Learning Online: A Guide for Students

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Introduction

"E-LEARNING DOESN'T JUST HAPPEN – IT REQUIRES CAREFUL PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION"- Anonymous

For many students, attending university introduces a period of great change due to the vast number of new and difficult challenges. Students must navigate various learning formats including lecture-style, blended learning, flipped-classrooms and laboratories, while simultaneously managing other aspects of their daily lives (e.g., part-time jobs, clubs, sports, volunteer work, family). Student life is certainly a "busy one", and the sudden transition to online learning has added an even greater sense of unease. This guide aims to help answer some of the questions students may have about e-learning, as well as act as a reference guide for students as they begin to navigate this new learning format.

Please note that this guide is adapted specifically for students at the University of Ottawa, however, the majority of the content is applicable to students at any institution. This eBook (and any documents or diagrams within the text) can be adapted specifically to your institution if you choose to do so. This eBook is an Open Education Resource (OER).

1. What is online learning?

In this chapter, you will gain an understanding of what learning online entails and how best to be successful. You'll learn what to do, what not to do, and common issues learners face when transitioning to an online learning format.

In this chapter

- What is online learning?
- The dos and don'ts of online learning!
- What makes online learning so challenging?
- Activity: What is online learning? How should I approach it?

For many students, this upcoming semester is the beginning of their online learning journey. While many students have developed a routine for how to study and learn concepts taught in-person, the idea of studying and learning online is still completely foreign for most individuals. Many students, if not the majority, will make the mistake of using the same strategies they use for in-person learning in their new online learning environment. **Distance learning is not the same as in-class learning.** This simple mistake is the root of the many misconceptions and challenges faced when students begin to learn online. To be a successful online learner, you must first learn-to-learn online. In this section, we will clear up the common misconceptions students struggle with, identify the dos and don'ts of online learning, and discuss some of the issues you may face as you begin to learn remotely (and how to prevent these issues!).

1.1 What is online learning?

Let's start with the basics: **What is online learning? How is it different than traditional in-person learning formats?** Below is an interactive diagram to help you begin to understand some of the key differences you will experience as you begin to learn online.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/learningonline/?p=5

As you can see, there are some pretty major differences. You will need to account for that when you study so that you can stay on track to reaching your goals.

1.2 The dos and don’ts of online learning!

Now that we’ve established the major differences between online learning and traditional in-person learning formats, it is important that we identify the dos and don’ts of online learning.

PDF of the diagram can be found here.

The Dos and Don'ts of *Online Learning*

Do

- **DO** communicate professionally online and in the virtual classroom
- **DO** read the course intended learning outcomes (ILOs) frequently to gauge progress
- **DO** let your professor know if you have questions
- **DO** make a plan for the semester (i.e., a schedule)
- **DO** define a workspace and set boundaries
- **DO** keep track of deadlines and due dates

Don't

- **DON'T** just study anywhere. Be smart with study locations
- **DON'T** think you need to do this alone
- **DON'T** be afraid to speak up
- **DON'T** neglect your mental health
- **DON'T** be afraid of asking for help
- **DON'T** forget to identify yourself when communicating (i.e., emails)

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GROWTH & GOALS

FRG FLYNN RESEARCH GROUP

uOttawa

1.3 What makes online learning so challenging?

1.3.1 Too much flexibility

When learning online, students are no longer required to travel to-and-from campus at specific times to attend class. Instead, students can choose whether to attend class synchronously or asynchronously[1]. In a *synchronous course*, students are required to attend the virtual lecture or session at the same time as the professor, or in other words, attend the virtual session "live". While this allows students to participate directly in the lecture and ask questions, many dislike this learning style due to the rigid schedule. Students must attend the lecture at the specified time. In an *asynchronous course*, students are not required to attend the lecture at the same time as the professor. Instead, students are able to view a recording of the lecture afterwards at their own convenience. While this allows for a highly flexible schedule, many students quickly fall behind the rest of the class. Students who choose this learning style must have a schedule in place to ensure that they watch the recordings at a pace that's similar to the professor.

You may think that one of the options described above sounds perfect for you – and that's great! However, we strongly suggest you remain cautious. Learning online, no matter which format (synch or asych) introduces way more flexibility to students' schedules than traditional in-person methods. It's important that you create a schedule and stick to it. This illusion of flexibility should not be viewed as "spare time", but instead should be broken down into tasks so that you stay on track. Procrastination is your worst enemy! You must commit to your schedule to ensure you cover all of the necessary content and meet deadlines. Proper time-management, dedication, and setting goals are all learning skills that are essential to prevent this obstacle.

1.3.2 Loss of Social Contact

Previously, you were surrounded by like-minded students on a daily basis. Just like you, these students were learning the same material, studying for the same midterm, and writing the same paper. Having peers around you to help with assignments, remind you of deadlines, and send you class information you missed was an extremely valuable study tool for many students. Luckily, this study tool doesn't have to disappear when learning remotely. Online learning provides many avenues for students to chat and create those essential connections with classmates. Many students who have taken online courses have reported feeling alone. You can prevent this and help yourself by connecting with your peers. Even befriending just one fellow classmate can have a positive impact on your studies. While you may not see each other face-to-face, you can still communicate just the same. Try to keep an open mindset and embrace this change!

