

Succeeding as an Online or Distance Learning Student

During the COVID-19 disruption to classes, there will be many adjustments and unanticipated changes. This guide is intended to help support students during these transitions. Any students wishing to talk more about active learning strategies may make a Zoom, phone or email [consultation](#).

First, recognize that you, your classmates and your professors will all be making ongoing adjustments. Being flexible, patient and open to changes will help everyone work together. Information on personal [counselling](#) for BU students and resources are available digitally.

Second, without the structure of classes, you will need to create structure for yourself in order to succeed as an online or distance learner. In online or distance learning, making a [study schedule](#) will be even more important. Check out these suggestions for succeeding at distance or [remote exams](#).

Online or distance classes are just as intellectually challenging as on-campus courses. If you are taking online classes, you may find that your professors or classmates seem distant, or that more written communication skills are required or that your ability to motivate yourself to work independently is challenged. There will be [adjustments](#) to make to an Online Learning Environment. When classes are not held at the time that you have learned to expect, it can be easy for procrastination to creep in and motivation to fall. You may not feel the same pressure to structure your life around your course work, so what follows are some guidelines to help you keep on track.

Plan your time

Choose your preferred tool for keeping track of assignments, readings and rescheduled tests. It does not matter whether this is your BUSU agenda, your phone or a wall calendar. Whatever it is, pick something that you will actually use (rather than sit in the bottom of your backpack). A wall calendar has the added benefit that your family or roommates can see when you are likely to be unavailable. Working from home is still working! A BU [term calendar](#) can help you make adjustments from your original syllabi or course outlines. Watch for communication from your faculty on changes to due dates, assignments and tests and update your calendar.

Block out time for class sessions to review the material your professor makes available. In some cases this will mean more reading assignments and in some cases this will mean more time required to review lecture slides. Try to block out five or six one hour blocks per week for each course. If there is a course that you already know you procrastinate about, try for 10-12 half hour blocks of time per week. The [Online Resource Guide](#) provides information on breaking up your study time, setting study goals and making learning a [habit](#).

Be realistic about how much you are able to accomplish in one day. Think about building in extra buffer time for big assignments, and setting a self-imposed rough draft deadline a few days before the actual deadline. Use the updated syllabi or course outlines to draft a weekly schedule. What one thing can you get done today that will make this week more manageable? Divide and conquer!

Adapted with thanks from materials from Ryerson University and the University of Virginia.

It will be up to you to define the structure of your day. Once you know how much time you will need to devote to your coursework, think about the best time of day for you to do that. Are you a morning person? If not, don't plan on working at 8 am! If you find that you are having trouble sticking to a schedule, consider keeping a [time log](#) of just how much time you are spending on various activities each day. If the results show that you are spending too much time on Netflix, then this will help you identify your 'black holes of time' and re-align your daily activities with your priorities. Check out these [anti-procrastination](#) and [motivation](#) strategies.

Discuss schedules, boundaries and expectations with family or roommates

Your family and friends will follow your lead – let them know that you need to prioritize your coursework but that you also consider their needs and schedules. Working out a 'new normal' with your roommates or family requires some open conversations about adjustments.

Allow yourself time for relaxing and being with family and friends, even if it is only [digital communication](#). Knowing that you have made time for socialization will make it easier to get down to the hard task of reading or reviewing slides.

Think about the type of tasks you will be doing. Will you need to engage in online class discussions with a speaker and microphone? Is this set for particular times of the week? Your family or roommates will be better able to support your learning if everyone is aware of each other's needs. You might want to consider working during the same hours to reduce the temptation to socialize rather than study. Plan ahead to share technological resources or favourite working spaces. Clarify child-care and household duties.

Prepare your study space

Keep your learning materials handy to make it easier to complete assignments. If possible, keep paper, pens, chargers, laptop and other materials together to make work convenient. If you have a dedicated space to set up your work station do so, and if not, try keeping it together in a 'desk in a bag' with a spare backpack or box.

Advice at this time discourages public gatherings and encourages social distancing. Do you have reliable internet access? The library remains [virtually](#) available. Are you comfortable with Moodle? There are lots of resources available under the first course category '[Student Services](#)'. The nature of technology is to expect the unexpected. There may be glitches so ensure that you keep copies of your work (preferably time and date stamped) even after it has been submitted.

If you need quiet space to engage in online classes and there is background noise, make a 'class in session' sign for your door. Remember to mute the microphone as needed. If you have trouble shifting your focus away from your apartment, dorm or roommates, try quiet breathing exercises or mindful meditation as you sit down. Take a few minutes before each study or class session to think about what you will be covering. Try to review the learning objectives or learn how to make [how to make study questions](#) to keep your learning on track and manageable

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If your class moves online, it may have discussion boards. Think of these as virtual class discussions; they are a chance to share your ideas with peers and show your professor your critical thinking skills and that you are prepared for class. Even if the professor doesn't comment on your contributions, they are reading and reviewing the conversation. Ask questions, share ideas and engage!

Use resources

Check the BU [coronavirus](#) page for regular updates.

Depending on your course and your text, online resources may be available to help get you through the next few weeks. Check out these [MindTap or Cengage resources](#)

While it may take some time for offices to return every email or find the answer to every question, many offices on campus remain open and active. Reach out and ask for help. Student counselling, advising and other [appointments](#) continue to be available by phone, video conference or email.

Be patient with your faculty as they work to reformat courses or address unforeseen issues. Know how to contact your professors if you need clarification and know how they wish you to submit coursework. Do not expect an immediate response if you email your professor at midnight!

More resources

Ryerson University's Guide to Succeeding in [Online Courses](#)

[12 Study Tips](#) for Online Learners

[Student blog](#) on staying on task with online study