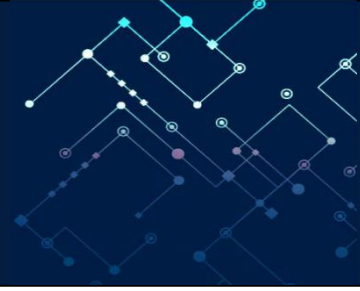# Adjusting Your Study Habits During COVID-19

We'll get through this together.

Things may feel out-of-control right now. You may be facing a lot of unknowns and disruptions. Try to be patient with yourself, your classmates, and your instructors during this time. Take care of your well-being first. Making a plan and adjusting your studying may help you feel even a little sense of control.

> If you have questions or need help with technology, visit Penn State's website for students: [RemoteLearning](#).

Your study habits may need to change. In this guide, we talk about:

- Staying organized
- Avoiding multitasking
- Making the most of your classes
- Setting a schedule
- Trading old strategies for new ones
- Working with a group or team
- Staying connected to other people

Boost your bandwidth during class:

- Turn off video unless necessary
- Use a wired connection if possible
- Locate yourself next to the wireless router, if possible.
- Ask others sharing your Internet service to limit their use during your classes.
- Turn off all other wireless or 'smart' devices
- Your internet service provider may have tools to manage other devices connected to your network.

1. Staying organized

With so many things changing in your courses, you might be reliving that first-week-of-class confusion at a finals-week pace.

Things you might want to track of for each class:

How are the in-person parts of class changing?

- What were the in-person parts of this course (discussion, lecture, lab, etc.)?
- Aside from scheduled class times, are other parts of class available any time?

Are assignments changing?

- Are there new due dates?
- Has your instructor changed the assignment submission process?
- How are quizzes or exams being offered?

What should you do if you need help?

- When and where are virtual office hours being offered for your courses?
- Is there an online forum for asking questions?

One example of a way you could keep track:

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3
Important dates			Paper due Friday
Big changes	No lab Zoom in Canvas	Discussion & video lecture	May do paper or group project
Important links	Canvas Zoom link Office hours		Group paper folder

2. Avoiding multitasking

If you're doing more work on your own and your time is less structured, you might be tempted to multitask. Many people think they can do multiple things at once, but research shows that only about 2% of the population can multitask effectively. Even if you feel like you're multitasking, you're probably not... really, you're switching between tasks very quickly ("micro-tasking").

Multitasking & microtasking downsides

- **Assignments take longer.** Each time you come back to an assignment another app, you have to find your spot, remember what you were doing, etc.
- **You'll remember less.** When your brain is divided, you're less able to commit what you're learning to long-term memory (because it doesn't get encoded properly into your brain).
- **You're more likely to make mistakes.** Distractions and switching between tasks make your brain tired.

What to do instead

When you need to study something important, consider The Magic of Monotasking

- Focus on one thing at a time.
- Take breaks between tasks.
- Consider the "pomodoro method" to help you focus for 25- or 50-minute periods and then reward yourself with 5- or 10-minute breaks.

3. Making the most of classes

- **Stick to your instructor's schedule as much as you can.** Staying on a schedule will help you have a feeling of normalcy and prevent you from falling behind.
- **Find out how to ask questions.** Is there a chat feature? Is there a discussion forum?
- **Close distracting tabs and apps.** Humans are not as good at multitasking as they think! (See #2 above)

- **Continue to take notes as you would if you were there in person.** Handwritten notes can improve your retention.
- **Watch recordings at normal speed.** Research shows that a playback speed of 1.5x can lower your retention and result in lower scores. Faster playback speeds are worse for the complex, multi-step material that is presented in most classes. There hasn't been research on 2x playback speed, but it is probably worse.

4. Setting a schedule

As the situation unfolds, you may have fewer social commitments, group meetings, or work hours. Setting a schedule for yourself can help provide structure and keep you motivated. If you don't already keep a weekly or daily calendar, try something like the example below to organize your time. Include time for exercise and self-care.

If you are living with others and managing limited space, consider sharing your proposed schedule with them, so you can all coordinate your needs.

Schedule Template

	Scheduled Activity	Course Tasks	Personal / Self-care
8am			Shower, breakfast
9am	Class on Zoom		
10am		Read chapter 3 & prep Discussion Question responses	
11am			Break – video call with friend
12pm			Lunch
1pm		Read chapter 4	
2pm	Recap class session with classmate		

5. Trading old strategies for new ones

Your routines may need to adjust during this time. Look for ways to adapt your usual habits or form new ones. For example:

- **If you usually study in a coffee shop or library**, ask yourself what kind of environment helps you study. See if you can recreate that where you are, such as studying at a table, or move to a new spot when you change tasks. If you feel you need background noise, consider a white noise app.

- **If you always study in groups**, try a virtual or phone-based study session with your group.

- **If you thrive on tight timelines, but now have a more open schedule**, think about how working with others or setting up a schedule can recreate that for you. When that gets hard, see if you can set mini-deadlines for yourself or working in 15-minute increments.
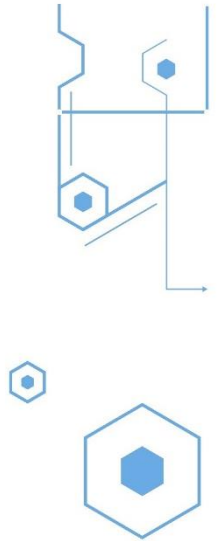
6. Working with a group or team

Remote collaboration will look a little different, but it is definitely possible.

- **Try not to procrastinate.** That group project may be out-of-sight, out-of-mind if you don't see each other regularly. Resist the urge to put it off. Take small steps and stay in touch.

- **Meet regularly**, especially if you usually touch base during class or lab. Consider a quick text on your group chat about progress every couple of days. Have real conversations any week you're working together.

- **Set a purpose for meetings and collaborate on the notes.** Meetings might feel different when using video, even if your team was really good working informally in the past. Try to set the purpose of your meeting in advance. Take notes in a shared document so you can all contribute and follow along. Microsoft Teams and GSuite are free for all Penn State students.

- **Keep cameras on when possible.** As long as you can see whatever you need to collaborate, aim to keep the video visible on your computer screen. Don't assume everyone has unlimited data or enough bandwidth—check first. Seeing others and their expressions can help you feel more connected.

- **Check on each other and ask for backup:** If someone has been absent from your group meetings or chat, ask them if they are OK and still able to participate. If you don't get a reply in a day or two, let your instructor know. This isn't being mean, instead it shows you care about your teammates.

7. Staying connected to other people

Even if we limit how much face-to-face time we spend with others, staying in touch is more important than ever.

- Staying in touch with instructors, classmates, and teammates is important for your success.
- Talking or texting loved ones and friends can help reduce stress and anxiety, so can taking time to laugh.

> ## Please remember, this too will pass.
> If COVID-19 has disrupted your plans, ended an experiment you were excited about, or you feel like this happened at the worst possible time, remember that this is temporary. You will find your way and get back on track. Penn State faculty and staff are here to help. Take a deep breath, do your best, and **wash your hands**.

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