Unsure how to form a connection in a virtual setting? Here are some tips[1]:

1. Offer extra warmth in video conferences, discussions, and chat rooms by adding additional comments
2. Introduce yourself (e.g., name + program)
3. Participate frequently (aloud or in the chat)
4. Turn on your video
5. Ask for help if you need it (odds are another classmate is willing to help!)

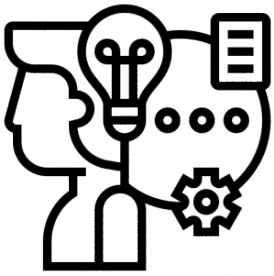
1.4 Concluding Activity

Complete the following activity below by filling in the blanks (question 1: similar/different, question 2-4: should/shouldn't)

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/learningonline/?p=5

Now that you've successfully got a grasp on what learning online entails, as well as how best to approach it, we will discuss learning skills that will help you succeed in an online environment in the next section!

2. Developing learning skills for distance courses



In this chapter, you'll develop several learning skills that are essential for success in an online learning course. By the end of this chapter, you will have fostered the necessary skills to succeed in an online learning environment.

The transition to online learning marks the beginning of a new way of studying for many students. Many of the strategies students have previously adopted for traditional in-person courses are no longer applicable or effective in an online learning environment. However, this should not be viewed as a bad thing. Transitioning to online learning will allow students to further develop their learning skills and increase their adaptability. This represents a period of great change and growth for many students. Try and embrace it!

In this chapter

- What is self-regulated learning?
- Growth mindset: what is it and why it is essential for online learning?
- The importance of setting priorities and making a plan
- The SMART goal framework
- Metacognition as a study tool
- Activity: Have you developed the required learning skills?

2.1 What is self-regulated learning?

Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to the strategic control of one's thoughts, actions, and motivations in order to achieve personal goals and continually adapt to the environment[2, 3]. Self-regulated learners possess three main skills: [4]

1. The ability to take strategic control of how they approach their goals.
2. A willingness and preparedness to face any challenges (build resiliency).
3. The drive to seize any opportunities that might arise.

Research shows that self-regulated learners experience **increased academic, metacognitive, self-efficacy, and time-management skills!** [5,6] In the remaining sections within this chapter, you will develop the necessary learning skills to become a self-regulated learner.

2.2 Growth mindset: what is it and why it is essential for online learning?

2.2.1 What is a growth mindset?

A mindset can be described as your personal beliefs about yourself and your own abilities. It is an internal dialogue with yourself about what skills you possess, as well as your ability to further grow and develop those skills. According to Carol Dweck from her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*,"[In a growth mindset,] people believe their most basic abilities and qualities can be developed and cultivated through dedication and hard work. Brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities."[7] Whereas in a fixed mindset, "...most people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success–without effort. They're wrong."[7]

Ideally, students should develop a growth mindset. A growth mindset will allow students to continually develop their skills and accept setbacks or failures as a part of the learning process. In the context of online learning, this mindset is especially important as it will allow students to embrace the new challenges faced with online learning, rather than shy away from a challenge (like in a fixed mindset). Those with a growth mindset will take on the challenge of online learning wholeheartedly, will not shy away from difficulties, and will emerge with increased learning skills, new strategies, and ultimately, greater success.

For more information about growth and fixed mindsets, watch the following videos:

- Mindsets: Fixed Versus Growth.[8]
- The dirty little secret about growth mindset.[9]
- James Dyson discusses success through failure.[10]

