The Handout

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Audrey Redpath, Pinney ARM

In addition to resources offered by our university (you should be checking out tutoring, counseling, and free software made available by WestConn), more online resources are available for free for students during this transition. There are a ton of frustrations that we're encountering as students, and those resources can step up to help. Here's a few problems I've seen pop up over the last month, and tools you can use to fix them or make your work a little easier.

My phone or webcam mic is barely audible over background noise

Many classes and student organizations are staying synchronous with video chat lessons, study sessions, and discussions. That comes with a lot of new headaches, but this one is an easy fix. In response to massive work-from-home demand during the coronavirus pandemic, krisp.ai, a software that mutes background noise for all major communication apps, has made their tool free for all students and professors. You can use it yourself, and drop the link in a (kind) email to your professor struggling with audio, too.

I'm having trouble taking notes during video lectures

This one is a two parter. 1) Record your screen. 2) Make a transcript for your notes. You can screen capture while listening to a lecture (just like most professors are doing) or even while working through problems with your professors or classmates to explain your thinking.

Loom.com for free all students and teachers, and it lets you edit, share, and make interesting presentations right through the app.

For our second step, transcripts can make it much easier to keep track of a lecture or multi speaker conversation in addition to your notes. Otter.ai is another free app for students and teachers, and it creates a transcript automatically using artificial intelligence. You can record from the app, or just upload a video or mp3 supplied by your teacher (or recorded in loom). It is AI, so it's not perfect, but you can edit the text in-line and add your own notes.

According to loom, most people talk 6x times faster than you can type - no wonder it's hard to keep your notes word-accurate, especially with tech issues and multiple speakers getting in the way. One of the few upsides to this disruption to our semester is that tools that you wouldn't be able to access in a physical classroom setting are available to you, so use what you can to make this time easier.

**I can't send this assignment file to my professors because it's too big**

 Some classes regularly use USB flash drives, external hard drives, or SD cards to turn in work, but that's not an option with a virtual campus. Outlook can be tricky, and large files can take forever to load into an email and crash the window even after they upload.

If you're sending a big file (like a video, presentation, program .ZIP, or set of audio files) to your professor or classmates, you can use tools like Firefox Send (up to 2.5GB) or MeeroDrop (up to 10GB) for free to send your files via a link or email.

I didn't buy all of my textbooks because I usually borrow the reference copy at the library

Many of us rely on the library for access to supplementary materials and course textbooks throughout the semester. With the physical library closed, textbooks are harder to access without paying for virtual ebooks outfront.

 Cambridge University Press is basically opening up the gates to all of their academic resources during the outbreak. Their ebooks, including textbooks, are available online for free to students through the end of the semester. Textbooks and course materials are also available for free from these publishers: Duke University Press, MIT Press, University of Michigan Press, and partner university presses with Project MUSE. While not every textbook will fall under these umbrellas, it's worth looking for yours.
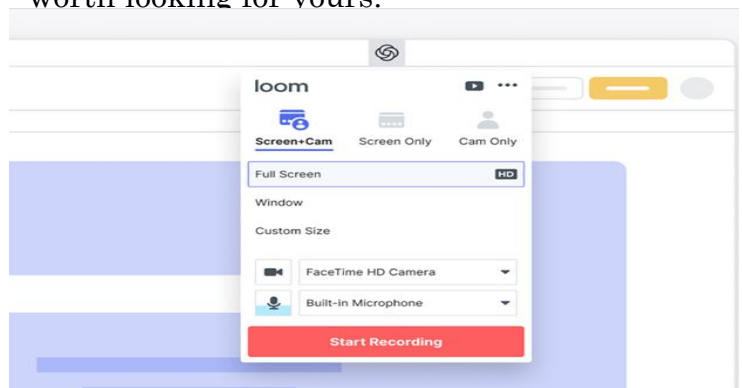
Additionally, you can head to openlibrary.org, the Internet Archive's free public library, to borrow ebooks (they expire after a set check out period) for fun and for class assignments. I've been using this tool to read *Redeployment* by Phil Klay, a book I needed for a writing course that I had originally been sharing with a classmate. If you can't find something you need online, our WCSU reference librarians are available during business hours to help out.

