

Effective Study Strategies for Online Courses

There is a learning curve to online courses though, as they are often structured and run very differently than traditional courses.

These strategies are key:

1. Get to Know the Course Format

– At the beginning of the semester, create a master chart or list with all the expectations and information about each course, to decrease the likelihood of making mistakes.



2. Know How You Will Be Assessed

– Take time at the beginning of the course to plan out how you will approach the course material based on how you will be asked to use the material in assessments. This will help you be more efficient and effective in your learning.

- If assessed primarily through writing, it can be helpful to make note of quotes and passages as you read course materials that will help support your writing.
- If assessed with online tests or quizzes, try to take notes on everything you learn and highlight course materials so it's easy to look back at the key information.

3. Don't Procrastinate

– Procrastination can be costly in online courses because of the possibility of running into technical difficulties which can lead to turning in the assignment late. Also, procrastinators may not have time to ask any questions and get a response from their professors before the assignment is due, as they aren't immediately available like they are in a traditional class. Therefore, aim to work on things early to have time to ask questions and get clarification on assignments.

4. Be an Active Learner

– Many online courses are very rigorous. Give yourself time to put forth the proper effort to learn the material. An effective strategy for being an active learner is knowing how you learn best. Think about what works best for you when you're sitting in a traditional class and apply that to your online courses. Some strategies to try are:

- Taking notes during a video (this works well for **reading/writing learners**)
- Listening to a lecture while you're washing dishes or going for a walk (this works well for **kinesthetic learners**)
- Color coordinating or highlighting your notes and reading materials (this works well for **visual learners**)
- Using text-to-speech to listen to course readings (this works well for **auditory learners**)

Use whatever strategies work best for you, don't be passive about your education.

The Challenge of Motivation with Online Classes:

Concentration – Among the challenges of online learning is losing motivation. Motivation is often the driving force that keeps students constantly working hard. Students struggling with motivation should not become too discouraged, as there are strategies that can be utilized to regain motivation, including the following tips:



- **Establish Goals** – Remain motivated by developing goals and following specific steps to attain them. It is best to set small goals that can be attained. One effective strategy is to write small goals on specific days of a calendar. Once you have achieved the goal, cross the day off on the calendar. Goal achievement is a great way to build self-confidence and remain motivated.
- **Create Community** – Make an effort to communicate with other people enrolled in the same online class through message boards where comments and questions can be posted. It is also helpful to regularly communicate with the course instructor. This will provide an opportunity to ask questions or discuss course material.
- **Engage with Others** – Take advantage of forums and chat rooms about the course. Students use these forums to arrange online study sessions with other students.
- **Leverage Social Media** – One way of staying motivated is by leveraging social media circles to your advantage. Posting the course progress online can generate a few congratulations that can make a person feel better and boost motivation toward finishing their education. Social media can also be a means by which people are held accountable. Updates can help keep a person focused on completing their online courses.
- **Use Supportive Tools** – Staying accountable is one of the most important aspects of staying motivated. Fortunately, there is software that can help students stay on task and motivated in their online work. One of the biggest distractions is the lure of websites and social media destinations. Students can now download a plugin for the web browser that prevents them from wandering away from their work and surfing over to a distracting website.
- **Treat Online Courses like Traditional Ones** – Structure online courses to set a routine, just like with in-person courses. Get into a rhythm of waking up at the same time every day, starting your online work at the same time, and finishing at the same time. Treat it just like a traditional course.

- **Take Breaks** –Taking breaks every 50 minutes or so when doing online coursework can help reinvigorate the mind. When taking a break don't let your break last too long. An ideal break lasts for no longer than ten minutes, and during that time, don't get lost in unrelated tasks that distract more than refocus, like playing games or watching TV. Make sure that you get back to your work within a brief amount of time so that you stay focused on your courses.
- **Don't Ignore Nutrition** – When nutrition is poor, people get tired more quickly and end up losing focus more quickly. Eating a balanced meal is key to maintaining a consistent focus throughout the day. Fruits and vegetables should form the core of any diet, followed by carbohydrates and, finally, meat and dairy. Junk food, sugar, caffeine, and carbohydrates can create spikes in energy levels followed by an energy crash, during which it becomes harder to focus and stay on task.
- **Self-Encouragement and Vision** – Some of the most underrated methods of staying motivated are by envisioning the future and encouraging one's self. Part of establishing and envisioning the future involves connecting even mundane coursework with the end goal. These small, frustrating moments in a course can mentally be connected with a person's vision of the future. This simple mental connection can help students power through even the most discouraging moments of taking a course.
- **Work and Life balance** – An easy way to quickly burn out and lose your motivation for sticking with a course is by taking on too heavy of a workload and forgetting to attend to your personal life. Creating that balance has a lot to do with staying on schedule and establishing boundaries. Schedules aren't just meant to get people to stay on task. They're also meant to help people understand when it's time to step away and give themselves a break.

Indulge in some Rewards – Take a step back and reward yourself for a job well done, whether that meant completing a difficult project or scoring well on a test.

*Adapted by CGCC's Title V Project from:
Loveless, Becton. "StudySkills for Students", January 2024, Education Corner,
<https://www.educationcorner.com/study-skills/>. Accessed 3 July 2024*