2.2.2 Why is a growth mindset essential for online learning?

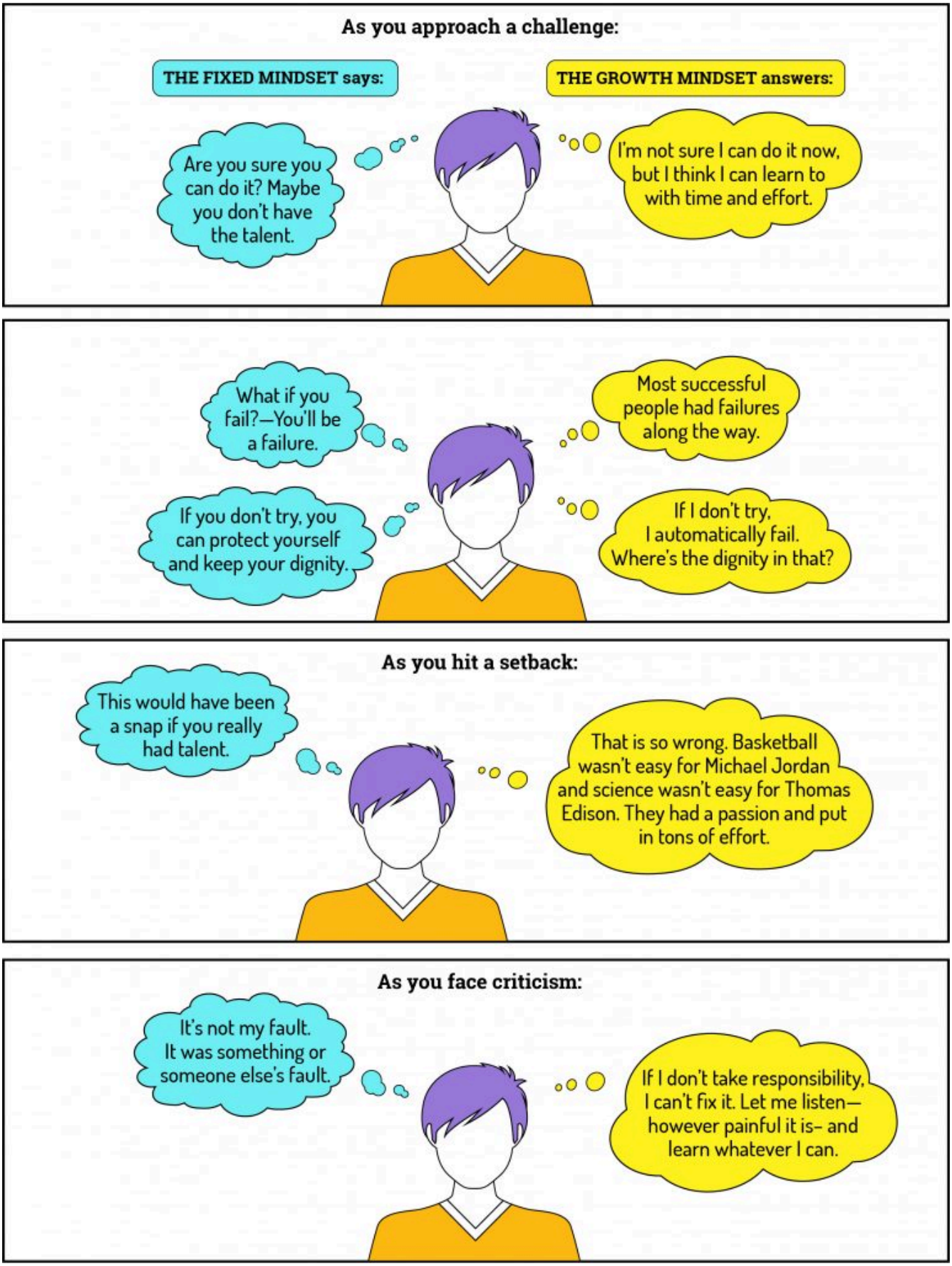
Online learning is a new format for many students. The mindset students possess will have a huge impact on

how they approach this new challenge, and will ultimately dictate how they are able to perform. Consider the following diagram below:

Fostering a growth mindset when approaching online learning will help students succeed. They will embrace this new way of learning, rather than reject it and shy away. A growth mindset consists of several qualities that are essential for successful online learning:

- **Adaptability**. Online learners must be able to adapt to different learning formats. Online learning may take on the form of virtual classrooms (i.e., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), online readings, interactive activities or quizzes, or group projects/assignments. Being able to adapt is key. If students foster a growth mindset they will accept new formats and embrace the change. Instead of shying away from things that are different, students with a growth mindset will take on the task wholeheartedly and view it as a challenge, not a setback.
- **Grit**. Successful online learners and individuals possessing a growth mindset have both developed grit. Grit is a combination of passion and perseverance and is crucial to maintaining motivation. This quality will allow students to push through difficulties, overcome failure, and ultimately, achieve their goals.

Fostering a growth mindset is not easy, and that's okay! With effort and dedication, you will be able to transform your mindset into a growth mindset. Practice listening to your internal mindset voice. Often times this internal dialogue can get in the way of you achieving your goals. As you approach a challenge or setback, what is your mind saying? If you find you're adopting a fixed mindset, actively strategize to transform your mindset into a growth one. Remember that you have a choice. You can choose to interpret setbacks or failure as a challenge and work to overcome these difficulties (growth mindset), or you can shy away from the challenge and believe that your failure is evidence of your own shortcomings (fixed mindset). Try to transform your mindset into a growth one and act on it. Examples of growth vs. fixed mindset statements could include:[4]


As you approach a challenge:
THE FIXED MINDSET says:
THE GROWTH MINDSET answers:
Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don't have the talent.
I'm not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort.
What if you fail?—You'll be a failure.
Most successful people had failures along the way.
If you don't try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity.
If I don't try, I automatically fail. Where's the dignity in that?
As you hit a setback:
This would have been a snap if you really had talent.
That is so wrong. Basketball wasn't easy for Michael Jordan and science wasn't easy for Thomas Edison. They had a passion and put in tons of effort.
As you face criticism:
It's not my fault. It was something or someone else's fault.
If I don't take responsibility, I can't fix it. Let me listen—however painful it is– and learn whatever I can.

