

## Navigating School During COVID-19

To say that none of us expected 2020 to start off the way it did would be an understatement. Many of you have found yourself swimming through uncharted territories with online learning. If you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or have so much to do that you don't know where to start, you are not alone. Many students, both undergraduate and graduate, are having the same reactions to the new academic challenges.

One thing that hasn't changed even in these uncertain times is that academic success depends on effective time management. You may not feel like you have a good grip on how to make the most out of your time right now. So today I am going to give you some tips for managing the COVID-19 stress, how to stay on task and riding this out while achieving your academic goals.

### *Organization increases productivity and reduces stress*

#### **Reach Out to Your Adviser**

If you are graduating soon immediately reach out to your adviser or the head of the department. Many schools have special requirements for students who are about to graduate, including projects and papers, off site-work study, or teaching requirements. These requirements many have changed significantly depending on what is expected of you.

#### **Write it Down**

Planning is one of the best stress management techniques out there. Writing your plans, notes, school projects, etc. in a planner can help you retain and remember more information. Stay on track with your school work by gathering all your school resource documents, study-at-home curriculum and any and all instructions from your teachers. Then transfer all exam dates, project deadlines, quizzes, assignments, etc. into a monthly calendar. Once you have plugged in important monthly dates into a calendar, break each week out into a weekly study schedule that works for you.

#### **Plan Your Time Wisely**

Sit down and work through any projects as consistently as possible. If you were already attending classes every day, use that time to work on your remote assignments. Don't deviate from your "schedule" If you can't, aim to block out a few hours in the evening for keeping up with your work. Those who haven't had much experience in self-directed learning may feel the urge to do the work at the last minute. Don't do that. It's better to work early and often, as there

will likely be times you need additional feedback. By waiting until the last minute, you'll probably not get a sympathetic ear from your instructor.

### **Keep Calm and Check Your Email**

It's very important to remember that everyone is still playing it by ear when it comes to figuring out what to do in regards to COVID-19. You must take the time to check your email at least once a day, if not more. Your school has been and will continue to send out regular emails that will keep you updated if anything changes.

### **Keep Everything Organized in One Place**

Many of you who know me personally know that I LOVE sticky notes. If you walk in my office you will find them stuck everywhere. However, I have found that writing things on random slips of paper doesn't work too well while working from home. To avoid anything slipping through the cracks, track all of this information in one place. A planner is the best tool for this, or you can just use basic school supplies like a binder and dividers. The point is to keep all documents and info handy in one convenient place so that you can see it all, stay organized and stress less about forgetting something.

### **Study According to Your Personal Learning Style**

Everyone learns and retains information in different ways. Are you a visual learner, auditory learner, social learner or solitary learner? Take the test below and discover the most efficient way to study according to how you learn best. <https://www.how-to-study.com/learning-style-assessment/>

### **After Studying, Practice Explaining What You've Learned**

If you can explain the lesson to someone else, then your studying has paid off. A simple but effective way to test your retention of the material is by describing what you studied. There are several ways you can do this while still abiding by the social distance rules:

- Practice explaining what you've learned to family members that are self-quarantined with you.
- Practice virtually with friends online.
- Practice in front of a mirror.
- Record yourself explaining what you've learned.

### **Power Through with Music**

The right type of music can be a powerful tool that can boost your mood, energy and focus. Find a study playlist that inspires you.

## **Study with Friends Online**

Even though we are all doing our part in helping reduce the spread of the virus, safe social interaction is still very helpful, especially for studying. Consider organizing virtual study groups with your friends to not only get you your dose of socializing but also to hold each other accountable to your academic goals.

## **Collaborate**

Working together remotely used to be such a hassle and often involved the same people emailing a document back and forth endlessly in hopes that the project would come together (aka most of my college projects). Not only did this lead to a lot of confusion, it made it hard to keep tabs on who had contributed what, and you'd wind up with multiple versions of the same document. Fortunately, it is 2020 and there are many software suites that allow you to work together on a single project with multiple people in real time. Google offers plenty of free tools, such as Google Docs, Sheets, Drive and Slides. All of these can be edited by a group, rather than just one person. Your school may also offer a subscription to Microsoft Office365, which offers collaborative version of their most popular Office programs.

## **Communicate**

If you have never had online classes, you might be surprised how often you will need to reach out for clarification on an assignment. You may also still have group projects that you need to finish, even though you may not be able to meet in-person. If you aren't completely sure about something, send a message to your instructor. Do it as early as possible and it will show your commitment to the class. Explain your problem clearly and show them where you need clarification. Keep it concise- both for clarity and because they probably have other students' emails to answer. If your class has a forum or message board, don't forget to check there, as other students may have the same issue- or have already figured it out. For group projects, it's best to block out time for discussing how the project should move forward.

Above all, you just have to make a conscious decision to manage yourself. Choose to study instead of watch TV, or start writing that paper early. Pay attention to the clock so that you don't waste time. Choose not to delay chores or assignments and figure out what you can do now. And finally, learn to anticipate changes and be flexible. Don't stress out so much about the changes and challenges that bubble up. The situation is rapidly changing every day and everyone is learning as they go. It's best to recognize that, at best, it's going to be a bumpy semester. Your school is likely working out the kinks and as long as you keep your eyes open and manage your time wisely, you'll be able to adapt to whatever comes your way.