** AccessAbility Services**

**Tips for Taking Online Classes**

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.

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 at the beginning of the semester, 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 professor 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, ask a parent, sibling, 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 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](https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/time-management-tips-online-students/):

* Look at the syllabus at the start of the semester and **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, such as weddings or vacations, 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 lectures, completing assignments, studying, and participating in forums. 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 throughout the term**, 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 the nights before the exams?* 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, or your bedroom 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, syllabi, 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, and software for the course
* Have headphones for listening to lectures or discussions (especially important in shared spaces)

5. Eliminate distractions.

From Netflix to social media to dishes piling up in the skink, 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. Others might choose to work from a local coffee shop or library to eliminate their urge to multitask at home. 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](https://getcoldturkey.com/) and [Freedom](https://freedom.to/stayfocusd) 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. If the kids require your morning and evening attention, try to carve out a study session mid-day while they’re at school. Brew your usual cup of coffee, 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 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 professor 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 plans, 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 professor 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 professors and instructors actively encouraging that students work together to complete assignments and discuss lessons.

Build relationships with other students by introducing yourself and engaging in online discussion boards. 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.

**Time Management Tips for Online Students**

1. Plan Ahead

Your hectic schedule, combined with daily distractions, can easily get in the way of finishing tasks. The best online students know how to set aside time to focus. This includes having a consistent time and workspace, tuning out those distractions, and avoiding surfing the internet.

Despite the flexibility in being an online student, it’s important to have frequent engagement with your studies throughout the week. Provide plenty of time to space out your required readings, assignments, and online discussions.

Consider purchasing a calendar you can use to plan your daily and weekly assignments, highlighting:

* Assignments due, including drafts and final submissions
* Activities related to your program, such as study group meetups or on-campus networking events
* Virtual or in-person office hours with professors and advisors

Here is a sample schedule of what a typical week might look like:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Monday** | Begin required readings and multimedia |
| **Tuesday** |  Continue reviewing materials |
| **Wednesday** |  Post to discussion forum and begin assignments |
| **Thursday** |  Continue posting and working on assignments |
| **Friday** |  Read and respond to posts and work on assignments |
| **Saturday** |  Read and respond to posts and finish assignments |
| **Sunday** |  Check your work and submit assignments |

2. Don’t Multitask

Avoid [multi-tasking—which can actually decrease your productivity](https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/why-you-shouldnt-multitask/). Focus on one assignment at a time and zero in on the specific task at hand, whether that’s studying for an exam, reading a textbook, emailing a professor, or participating in an online forum. Arrange your tasks in order of importance, and pay attention to the three or four crucial tasks that require the most effort.

If you need help staying focused, then consider creating lists using a project management tool, such as [Trello](https://trello.com/) or [Smartsheet](https://www.smartsheet.com/)*,* to help organize tasks. If you prefer a traditional to-do list, then look at digital notebooks like [Todoist](https://en.todoist.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [Wunderlist](https://www.wunderlist.com/), or [Evernote](https://evernote.com/).

Lastly, concentrate on what needs to get done in the present and avoid anything too far-off. If it’s a small assignment that you don’t need to address for several weeks, put it on your calendar to focus on when the deadline is closer.

3. Set Up Your Virtual Office

Whether you study at home or your local café, it’s important to work in the optimal setting needed to complete your work. Make sure there’s high-speed internet, and that you’re in a comfortable space with the right lighting, sound, and background. For example, some people prefer to work with headphones on, while others prefer silence or an ambient backdrop with people quietly chatting. Sit in a comfortable chair, and make sure the lighting isn’t too dim. Close out your browser windows, and put your phone away.

Along with these elements, make sure you have all the required materials, such as textbooks and industry-specific software. Set up as much as you can ahead of time to stay on task with your coursework.

4. Block Out Distractions

Make sure to avoid surfing the web excessively. It’s easy to become distracted by the news or your favorite celebrity gossip site. Stay focused, and avoid Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools when you need to concentrate on your studies.

If you’re struggling to stay focused, then consider the [Pomodoro Method](https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique). This technique helps with productivity by arranging how you work to increase efficiency. The tool builds on 25-minute work sessions, optimizing your time to focus on your online studies. The best way to use this method is to:

* Set a timer for 25 minutes and work uninterrupted for the scheduled period.
* Take a five-minute break to grab coffee, check emails, or do something else.
* Once you’ve completed four work sessions, treat yourself to a longer, 15-minute break.

If you’re still struggling with procrastination, download a website blocker for your Pomodoro sessions. [Freedom](https://freedom.to/), [KeepMeOut](http://keepmeout.com/en/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), and [Switcheroo](https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/switcheroo-redirector/cnmciclhnghalnpfhhleggldniplelbg?hl=en) minimize online browsing and let you follow through on your daily tasks. With these tools, you can block all websites or redirect your favorite sites to your school’s homepage.

5. Reward Yourself

It’s important to reward yourself after a job well done in order to avoid burnout. Otherwise, it will be difficult to concentrate on even the simplest tasks.

You can reward yourself by celebrating your accomplishments and treating yourself to something you truly enjoy, whether that’s watching your favorite show on Netflix or going out to a nice dinner and a movie. If you’ve been working on an assignment for several months in a row, then take a week off when you’re finished.

Also, make sure your time away from your studies is dedicated to fully enjoying yourself. If you’re mixing work with leisure, then you may burn out—making it difficult to get back into your routine.

6. Get a Good Night’s Sleep

Sleep is essential to rest your body and keep your mind fresh for the next day. Try to get seven to eight hours of rest a night. Pulling all-nighters is less productive than studying consistently. Include sleep in your schedule, and you can reap huge rewards.