2.3 The importance of setting priorities and making a plan

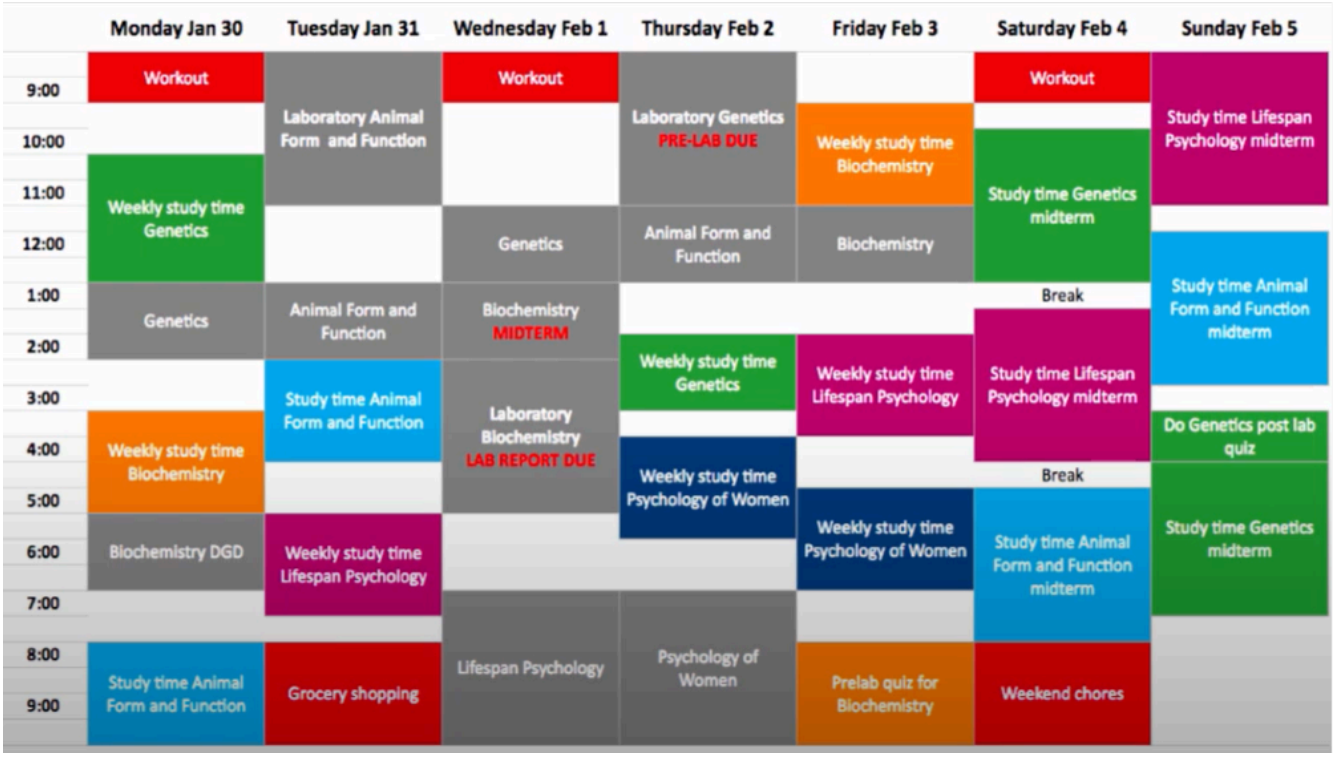
Online learning introduces a lot of flexibility to students' schedules. Without a detailed plan or schedule to keep students on track, the illusion of "spare time" will likely pose challenges for many. In order to maintain an acceptable pace and complete all of the work you have on the go, you need to have a schedule and plan put in place.

2.3.1 How to make a schedule for the upcoming semester

Online learning makes staying on track even more difficult than before. The lack of in-person classes, time spent commuting to-and-from campus, and club commitments will leave many students feeling ungrounded and impacted negatively by the illusion of endless time and freedom. The temptation to laze around the house all day or binge-watch Netflix must be pushed away. Students must create a schedule and manage their time effectively.

We strongly encourage creating a detailed schedule for your semester. This will allow you to make the most out of your time and prevent you from falling behind or feeling overwhelmed. You can use whatever technology you wish to create a schedule, such as the calendar on your phone, a spreadsheet (i.e, Excel or Google Sheets), software such as Asana, scheduling software, paper, a physical planner or agenda etc. Here is a link to a template schedule made in Excel (specific to uOttawa holidays and breaks, but can be customized to any institution).

