

Effective Study for Online Learning | ITLS

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COVID-19 has caused a dramatic change in the education system, forcing most everyone to learn and teach remotely. Because of this, both students and teachers have had to adjust their methods of presenting and retaining information. In this transition, many departments at Utah State University, including the department of Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences, have been dedicated in helping students maintain an enjoyable and effective online learning experience.

Instructors know the difficulty in this adjustment. They understand that there is a higher chance of students falling behind and are therefore doing all they can to improve the quality of their online courses. However, it is also vital for students to look for ways to have the best online learning experience they possibly can. In light of the new year and the second semester of campus-wide online learning, here are some strategies that students can implement to make this semester better than the last:

Set goals and make plans. Hillary Swanson, instructor of various online classes in the ITLS department, discusses different strategies that she hopes her online students will use. "At the beginning of the semester, read through the syllabus and study the overview of assignments," she advises. "Open your calendar and write down assignment due dates, then look at your schedule and decide when you will do each of those assignments. I recommend following a regular work pattern if you can; this will help

you develop a better sense for how to manage your time. I would also recommend creating a master schedule at the beginning of the semester that lays out all your assignment due dates and work hours for each of your classes. I recommend writing notes on your calendar as you go to record how long the assignments really took, as keeping track of this data will help you get a better sense of how long particular kinds of tasks take you."

Make use of rubrics. To assist in managing your time for classes, it's important to review the rubric to help you focus on the right aspects of any given assignment. "Every instructor has a different approach when it comes to grading," Swanson states. "For my courses, I try to spell out very clearly exactly what I expect from students on each assignment. I do that by posting very detailed rubrics. I encourage my students to use the rubrics as templates to guide their work. I recommend that they evaluate their completed work against the rubric, paying attention to the details to make sure their work is meeting all assignment criteria."

Create a dedicated study space. It is important to create a space with limited distractions so that you can be mentally engaged and focused on what you are learning. Creating a space where you regularly go for the primary purpose of studying will make it much easier to hone in on your school work. Make sure that your regular study space is well-lit and comfortable, somewhere where you can sit in an upright position. Avoid making your bedroom your regular study space; it's important that you associate the room you sleep in with rest and comfort, not stress and frustration. If you do choose to make your bedroom your study space, it could negatively affect your sleep cycle.

Stay physically and mentally healthy. It is much easier to be actively engaged in your classes when you are physically and mentally healthy. Be sure to get a reasonable amount of sleep and to try and maintain a regular sleep cycle. It is also important to take periodic breaks from your schoolwork to avoid burnout. Take a 10 to 15 minutes break for every 90 minutes of work. During that time, you can get up and stretch, move around, go for a walk, and take a break screens.

While doing your schoolwork, it can also be helpful to have healthy snacks at hand. Amria Farnsworth, President of the [Student Nutrition Access Center](#) at USU, provides some examples of healthy snacks: vegetables and hummus, a boiled egg with pretzels, cottage cheese with canned pears or peaches, frozen grapes, an apple and a cheese stick, a banana and peanuts, trail mix with dried fruit and nuts (and chocolate!), and wraps that include a

protein, carb, and fat (for example, a tortilla, with chopped veggies and cheese or hummus).

Reach out to others for support. "For me, the most helpful strategy [for online classes] is to reach out to real people," says ITLS Master's student, Arrin Brunson. "I used Canvas or zoom meetings to connect one-on-one with people in my class. In this way, we were able to talk about our challenges and successes, to compare our experiences, and to develop relationships. It helped to have discussions outside of the required coursework. We expect these relationships to continue to thrive as we move from student life to professional life."

Swanson also mentions the importance of reaching out to instructors. "Be sure to send your instructor a message as soon as you have a question, even if you think it is small or silly," she says. "There is really no such thing as a silly question, and often student questions help instructors realize flaws in their course design, which they can then fix for future students. Know that your instructor's top priority is for you to get the most out of their course, and asking questions is one of the most powerful ways a learner can take charge of their own learning."

This new year and semester will more than likely bring diverse academic challenges, but implementing some of these tips and strategies will help you conquer this school year and come out ahead.

For more academic resources and support, visit usu.edu/academic-support or check out this [list of additional resources](#) available to USU students.