TIPS FOR SUCCEEDING IN ONLINE CLASSES

In this guide, we will cover:
- Staying organized
- Avoiding multitasking
- Making the most of video lectures
- Setting a schedule
- Working with a group

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LEARNING ENRICHMENT CENTER

Staying Organized
- Determine what parts of the class are synchronous (done at a specific time with other members of the class present) and which are asynchronous (done individually at each person's own pace).
- Make a list of due dates, major assignments and quizzes/exams early on in the semester and use a planner or digital calendar to keep up with this information.
- Familiarize yourself with your instructor's virtual office hours and the platform they will be using so that you are able to ask for help when you need it.

Avoiding Multitasking
If you're doing more work on your own and your time is less structured, you might be more tempted to multitask. 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 microtasking).

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 frequently 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 yourself with 5 or 10 minute breaks.
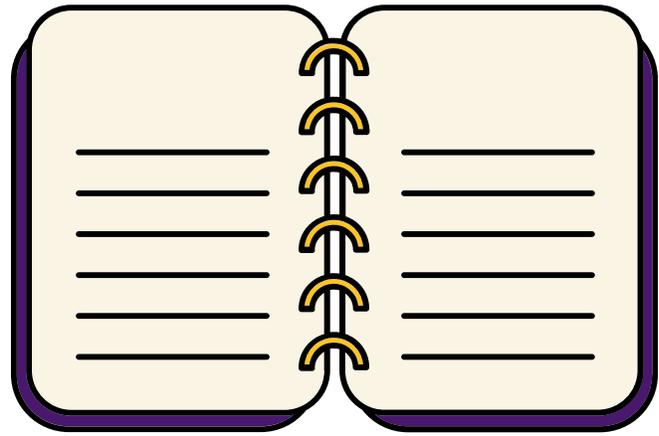
Making the Most of Video Lectures

- Stick to your instructor's schedule as much as you can. Staying on a schedule will help you stay on track and prevent you from falling way behind.
- Find out how to ask questions. Is there a chat feature or a discussion forum?
- Close distracting tabs and apps. Remember that we are not as good at multitasking as we think!
- Continue to take notes as 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 only about 1.5x speed. There hasn't even been research on 2x playback speed, which is probably even worse.

Setting a Schedule

Setting a schedule for yourself can help provide structure and keep you motivated. If you don't already keep a weekly or daily calendar, try something like the example below to organize your time. Include time for exercise and self-care.

8 a.m.: Shower, breakfast
9 a.m.: Call in for remote lecture
10 a.m.: Read chapter 3
11 a.m.: Break-video call with friend
Noon: Lunch
1 p.m.: Read chapter 4
2 p.m.: Recap lecture with classmate
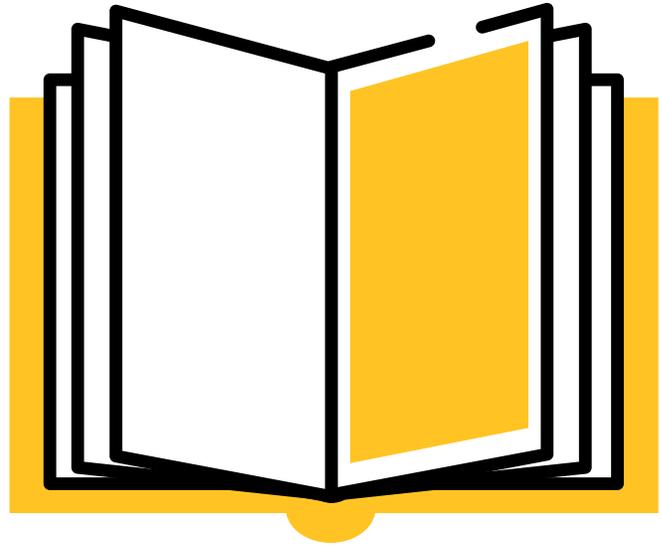
Working With a Group or Team

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, but resist the urge to put it off. Make small progress and stay in touch.
- Meet regularly. 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.
- Set a purpose for meetings and use a shared notes doc.
- 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 one another.
- 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 that it is not being petty; it is your team's responsibility.

Adapted from Center for Academic Innovation at the University of Michigan.