Complete the following 5 steps now in order to create a schedule for your upcoming semester:[11]



1. **Create a skeleton**. Block out all of the sessions you are required to attend each week. This will include when you plan to attend all of your classes, DGD's, and lab sessions for the semester. This is the bare minimum of what you are expected to complete each week. Make these required tasks in the same colour.
2. **Map out deadlines on your calendar**. This is super important! As soon as you are aware of a deadline, write it down in your schedule. Deadlines could include assignments, presentations, midterms, and/or exams. Completing this step will prevent you from forgetting and will help you stay on track. We recommend you go through each of your course's syllabi at the beginning of the semester to write down all of the deadlines at once, rather than waiting for your professor to announce the deadline during the semester. Make the deadlines noticeable (bold letters, bright coloured font, etc.)
3. **Decide when to work on your courses**. Block out the remaining time in your schedule with "weekly study blocks" for each course. Block these times out for the entire semester so that you stay on track. We recommend putting aside 4 hours of study time per week for each course. Make these "weekly study blocks" a different colour for each course so you can visually see the workload of each course each week.
4. **Decide the amount of time you will need to complete assignments or prepare for assessments**. Some assignments may take more or less time depending on the assignment type (see recommendations below). After that, block out times for studying for midterms or exams. How much time you require to study for each assessment is a personal choice (see recommendations below). Make sure the blocked out time for each "assignment" or "assessment study block" matches the colour for the "weekly study time" of the course. That way, you can see what you need to do for each course with a quick glance. The following are the recommended time required for each type of task:

    - Pre and Post-lab quizzes: 1-2 hours
    - Lab reports: 4 hours
    - Writing an essay (including editing): 25 hours
    - Study time required for a midterm: 10 hours

- Study time required for a final exam: 15 hours

5. **Add the time required for personal tasks.** These tasks may include time for exercise, grocery shopping, household chores, part-time jobs, downtime, time with friends or family, or self-care. It is important you fit in time for you during the semester! Make personal tasks the same colour so you can visually distinguish them from schoolwork.

Remember, since courses are online you may wish to move around when you complete a specific block or task. Do not delete the block entirely or else you will fall behind. Simply move it to a more convenient time for you.

2.3.2 Tips for staying on track and following through with your schedule

1. **Put your schedule in an obvious place** where you will see it frequently.
2. **Cross off each task as you complete it**. Not only will this create a sense of accomplishment, but it will also keep you on track. If you didn't complete the task assigned to a specific time block, move the task to an open time block later on so you don't fall behind.
3. **Create a routine**. Get up at around the same time every day. Do whatever you need to do to feel prepared for the day – get dressed, brush your teeth, make some coffee, etc. Then sit down at your work station and take a look at your tasks for the day. This will help you stay motivated and create a sense of normalcy.
4. **Define a specific workstation**. When you are in that work station, it means you are being productive and staying on task. If you need a break, leave that work station.
5. **Set boundaries**. Don't let school work and home life blend completely. It's hard learning in the same place you relax and wind down. Try and create a distinct barrier between work-life and home-life.
6. **Don' be too hard on yourself!** You did not sign up to learn online. It was not your choice, so don't be upset when you struggle or face difficulties.
7. **Ask for help if you need it.** Ther are numerous resources at your disposal to help you learn and stay motivated. Check out our chapter on Resources for more details!

2.4 The SMART goal framework

Goal-setting is a valuable skill for students regardless of their learning format. It allows students to stay on track, easily gauge their progress, and accomplish more. The SMART goal framework was adapted for the Growth & Goals module, an Open Education Resource (OER) designed by the Flynn Research Group to assist students in learning-to-learn. The module uses research-backed methods to teach students learning skills. You can access the module for free online here.

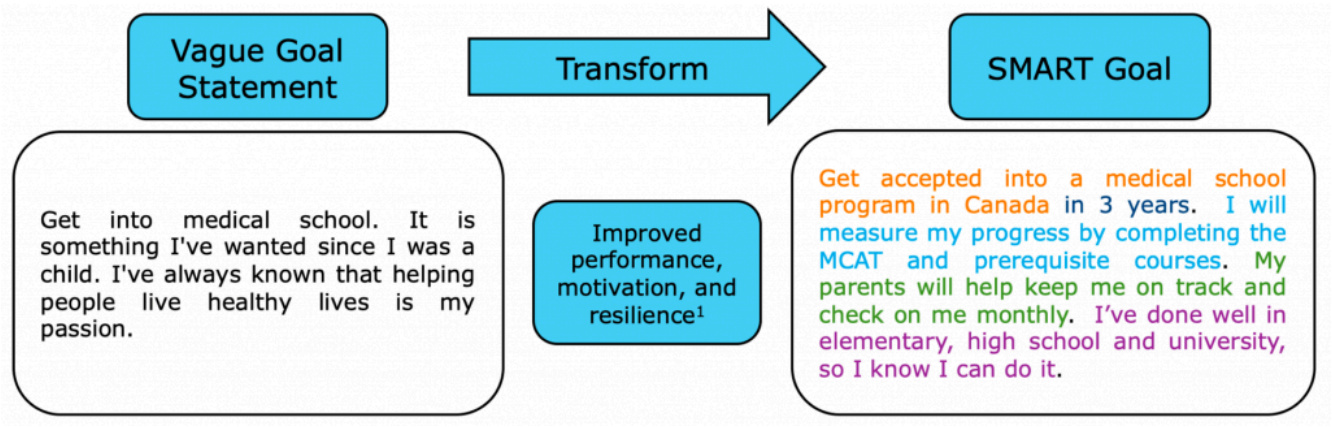
2.4.1 What is a SMART goal?