**Since I'm working online, I'm copying a lot of stuff and keep losing track**

You need a clipboard history tool. It's an old school application, but Clipboard Help+Spell saves all the images and text you copy online so you can find something hours or days later. You'd be smart too to start using your browsers built in bookmarks manager to create folders per-class as you use more online reference materials (articles/videos/databases).

Working from home, it's hard to keep track of the information and files I'm using for class
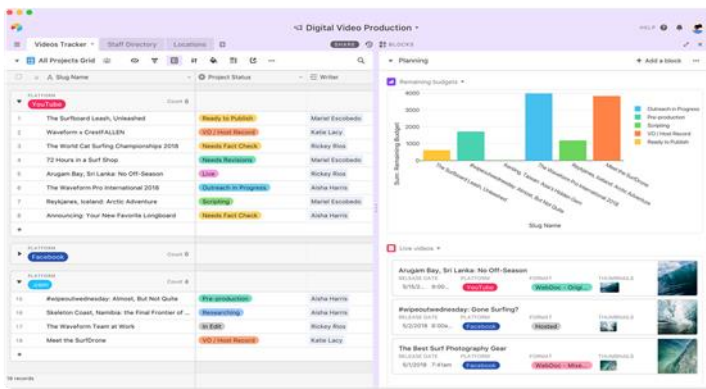
A good way to address this stress is to pick a tool and treat it as a kind of virtual binder for your classes. Here are two options: **Airtable** is a hard to describe tool. It allows you to make database/spreadsheet hybrids, turn data into visualizations, store complex information, create workflows that take your inputs and turn them into something else. You can also just use it to make engaging presentations for class, or build an interactive multimedia study guide. With the coronavirus swap to online learning, they've just launched free access for anyone with a .edu email address. **Notion** is another great self management tool (free for students and faculty) with database and notetaking options.
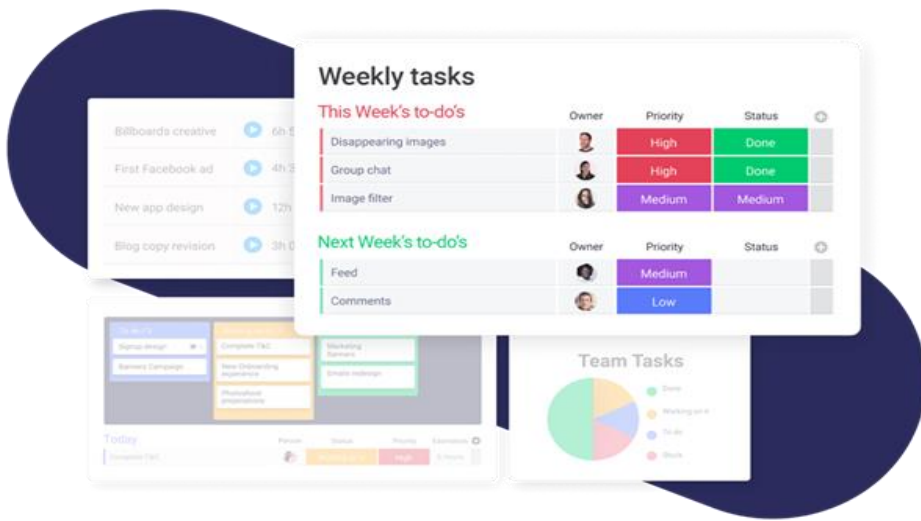
If you head to either site, each have templates specifically for students to manage college courses and other work, or you can build your own.

Group projects were tough in person, but I can't keep up with my group online.

Group projects were already a nightmare for some students during the normal semester. Now, it can be chaotic to keep track of your group and keep each other on-task across platforms. [Monday](#) is a collaborative project tracking software. In addition to tracking your homework and other assignments, it's perfect for collaborating with small and large groups.

With task assignments, a chat/discussion feature, and visualizations for important project steps, you can condense your group project coordination to one app.

