

Learning During COVID-19

In these strange times, the Cornell Community is coming together to do what we can to prevent the spread of the virus and support each other through this challenging period. Cornell's Learning Strategies Center is here to help students think through steps they can take to learn effectively in this new environment. We'll get through this! Try to be patient with yourself, your classmates, and your instructors, and take care of yourself. Making a plan and adjusting your studying may help you feel even a small sense of control.

In this guide, we share tips about:

- Getting Organized in Time and Space
- The Perils of Multitasking
- Learning from Video Lectures
- Being Flexible
- Remote Group Work
- Staying Connected with Other People

Getting Organized in Time and Space

Organizing your Space

You're going to need to carve out a physical space to do your remote learning. More and more people are practicing good social distancing and staying home, and it might be challenging to find a spot at home that's private, quiet, and has internet access. If you don't have an ideal spot, what can you do to create a spot that's good enough?

Tip: If you're healthy don't stay in bed all day!

For useful information, go to the Cornell COVID-19 updates page cornell.edu/coronavirus/

Organizing your Classes

So many things are changing! You may find this period of time a little less disorienting if you can keep track of the changes for each of your classes. Here's an example:

	Biochem	Psych	AnSci
Major Changes			In-person lab is canceled
Important Links	Professor's zoom office hours link	Library link to on-line textbook	
Unknowns you want to resolve	Is prelim 3 canceled or rescheduled?		What's going to happen with the final group presentation?

Organizing your Time

The prospect of a whole bunch of unstructured time might leave you filled with excitement, or dread, (maybe a combination?), and/or a million other feelings. Creating and sticking to a routine will help make this away-from-campus-time optimally functional. Setting a "work-day" schedule for yourself can help provide structure and keep you motivated.

Many students find that LSC's simple weekly planner is useful (lsc.cornell.edu). In COVID-19 times, it might help to color code the different types of activities you'll be doing throughout the week: video lectures, on-line office hours, remote study group meetings, reading/studying on your own, breaks to chat with friends, etc. Like always, you'll be more productive if you can get some exercise, and don't forget that it's effective to break up your day so you're not doing just one thing for hours at a time.

Tip: Change out of our pajamas!

Check out the following videos on the LSC webpage on "Time Management for Online Learning" (lsc.cornell.edu):

- Structuring Your Workday
- Managing Time and Space, Communicating
- Using Time Intervals for Balance and Efficiency

The Perils of Multitasking

When you're participating in classes remotely, it seems like there are even more distractions than in regular classes (email, messages, movies, shopping, etc.) and you might be tempted to multitask. Most people think they can multitask effectively, but the simple truth is that most people cannot.

People think they are "multitasking," but most often people are "microtasking" instead. This means they are switching back and forth rapidly between tasks--NOT doing both tasks at once. Here's what happens when you try to do more than one task at once:

- Assignments take longer, because each time you come back to an assignment 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, because distractions and switching between tasks tires out the brain.
- You'll remember less, because what you are learning doesn't get encoded properly into long-term memory.

Tip: Turn off distractions when you attend class

Instead, do these things:

- Allow yourself to focus on one thing at a time.
- Plan breaks between tasks. Get up and stretch, check on your friends, have a snack, pet the cat.
- Consider the "Pomodoro Method" to help you focus for 25- or 50-minute periods and then reward yourself with 5- or 10-minute breaks.



Learning from Video Lectures

Successful online learners have a growth mindset! They are flexible, tolerate the inevitable technical problems that arise, ask for help when they need it, do regular work for each class, and persist when things are hard.

- If your time zone and internet connection allow, you should attend online classes at the normally scheduled time. If you need to watch the recorded version, set regular times to watch the videos and watch them at normal speed (don't speed them up!).
- Expect to take time before each class to read the syllabus or Canvas instructions so you know before class what's expected of students.
- Take notes just like it's a normal class. The LSC's videos on Cornell Notes (lsc.cornell.edu) offer good general note-taking tips.
- Close down distracting apps while you are watching the lecture. (See "Perils of Multitasking")
- Find out how your professor expects students to communicate questions about the class and/or about the course material: During class? In office hours? Via email? Through Canvas?
- For an in-person class, professors often rely on non-verbal cues to know whether their students are following along or not. In online environments students need to signal to ask for clarification when they are confused.
- Active participation in online learning can help you—and the rest of the class— feel connected, which helps learning.

Being Flexible

Throughout this situation you've already demonstrated that you can be flexible. Nice job! We all—your classmates, your professors, your friends, your family—are dealing with changing our routines and figuring this out as we go.

In order to make this work as well as you can, figure out how you can develop new routines that support your needs. Try new things. See what works. Don't stay in bed all day.

There's a great TED talk called "The Power of Belief" that offers some great advice about developing and maintaining your Growth Mindset.

Remote Group Work

The work you're asked to do in groups, and how to do that work, will depend on your courses.

Some areas of the country and world are going through harder times with COVID-19 than other areas. Be kind with each other, be there for each other. There's a lot going on.

Know that your classmates don't all have access to the same internet and physical workspace resources. Talk to each other and check out what on-line resources work for you and your group (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Canvas chats, etc.), and together decide what is going to work best for everyone.

Group work, both online and in-person, works best when you set regular meetings and stick to them. Agree on the agenda for your meeting and take notes in a shared document so everyone can contribute, follow along, and refer back to the group notes when you're studying on your own.

Check on each other: 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. This is not about being petty, it's about taking care of each other.

Tip: Check in with your group members!

Staying Connected with Other People

This is an important time to stay connected with your friends and family as well as with the Cornell Community.

- Set up video calls with people from your dorm, apartment, or house. Maybe you can even have a regular date to eat lunch together. (The Learning Strategies Center staff and instructors are doing this ourselves.)
- Attend virtual office hours. We set up office hours for you—you are not bothering your instructors or TAs by attending!
- Make appointments to chat with your advisor, supervisor, or other staff you connect with on campus. We're stuck at home too, and we miss you!
- Reach out to students in your classes to find virtual study buddies who can help you stay on-track and accountable. Consider virtual co-working as a way to stay intellectually connected with your peers (make sure to respect each other's thinking time).

This is Temporary

It is important to remember that this situation is temporary. Things will get back to normal. We don't know when, but it will happen. Until then, take a deep breath, do your best, get some rest, and wash your hands.

We are all in this together!

References

Many of these tips are adapted from the Center for Academic Innovation at the University of Michigan—thank you to our colleagues for generously sharing their resources.