A SMART goal allows students to take their goals and transform them into actionable statements. Using the SMART goals framework, students' goals will become more defined and attainable.[4]

The SMART goals framework consists of five distinct components that must be clearly defined in order for the goal to be "SMART":

- **Specific**: Students are more likely to achieve their goals if they are fine-grained. This prevents the goal from appearing too large for students to tackle, and allows students to easily gauge their progress and stay motivated. **Try and make your goal as defined as possible**. For example, "*Get into med school*" is a broad statement, instead rephrase your goal, *"Get accepted into a medical school program in Canada"*. This statement is much more explicit.
- **Measurable**: Students must be able to easily gauge their progress towards achieving their goals. That way, students can make adjustments if needed and can easily stay on track. If students create goals that are immeasurable (i.e., too large, hard to gauge progress), they will have a difficult time staying focused and motivated. Being able to measure your progress towards your goal allows for increased motivation and prevents you from feeling overwhelmed. **Make sure you can easily measure your progress towards achieving your goal**. For example, "*I will study hard so I get accepted into a med school program*" is not a measurable statement. How will you be able to tell if you are studying hard enough? Instead, students should include a statement like this, "*I will measure my progress by completing the MCAT and prerequisite courses*." This statement will allow students to track their progress and level of preparedness. Students will be able to see which courses they still need to complete, as well as which areas require more focus based on their grades or scores on MCAT quizzes.
- **Accountable**: You can't just count on yourself to keep you on track to reaching your goals. It is helpful to have someone you trust to check in on your progress and encourage you to keep going. Not only will this help you stay motivated, but it will keep you on track and prevent procrastination from getting in the way of you reaching your goals. You can ask a friend, colleague, sibling, or even your parents to check in on your progress every so often. Try and include a statement like this in your future goals, "*My parents will keep me on track and check in on me monthly.*" **It is important to have someone keep you accountable**.
- **Reachable**: **It's important that you set goals that are realistic for you to obtain**. Setting a goal that is too large or unrealistic will only result in you feeling overwhelmed, demotivated, and frustrated. Try and include a statement like this in your goals so that you know it's reachable, *"I've done well in elementary school, high school, and university so I know I can do this."* If you have a goal in mind that isn't overly realistic right now, try breaking your big goal down into several realistic steps. Research shows that people are more likely to achieve goals when they are broken down into several small sub-tasks. These sub-tasks are easier to obtain, realistic, and reachable. Not only will this method prevent you from feeling overwhelmed, but it will also keep you on track and increase your motivation as you accomplish each sub-task you defined.
- **Time-specific**: **You should always include a statement about WHEN you want to achieve your goal**. This will prevent you from coming up with excuses and pushing the task further into the future. If you have a

specific deadline in mind, you can't procrastinate. Your goal may have a relatively small timeline (within the next week), or a large timeline (within the next 5 years) – and that's okay! As long as you have a deadline set, you will be on track to preventing procrastination and achieving your goals. Try and include a statement like this in your goals, *"I will accomplish this goal within 3 years."*



Try taking a goal you already have in mind and transform it into a SMART goal like in the image above. Make sure you include all five components of a SMART goal. Finally, **put your goals somewhere you will see them** so you stay on track! Perhaps, placing them next to your schedule so you can view your goals daily?

2.5 Metacognition as a study tool

2.5.1 What is metacognition?

Metacognition is thinking about thinking and it consists of two distinct parts: knowing what you know, and deciding what to do about your learning.[4] Or in simpler terms, metacognition is a learning skill in which students self-assess their own learning and knowledge, use that self-assessment to identify areas of weakness or lacking knowledge/skills, and actively work towards improving those identified areas. Successful learners

(regardless of their learning format; online or in-person) will use metacognitive skills to assess their progress and make necessary changes to further their learning and success within a course. Without even realizing it, you have likely used metacognitive skills to assess areas of focus when preparing for midterm assessments or final exams.

Let's take a look at the two components of metacognition in more detail:

1. **Knowing what you know**
    - This component of metacognition involves completing an internal reflection of your own knowledge and skills. You can complete this reflection in the context of schoolwork, physical skills or abilities, your own hobbies, etc. You may wish to ask yourself the following questions when completing a self-reflection of your own knowledge in the subject of your choice:
        - What skills are required to complete the chosen task? Create a list of required skills. For example, in the context of a course, you may wish to use the courses intended learning outcomes (ILOs) as a list of required skills.
        - What do you already know?
        - What skills do you already possess?
        - What are you good at? What are you bad at?
        - Rate your level of skills or abilities on a scale of 1 (unable) to 10 (mastery) for each of the skills required to complete the desired task.
            - For example, "To succeed in my upcoming chemistry midterm (my task), I have to have know how to convert grams to moles. I learned that in high school but I don't really remember how. My current ability is 5/10".

2. **Deciding what to do for your learning**
    - This component of metacognition involves taking the shortcomings or weaknesses you identified from the first step ("Knowing what you know") and actively creating strategies or a plan to improve your knowledge or learning in those areas.
    - You may wish to prioritize the low-rated skills or abilities (i.e., the skills you rated as a 1) by importance to decide which areas you will work on first.
    - You will then create a plan to improve those skills.