Tools can help you get a handle on your online work environment for school, but they're nothing if you're feeling unmotivated or facing other barriers to taking on online work. These tools can make things easier, but if you're struggling to get your work done at a basic level, remember that you can reach out to your support network here at WCSU for help. Your ARMs, advisors, tutors, and professors are here to assist when resources alone won't cut it. 👈

2 | Staying On Top of Your Online Work

Tamia Scott, Litchfield ARM

So, as we all know, school closed and we are now doing all of our work online. For some, it's amazing, but for others, not so much. Here are some tips to help you stay on top of your online work.

1. Establish a Routine

Scheduling flexibility is very important to a lot of students, whether they are working professionals who can't attend daytime classes or just traditional students who don't like night classes. It's important to think of "flexibility" as the right to create your own schedule, not to abandon schedules altogether. You will be more productive by setting aside designated periods throughout the week to view lectures, do your readings, and complete coursework.

2. Leave Yourself Reminders

The calendar app on your phone can be a time in your calendar, and set up notifications and reminders to help you stay on track. A calendar on the fridge, an agenda, or even the classic wall of post-it notes surrounding your workspace – whatever works for you!

3. Get Comfortable Saying 'No'

Remember why you're studying and recognize the importance of your time. You may have to get used to saying no to social obligations, and your friends may have to get used to seeing a little less of you for a while. The real ones will understand, and will still be there when you're free.

4. Reduce Distractions

On the same note, one of the biggest challenges of online study is the sheer number of distractions readily available when you're working from home. Social media, pets, TV, household chores… these are the excuses for serial procrastination. If you can't seem to focus while working from home, try designating an area just for working to help you stay on track. If you're doing a reading that doesn't require an internet connection, disconnect and turn off your phone for a while.

5. Keep Good Notes

There are many different kinds of learners: some learn best by ear, others by reading. Recognize your learning style and keep notes accordingly. One good approach is to write your notes out in longhand in a book while you watch a lecture, and then type them up afterwards. Studies have shown many students remember better writing by hand, and the process of reviewing your notes as you type them up helps reinforce the lesson.

6. Don't Let the Work Stack Up

Your course load is balanced so that if you're reasonably efficient in your work habits, you should be able to excel. But this also means that if you get behind in your work, it can be difficult to catch up! Make sure if you lose a work day for whatever reason, you don't dawdle when it comes to making up for it.

7. Don't Beat Yourself Up

Even the most disciplined among us will have days when we don't get as much done as we'd like, and life's little emergencies can disrupt your studies. There's no sense in beating yourself up over it! When you turn your work into a source of stress, your mind can come up with some very clever ways to avoid that stress. After a while, you can end up focused on the guilt you feel for not doing the work, rather than the challenges of the work itself, and that's not a recipe for success. It's also important to communicate to your professor if you are running into challenges during the course. Professors are there to help you, and provide guidance!

8. Don't Cram

Students pulling all nighters and skipping out on basic hygiene to cram for an exam is better left to teen movies than your own studies. For one thing, you won't absorb more than a fraction of what you read in this way, and for another, any slim benefit you get from cramming will be more than offset by the impact of writing your exam while exhausted. Crack the books a week earlier and take regular breaks instead.

If you follow these tips, you should be very successful in your online course work. Keep striving to be great and it will all work out. 👍

3 | Summer Bucket List

Maggie Walsh, Centennial ARM

"Once school gets out, I'll have so much more time to do the things I want." "No, haven't started that project yet. I'm planning on doing that over the summer." "I really liked that topic we covered in class. In fact, I want to spend most of the summer doing more research on it."

With the spring semester coming to a long-antici-pated close, and the summer right around the corner, it's about the time when we start hearing phrases like this left and right Having ideas of things to do over the summer is amazing, and extremely beneficial. It gives us time to better ourselves and study or pursue something we don't get the chance to do during the school year. These are extremely noble intentions, of course, but how often do we actually write that novel, paint that mural, or do that research?

I am a huge proponent of the over-the-summer mission, and over the years I have come up with a system that helps me to make my goals a reality. You can use this system the same way I do, or use it as an inspiration to the come up with a plan that will work for you. Either way, let's make this summer when we finally do those things we've always planned on doing.

