

Tips for Success in Distance Education

As a distance-education student, you will be using new sets of skills that may be different than what you are used to in traditional educational settings. Here are some tips for success as a distance education student:ⁱ

Establish a study timetable

Time management is one of the biggest issues faced by both on-campus and off-campus students. A study timetable is essential if you're going to manage your time effectively.

- Start by putting all the important academic dates into your calendar or diary (for example, assignment due dates, semester breaks, study week and exam periods).
- Allocate study time for each subject. Try and work out how long each assignment is likely to take and make sure you allow yourself plenty of time, particularly when you are returning to study after a break.
- Schedule in time for your other commitments and activities aside from study (work, sport, social, family) – both weekly activities and one-off events.
- Place the timetable in a visible position (on the wall – in the bathroom – somewhere that you will see it!).
- Let friends and family know about your schedule so they understand your commitments and time restrictions.

Don't ditch your timetable just because you're having trouble sticking to it. Consider how you can modify it to make it work more effectively for you. Be realistic – some weeks things might not go according to plan, but don't beat yourself up about it. Just get back on the horse and get back on track.

Create a study environment

- If you are studying at home then try and have a space dedicated to your studies, a bit like a mini-office as this will help you to have an organized approach to your studies. By creating yourself a study nook it will help you to get in the 'zone'.
- If studying at home really isn't an option then consider other places, such as the local library or a quiet café.

Identify when and how you study best

- Think about when you are most effective. Are you a morning person or a night owl? Make the most of the time when your brain is really firing.
- Consider how much time you can allocate in one sitting. Do you work best in short, sharp bursts, or do you prefer a slower pace and like to spread it over a couple of hours?

- When you start to lose focus it might be time for a break. Make sure you allocate regular breaks – 20 minutes used effectively is better than three unproductive hours.

Recognize when you are procrastinating

Most people procrastinate, especially when a task is challenging and you don't know where to start. The important thing is to recognize when you are procrastinating and identify why.

- Start by getting rid of distractions. Some things are easier to get rid of than others; put your mobile on silent, close Facebook, don't open your email – FOCUS on the task at hand.
- Remember that the more you put something off, the more stressful it will become down the track. Once you make a start on a task you'll immediately reduce your anxiety about it. Begin by breaking the job into bite-sized chunks, rather than tackling too much at once.

Actively seek support

Don't put off a task because it's too hard – you'll only make it harder for yourself later. If you don't understand something it's OK to ask for help.

- Contact your tutor or lecturer if you have any difficulties with understanding an assignment or subject content (make sure you have relevant staff contact details close at hand).
- Find out if there are forums/discussion boards for specific subjects and courses. These are a great way of connecting with other students and helpful for discussing and clarifying questions about your course or assignments.
- Know how to get in touch with learning skills/academic advisors. They are a wonderful resource and can help you to overcome academic issues you may be experiencing with essay writing, referencing or how to structure your work.

Use your initiative – avoid being a passive student who only communicates with your lecturer when submitting assignments. Take control and be active in asking questions and engaging in online discussion boards. Let your lecturer know you are out there and that you really do care about your studies!

Know what tools and services are available

Become familiar with the resources available to you and make use of them. These services will vary depending on the institution you are studying at but generally include:

- Faculty course advisors
- Online student forums/support groups

- Student services (career advisors, disability and equity advisors, academic/learning skills advisors, counsellors)
- Library services (find out about borrowing and online library resources)
- Online training (web-based training for using software or other institution-specific programs)

Reward yourself along the way

Let us not pretend – online study is challenging. You will need to be motivated, disciplined and, most importantly, believe in yourself. It helps to recognise every achievement, from the little ones right through to the big successes. It might be completing an assignment by the due date, receiving a good mark, improving your grades or attempting something totally new.

Promising yourself a reward can also be motivating and when you finish your task it provides you with an opportunity to reflect on your achievements. For me it's a massage, for my husband it would be a round of golf – what is it for you?

You are the captain of your ship. Sometimes you might need to take a step back and just *breathe*. Independent learning is challenging but it is worth it – and if you believe in yourself, you can do it!

ⁱ <http://www.careerfaqs.com.au/news/news-and-views/tips-for-studying-by-distance-education>