2.5.2 How can you use metacognition as a study tool for your own learning?

To develop your metacognitive skills, we recommend completing the following for each course in your upcoming semester:

1. **Knowing what you know**
    - **Review the pre-requisite knowledge** needed to determine what you already know and what you need to work on as you begin the course.
    - **Review the intended learning outcomes** for the course frequently throughout the course to determine any concepts you do not know and that require your focus. Make note of the learning outcomes you do not know so you can improve these skills before midterms.
    - **Use the list of learning outcomes to prioritize which concepts you will focus on when preparing for assessments** based on which learning outcomes you know and do not know (the skills you identified

in the previous steps).

2. **Deciding what to do for your learning**

    - Research has found the most effective ways to study are to **test yourself, spread your studying out over time, and to alternate between subjects**. You may wish to try these techniques this upcoming semester!
    - **Don't be afraid to change your study strategies!** Successful learners are constantly monitoring their progress and making changes (they have a growth mindset!) This is especially true for students who are transitioning to online learning. Your previous study strategies that helped you succeed in a traditional in-person learning environment may not be effective online.

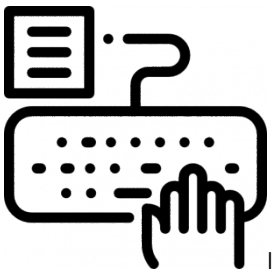
2.6 Concluding Activity

Complete the following activity to determine if you have successfully developed the required learning skills to succeed in an online learning environment:

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/learningonline/?p=37

Congratulations! You have now developed the skills required to be a self-regulated learner. Make sure you use these learning skills throughout your semester of online learning in order to stay on track!

3. Professionalism and communication in an online setting



In this section, you will master how to communicate online in a clear, professional manner. We will cover basic guidelines for online communication, as well as delve deeper into how to conduct yourself in some of the most common scenarios you will experience in an online class.

Online learning introduces many new obstacles to students, one of them being how students communicate with others. The loss of face-to-face interaction causes many students to feel awkward or unsure of how to proceed. In this section, we will discuss how to maintain general professionalism when learning virtually, as well as how best to approach various conversations and online scenarios.

In this chapter:

- General professionalism
- Academic integrity
- How do I communicate in a video conference?
- How do I communicate in forums and discussion boards?
- Email etiquette

3.1 General professionalism

As a student, you are expected to act in a professional and respectful manner when communicating with your peers, professors, or other faculty members. This expectation also extends beyond the university and into the greater community. When you apply for jobs, take on a volunteer position, or attend a conference or event you are representing your university. It is expected that you will act in a professional manner. Not only is it expected, but it is also beneficial for you, too.

Here are some tips for maintaining professionalism in academics, the workplace, and beyond:[12]

- **Display character**. Integrity and decency speak volumes.
- **Share your knowledge** with your peers if they express interest, but be humble.

- **Take ownership** of your mistakes and remedy the situation. If you are unable to, find someone who can fix it.
- Always **maintain a positive attitude**.
- **Be diligent**. The quality of your work speaks volumes.
- **Be proactive**. If something needs to be done, do it.
- **Exude dedication.** To your studies, the quality of your work, to your employer.
- **Be organized.** Know what you have on the go and where your things are. You don't want to waste precious time trying to find something you misplaced, or even worse, forget about a deadline altogether.
- **Communicate clearly**. Deliver facts, avoid rambling, and use as few words as possible.
- **Exercise self-discipline**. Leave your personal life aside, focus on the task at hand, and reach your goals.
- **Be dependable**. Don't slack off on the group project, show up to class/work on time, and meet deadlines.
- **Be flexible and adaptable**. Don't be afraid to try new things, keep an open mindset, and get the task done (whatever that may be). Don't whine if you're given a task that isn't really your expertise. Instead, try your best and ask for help if you need it.
- **Know your weaknesses**. Be aware of things that you aren't so good at and actively strategize to improve. Also, don't be afraid to say you can't do something or you need help. You need to be aware of your personal limitations.

3.2 Academic integrity

A major concern of online learning for many universities is academic integrity.

*"**Academic integrity** means being responsible for the quality of your work, preparing it honestly and respecting the intellectual community you are part of as a student. It is a core value in all scholarly work." (Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs; University of Ottawa)*[13]

Students must commit to preparing work in an honest and moral fashion. This includes assignments, papers, midterms, and exams. Transitioning to online learning does not change the expectation for students regarding academic integrity. Students are still expected and responsible for preparing honest and moral work. Most institutions, including the University of Ottawa, have a very strict policy regarding academic fraud and plagiarism. Failure to obey their policies could result in failure or expulsion. Part of becoming a professional and respected scholar is being trusted to create original and honest work.

3.3 How do I communicate in a video conference?

For many students, attending virtual classrooms via videotelephony software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Adobe Connect is a completely new format of learning. Students must navigate new software, develop new techniques to learn the material, and find new ways to communicate their ideas in a professional manner. Professionalism during online learning must be equal to the etiquette expected when in a traditional in-person setting. Below are general guidelines for professional online behaviour in a videotelephony setting.[1]

PDF version of the diagram can be found here.