The secret to my productivity is my game plan. Before accomplishing any task, large or small, I have to get my ideas out of my head and onto paper, because if I just have my ideas bouncing around in my head all day, I'll either get over- whelmed and never want to approach them, or I'll get stuck in the mentality of "I'll get at it at some point." Having a physical place to record my thoughts helps me to stay organized and motivated so I can take steps towards accomplishing my goals.

The first thing I do is compile a big master list of everything I want to get done. No organization, no filters, just brain dump every last idea I have. After that, I start to whittle it down to a manageable number of objectives. I'll combine similar ideas into one. I'll break down vague aspirations into something more concrete, and I'll outright cut things that I know I'll never get to.

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> ❝
>
> Nothing is quite as satisfying as when I see one of my game plans with all of the objectives highlighted in green.
>
> ❞

Next comes the nitty-gritty. I organize my pruned master list into either a rough timeline, or if it's not very time-sensitive, manageable categories. Then I go through every objective and write

a detailed action plan for how I am going to accomplish it. I start with an overview at the top so I remember what it is I really want to do, then break it down as far as I need to until it feels manageable. I usually include some kind of checklist or progress bar I can update as I go along, so I can easily see where I am. Nothing is quite as satisfying as when I see one of my game plans with all of the objectives highlighted in green.

This system probably seems obsessive and overwhelming, and it might be. For some, having a ten-page, multi-subtopic, color-coded google doc for everything might be overkill. But if you're a visual learner like me, this might help. I always find that when I take the extra time to write out what I want to get done, and I see my intimidatingly long list of things to do clearly written out with exact instructions on how to get started, I'm a lot less scared and even excited to start crossing things off. So, if it's using this system or something else, make this summer the one where you finally complete everything on your bucket list. 👍

4 | Music Might Help You Study Better?

Angela Nicastro, Pinney ARM

It's not unusual for people to plug in their headphones when they walk to work or class, while they clean, or while they exercise, but what about when they study? In the last few years of being a student, I have noticed that while most students listen to music sitting on the shuttle or for most of the day, I rarely see students listening to music while they study. Now for some people, they just know music is more distracting, and that's OK – sometimes I even study better in pure silence. Other people may just have a TV or podcast on in the background so there are some voices, but nothing that could really distract them while studying.

The topic of "is music good for studying" is actually still being intensely studied; some studies have shown that people who worked in silence received higher scores than those who listened to music, while others say the complete opposite. The one thing most studies have agreed on, though, is that softer music tends to work better for studying. This could range from classical music to instrumental to slow pop, etc. There are even multiple YouTube channels that livestream music to study to, also known as "lofi hip hop radio-chill/study beats"; usually it's an image of an animated girl at her desk with her awesome cat by the window. This music can livestream for hours, and is still available after the initial livestreaming. Due to this being a popular style of music, more genres have come out with similar ideas, so I'm sure if you wanted to listen to something specific, it might be there!

So, what are some of the reasons music might help you study? One reason would be that it makes you feel less lonely when you are studying by yourself; listening to anything with people singing or talking can fill the room so there's not just silence, and when you do take that ten-minute study break, you also have something to relax to until you go back to that textbook.

The big, main reason music might help you study better is because when you are listening to music you like, your brain releases dopamine, which helps bring pleasure. It can also affect behavior and physical functions such as learning, motivation, sleep, attention, mood, pain processing, etc., which we as students experience every day. If we are being honest, not all of us like studying. We find it boring, might have difficulty paying attention, or just feel tired. Some studies have said the reason for this could be that your dopamine levels are low if it's a topic you don't take pleasure in studying, so the idea is that if you listen to music you like, your brain will release more dopamine, help you with that "tiredness" or boredom, and give you a little more motivation to keep working.

This goes into the next reason to listen to music while studying: overall motivation. You go to the gym and listen to music to get pumped to hop up on that treadmill, right? Well, use that same mindset for studying! It's basically the same thing, but instead of giving your overall body a workout, studying is mostly for your brain. Listening to music can bring on the same effect and get you motivated, along with finding a comfortable place to study and setting up all of your materials the way you like it.

