connected to each other.
- **Check on each other and ask for backup:** If someone has been absent from your group meetings or chat, ask them directly if they're still able to participate in the project. If you aren't getting responses within a day or two, let your instructor know. Know it isn't being petty, it's your team's responsibility.

7. Staying connected to other people

While we can't spend our typical face-to-face time on campus, connecting with family and friends might be more important than ever. And staying in touch with instructors, classmates, and group mates is still important for continued classwork.

Here are a few ideas:

- **Schedule video calls with friends and family.** Talking with loved ones is often really helpful when you're stressed or nervous about something. Taking a break to have a laugh is also important.
- **Use Hangouts in Zoom and other platforms** to connect with classmates to talk through a tough problem
- **Attend virtual office hours or study groups** so that you can stay up on your coursework.

8. Taking care of yourself

- **Spend a few minutes meditating, coloring, doing yoga or a mindfulness activity.** Join our [April Mindfulness Month Yeofit Challenge!](#)
- **Exercise** however is possible for you - be creative about physical activity and movement!
- **Be mindful of posture and ergonomics while doing computer work in a new location.** Stretch and switch things up when you can.
- **Adequate sleep and nourishment** are as important as ever.

- [Wash your hands!](#)

Please remember, this will pass.

If COVID-19 has disrupted your travel plans, ended a lab experiment you were excited about, or for any reason feels like it came at the worst possible time, remember: this is temporary. You'll find your way when it settles down. You'll get back on track, and life will eventually feel normal again. You will have new and unforeseen opportunities. We don't know when, but it will happen. Envision that positive future. Until then, take a deep breath, do your best, get some rest, and wash your hands.

Additional Resources

- [Oberlin COVID-19 Updates/Information](#)
- [Preventing COVID](#)
- [Counseling Center](#)
- [Disability Resources](#)
- [Oberlin Writing and Speaking Center](#)
- [Quantitative Skills Drop-in Center & OWLs from CLEAR](#)
- [AARC Info](#) and [Online Appointments](#)
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