8 STRATEGIES FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF AN ONLINE CLASS

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Tips for Taking Online Classes

If you're considering taking online courses (or you're already enrolled in a program) the tips and advice below can help you address their unique challenges to get the most value out of your online program.

1. Treat an online course like a "real" course.

When it comes to online classes, you need to have the discipline to sit down and say, "I am going to work on this," as well as the dedication to actually follow through. Though

you can be flexible as to *when* you choose to complete your work during the week, you can't put it off indefinitely.

One of the easiest ways to ensure follow through is to remember that you are paying to take this online course, just as you would for a traditional, in-person class. You must "show up" if you're going to get real value out of your class. Treat your online classes the same way you would a face-to-face class—or, better yet, a job—and you'll be off to the right start.

2. Hold yourself accountable

Set goals and check in with yourself weekly. In a traditional classroom setting, you'll often receive verbal or visual reminders of an assignment's upcoming due date. But without a teacher actively reminding you, it's up to you to make sure you've allotted enough time to complete the work so you're not starting an assignment the day before it's due. If you're having trouble holding yourself responsible, pair up with a fellow classmate, or enlist the help of a parent/family member, or friend to check in as an accountability partner. By being organized, proactive, and self-aware, you can get the most from your online class even when life outside of school becomes chaotic.

3. Practice time management.

The flexibility to create your own schedule is often one of the biggest appeals of taking online classes. But that freedom can also be detrimental if you do not have solid time management skills. Without them, you might easily to find yourself cramming before classes or handing in subpar assignments.

Though how you manage your time will depend on your schedule, learning style, and personality, here are some universally valuable tips to help you practice and [improve your time management skills](#):

- **Make note of major assignments**. Mark them on a calendar you check regularly so you know what workload is coming in the weeks ahead. Don't forget to **factor in prior commitments** that may interfere with your regular study schedule, so you can give yourself enough extra time to complete assignments.

- **Create a weekly schedule that you follow**, designating certain hours each week to reading, watching course videos, completing assignments, and studying. Commit to making your online coursework part of your weekly routine, and **set reminders for yourself** to complete these tasks.

- When working on your assignments, **try time-blocking**, allotting yourself a certain amount of time for each task before moving on to the next one and setting a timer to keep you accountable.

- **Check in periodically** and look at how you're spending your time. Ask yourself: *How much time am I dedicating to course reading and assignments? Am I regularly underestimating the time it's taking me to get things done, forcing me to cram in work?* A little self-reflection and adjustment can go a long way.

4. Create a regular study space and stay organized.

Set up a dedicated learning environment for studying. By completing your work there repeatedly, you'll begin to establish a routine. Whether your workspace is your kitchen table, your bedroom, or the couch, it's important to determine what type of environment will work best for you. Experiment to discover which type of setting boosts your productivity. Wherever you choose, make sure there's high-speed internet access so you're not trying to take an online course over a lagging connection.

Setting up a regular workspace or office will also help you to stay organized. Knowing exactly where important dates, files, forms, books, and assignments live will help keep you on track towards hitting your goals. When setting up your study space, make sure you:

- Have a high-speed internet connection

- Have the required books & materials for the course

- Have headphones for listening to videos (especially important in shared spaces)

5. Eliminate distractions.

From Netflix to social media to dishes piling up in the sink, you'll be faced with many distractions that can easily derail your studies. The best online students know how to lessen these distractions and set aside time to focus.

Exactly how much of a challenge these distractions will prove to be will depend on your own unique personality and situation. Some might find that they can tune out a noisy home by listening to music. Ultimately, you will need to find a strategy that works best for you.

Regardless of where you choose to work, consider turning your cell phone off to avoid losing focus every time a text message or notification pops up. And if you're still having trouble resisting the temptation to check your email or surf the web, try downloading a website blocker. Using applications like [Cold Turkey](#) and [Freedom](#) can help eliminate distractions by blocking the apps or websites that tend to compete for your attention, such as Facebook and Twitter.

6. Figure Out How You Learn Best

Once you've established where you'll learn, think about when and how you accomplish your best work. If you're a morning person, make time to study first thing. More of a night owl? Set aside an hour or two after dinner to cozy up to your computer. Grab your favourite drink, put on your go-to playlist, and do whatever you need to get into the zone and down to business.

Not everyone learns the same way, so think about what types of information help you best grasp new concepts and employ relevant study strategies. If you're a visual learner, for example, print out transcripts of the video lectures to review. Learn best by listening? Make sure to build time into your schedule to play and replay all audio- and video-based course content.

7. Actively participate.

Participate in the course's online forum (if you have one) to help you better understand course materials and engage with fellow classmates. This might involve commenting on a classmate's paper on a discussion board or posting a question about a project you're working on. Read what other students and your teacher are saying, and if you have a question, ask for clarification.

Make sure you are checking in as often as you can, too. The flexibility of online learning means that if you have 30 minutes before dinner, you could squeeze in a discussion response around your schedule. Set a goal to check in on the class discussion threads every day.

And if you do feel yourself falling behind, speak up. Don't wait until an assignment is almost due to ask questions or report issues. Email your teacher and be proactive in asking for help.

8. Leverage your network.

Online classes may sometimes make you feel like you are learning on your own, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Most online courses are built around the concept of collaboration, with teachers actively encouraging that students work together to complete assignments and discuss lessons.

Your peers can be a valuable resource when preparing for exams or asking for feedback on assignments. Don't be afraid to turn to them to create a virtual study group. Chances are good that they will appreciate it just as much as you will.