Obviously, listening to music might not work for you. I know sometimes I get distracted when listening to music, so if you find yourself feeling distracted with music, try putting on a movie or podcast you've already seem or listened to, so nothing new will catch your attention. And the next time you sit down and crack open your homework or study for a big test, try looking up "study music" to see how it helps you. You might be surprised by the results! ☝

5 | How to Professionally Email Your Professors

Sara Slaiby, Newbury & Fairfield ARM

Emailing is such a large form of communication in our daily life, whether we like it or not. Emailing is a great, professional way to contact your peers, boss, professor, etc., especially now that we are all completing our schoolwork remotely from home. Learning the proper format for emailing will greatly benefit you in not only your college career, but also in your future endeavors in the workforce.

1.   Always start your email with a salutation. You can begin by saying "Dear Professor [Last-Name] with a comma. Unless very specifically asked otherwise, you should address your professors by Professor [Last Name]. If your professor has a doctorate, it is proper form to address them by saying Dear Dr. [Last Name]. Please make sure that when you are typing your professor's last name, you **spell it right**. This can quickly be double checked by reviewing previous emails sent from your professor, looking at the syllabus, or even looking at your professor's email.

2.   When typing your email, do not use slang or unprofessional jargon. It is important that you use formal language. Your professor does not want to dissect your email to figure out what you are trying to say. Also, remember to use proper grammar. There is nothing more frustrating than receiving an email that you do not understand, and having to email for clarification, wait for a response, then re-answer the question once you receive the new email is frustrating.

> " There is nothing more frustrating than receiving an email that you do not understand… "

3.   Explain why you are emailing, and make it as concise and straight-to-the-point as possible. Your professors receive dozens of emails daily, and they are responsible not only for hosting classes and grading, but also replying to questions, discussions with their peers, etc. By addressing your concerns in a precise manner, it will allow the professor to answer your questions without any confusion or misinterpretation.

4. The most important tip for emailing your professor is to make sure that your question cannot be answered elsewhere. Before you email your professor, look at the syllabus, look at the course calendar, and ask your peers. Take the initiative to answer as many of your own questions as possible because remember, for every one question you have for your professor, they have 10+ questions to answer from all your peers

5. Remind your professors who you are. This is such an important piece of every email to professors, because they have dozens (or hundred) of students that they teach/interact with weekly. If you are a part of a 60+ student lecture, and the professor teaches three or more of the same size lectures, it is hard to imagine that the professor can remember who you are or what class you are referring to.

6. Finally, make sure you are polite and thank your professors for their time. You can even write something like "I hope you are doing well and staying safe!" just to remind your professor that you recognize they are a person, too, and are going through the same struggles that we all are. Being polite can never harm anything.

I hope that these tips were helpful, and provided you with insight on how to better communicate with your professors via email. Remember, professional, concise, and polite is the key! ☝

Ear Buds-In: To-Do List-Done!

Caitie Barry, Grasso ARM

There are two types of people in this world: those who love to listen to music while they study, and those who don't. Both are completely valid, but I am going to be focusing on those who listen with music today.

There are so many reasons why you should try listening to music while you work on homework, write an essay, or study for an exam. First, a lot of times when you're in public spaces, it is really easy to get sucked into conversations or distracted by all the different noises. Having some form of music playing in your ears helps create a sort of tunnel vision, keeping you focused on the task at hand. Also, people are way more likely to leave you alone and not distract you if you have ear bud/ air pods/ headphones in. No one wants to be "that guy." Listening to music can also boost your

mood enough to get rid of some unwanted test anxiety and any stress you have while you complete your work. It can help you into the zone, and you can confidently attack your to-do list. I know that as soon as I put on my favorite study playlists, I feel invincible.

The key to a good playlist for studying is for it to be calm enough to not distract you, but still good enough to put you in a positive and productive mood. Everyone has their own individual musical tastes, so it's best to create your own individual playlist, but if you are in need of inspiration, Spotify has dozens of different playlists for different types of studying moods, including all-nighters and essay writing.

Good luck, and happy studying! 👍

Can Procrastination Be A Good Thing?

