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6 TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

By Tamar Shulsinger | October 18, 2017



One of the most valuable skills you can have as an online student is effective time management. The better you manage your time, the easier it is to achieve your goals. Everyone has the same 24 hours in a day, meaning, it's not about how much time you

have, but *how well* you can manage it.

This is especially important for online students, who are often working full-time, taking care of family, or juggling other commitments. Without the camaraderie of a class to motivate you or having a set time where you need to be on campus, effective time management is crucial to helping you stay focused.

In addition, effective time management not only helps with your learning, but can also make you more productive at work and in your personal life. If you're serious about successfully completing your online degree, it's crucial to find a good time management system to use.

Below are six time management tips to help you stay ahead of your coursework.

Time Management Tips for Online Students

1. Plan Ahead

Your hectic schedule, combined with daily distractions, can easily get in the way of finishing tasks. The best online students know how to set aside time to focus. This includes having a consistent time and workspace, tuning out those distractions, and avoiding surfing the internet.

Despite the flexibility in being an online student, it's important to have frequent engagement with your studies throughout the week. Provide plenty of time to space out your required readings, assignments, and online discussions.

Consider purchasing a calendar you can use to plan your daily and weekly assignments, highlighting:

- Assignments due, including drafts and final submissions
- Activities related to your program, such as study group meetups or on-campus networking events
- Virtual or in-person office hours with professors and advisors

Melanie Kasparian, associate director of assessment for the Northeastern University College of Professional Studies (<http://www.cps.neu.edu/>), shares a sample schedule of what a typical week might look like in her post on how to be a successful online learner (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/successful-online-learning-strategies/>):

Monday	Begin required readings and multimedia
Tuesday	Continue reviewing materials
Wednesday	Post to discussion forum and begin assignments
Thursday	Continue posting and working on assignments
Friday	Read and respond to posts and work on assignments

Saturday

Read and respond to posts and finish assignments

Sunday

Check your work and submit assignments

2. Don't Multitask

Avoid multi-tasking—which can actually decrease your productivity (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/why-you-shouldnt-multitask/>). Focus on one assignment at a time and zero in on the specific task at hand, whether that's studying for an exam, reading a textbook, emailing a professor, or participating in an online forum. Arrange your tasks in order of importance, and pay attention to the three or four crucial tasks that require the most effort.

If you need help staying focused, then consider creating lists using a project management tool, such as Trello (<https://trello.com/>) or Smartsheet (<https://www.smartsheet.com/>), to help organize tasks. If you prefer a traditional to-do list, then look at digital notebooks like Todoist (<https://en.todoist.com/>), Wunderlist (<https://www.wunderlist.com/>), or Evernote (<https://evernote.com/>).

Lastly, concentrate on what needs to get done in the present and avoid anything too far-off. If it's a small assignment that you don't need to address for several weeks, put it on your calendar to focus on when the deadline is closer.

3. Set Up Your Virtual Office

Whether you study at home or your local café, it's important to work in the optimal setting needed to complete your work. Make sure there's high-speed internet, and that you're in a comfortable space with the right lighting, sound, and background. For example, some people prefer to work with headphones on, while others prefer silence or an ambient backdrop with people quietly chatting. Sit in a comfortable chair, and make sure the lighting isn't too dim. Close out your browser windows, and put your phone away.

Along with these elements, make sure you have all the required materials, such as textbooks and industry-specific software. Set up as much as you can ahead of time to stay on task with your coursework.

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4. Block Out Distractions

Make sure to avoid surfing the web excessively. It's easy to become distracted by the news or your favorite celebrity gossip site. Stay focused, and avoid Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools when you need to concentrate on your studies.

If you're struggling to stay focused, then consider the Pomodoro Method (<https://cirillocompany.de/pages/pomodoro-technique>). This technique helps with productivity by arranging how you work to increase efficiency. The tool builds on 25-

minute work sessions, optimizing your time to focus on your online studies. The best way to use this method is to:

- Set a timer for 25 minutes and work uninterrupted for the scheduled period.
- Take a five-minute break to grab coffee, check emails, or do something else.
- Once you've completed four work sessions, treat yourself to a longer, 15-minute break.

If you're still struggling with procrastination, download a website blocker for your Pomodoro sessions. Freedom (<https://freedom.to/>), KeepMeOut (<http://keepmeout.com/en/>), and Switcheroo (<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/switcheroo-redirector/cnmciclhngihalnpfhleggldniplelbg?hl=en>) minimize online browsing and let you follow through on your daily tasks. With these tools, you can block all websites or redirect your favorite sites to your school's homepage.

5. Reward Yourself

It's important to reward yourself after a job well done in order to avoid burnout. Otherwise, it will be difficult to concentrate on even the simplest tasks.

You can reward yourself by celebrating your accomplishments and treating yourself to something you truly enjoy, whether that's watching your favorite show on Netflix or going out to a nice dinner and a movie. If you've been working on an assignment for several months in a row, then take a week off when you're finished.

Also, make sure your time away from your studies is dedicated to fully enjoying yourself. If you're mixing work with leisure, then you may burn out—making it difficult to get back into your routine.

6. Get a Good Night's Sleep

Sleep is essential to rest your body and keep your mind fresh for the next day. Try to get seven to eight hours of rest a night. Pulling all-nighters is less productive than studying consistently. Include sleep in your schedule, and you can reap huge rewards.

Are interested in more tips about how to achieve grad school success (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/>)? Learn more about "How To Be a Successful Grad Student (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/grad-school-advice/>)" or the "Four Industries Where a Graduate Degree Pays Off (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/careers-where-graduate-degree-pays-off/>)." If you're interested in becoming an online student yourself, explore our online graduate programs (<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/programs/#/-/-/online/-/-/-/>).

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