Gabby Christofor, Centennial ARM
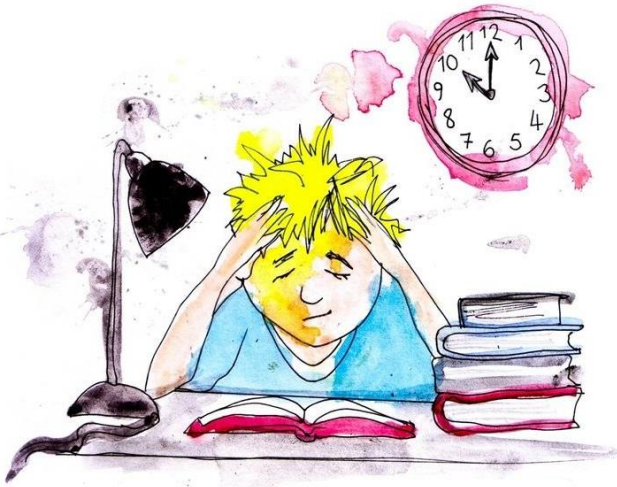
I'm going to start off this article with a confession: this is a product of procrastination. This is not the usual case of writing and handing in an essay a couple hours before it is due; it is the opposite. I am writing this article over a month in advance as an act of active procrastination. There are different types of procrastination and various levels of procrastinators, even going to the extreme of people that identify themselves as precrastinators. The overall question is: can procrastination make you a better worker?

To start, ask yourself where you think you fall on the spectrum of procrastination. Do you get all your work done on the day that it is assigned to you? Do you usually wait a couple of days to continue the work after you started the project, or do you the work the night, even maybe hours before, the assignment is due? No matter where you fall, there are pros and cons to your work tactics. Whether you are a *procrastinator* or *procrastinator,* you can take tips from the opposite end of your spectrum to become a more effective and creative worker.

I will begin with precrastinators, who are those who get work done right away. If this is you, other students definitely look up to you. They might even aspire to be like you. You are the kind of person that hears about an assignment from a professor, starts, and could possibly finish it within the next couple of days. You have great time management skills and everyone that works with you will be satisfied. However, you could have something to learn from procrastinators!

Moderate procrastinators are people that begin work in advance, but then leave it be for a period of time. This time is like an incubation period for your thoughts to develop and come to life. This allows for ideas to come and go. You can acknowledge the bad and accept the good. There have been studies done that moderate procrastin-

We always end up finishing the most important piece of work, but we deceive ourselves into doing work that is seemingly less important in the meantime, when in reality they are equal. Try to stay away from passive procrastination. That is when you watch TV or sleep instead of doing any work at all. Robert Benchley once said something I find to be very true: "Anyone can do any amount of work, provided it isn't the work they are supposed to be doing at that moment."

If you are able to identify what kind of procrastinator (or procrastinator) you are, you will be able to improve your work performance. If you tend to do work very quickly, try to take some time to slow down and let thoughts expand in your mind over a period of time. If you procrastinate to the point of stress and anxiety begin to work towards starting sooner and ask for help when needed. Great work IS sometimes rushed – the Gettysburg Address was written last minute and is known as one of the greatest speeches of all time. The words, "I have a dream" were not in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s original draft; he was writing new thoughts right before he went on. As Aaron Sorkin said, "You call it procrastinating, I call it thinking." Embrace procrastination and let those mild ideas evolve into something eccentric. 👍

nators are the most creative. They learn what their task is, and it stays in the back of their minds until the right ideas stick. Learn from this level of procrastinators and quit on a high note. Stop when you are proud and excited with the work because then you can't wait to get back and continue it later. You don't want to wait too long to start the work, though, because then no new ideas will come up.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I am an active procrastinator. That means I make a To-Do list, then number them with their importance. I will do all the work on the list except for the task labeled as #1. I always thought this was a bad trait, but as I learned today, it is actually effective.

Citations:

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Martina McGowan Follow @MartinaMcGowan Martina McGowan, et al. "10 Ways to Show Your Ability to Handle Pressure at Work." *Business 2 Community*.

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