ONLINE PROFESSIONALISM

IN A VIDEOTELEPHONY SETTING

Join early

Offer **extra warmth** with comments

You can **use the chat function**

Turn ON your video, optional but encouraged

Stay on mute, except when speaking

Raise your hand

CC BY NC SA

Ellyssa Walsh
ewals075@uotttawa.ca

GROWTH & GOALS

FRG

3.4 How do I communicate in forums and discussion boards?

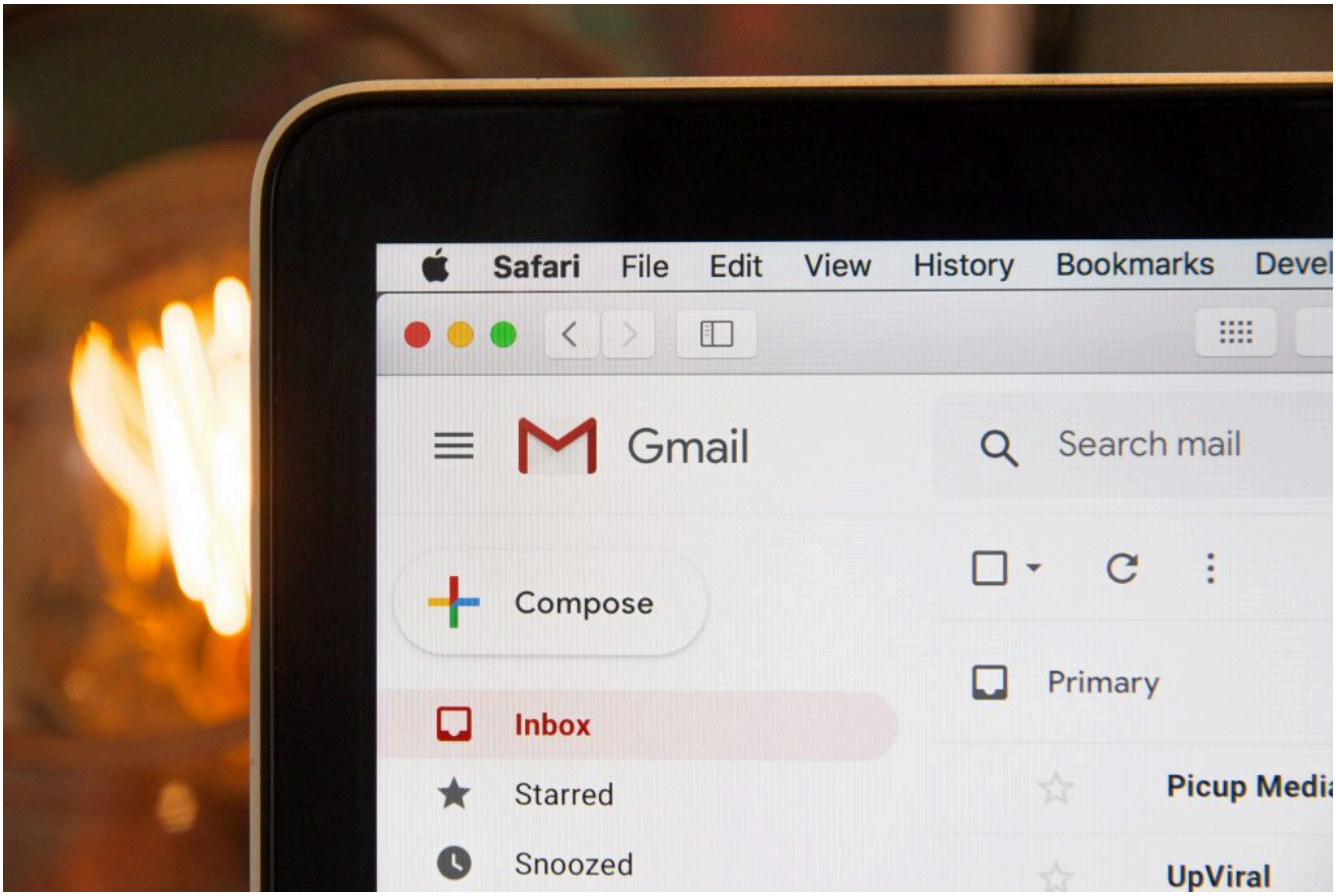
One of the main modes of communication amongst your peers in an online learning environment is through chat rooms, forums, or discussion boards. You'll be able to ask questions about the course material, get help on difficult problems, and ask questions about the logistics of the course (i.e., "when is the next assignment due?"). While it may seem natural to communicate in a casual manner, it is important that you use a professional and respectful tone. Maintaining a professional relationship online with your peers ensures that your image stays intact and helps you develop long-term relationships. Although you are still a student, you are working in a small community of individuals who will likely pursue elite positions. View this as a way of networking, not as a casual conversation with friends.

Below are some general guidelines for how to communicate in an online forum or discussion board:

- Always introduce yourself. You will seem more personable, approachable, and friendly.
- Offer extra warmth with comments. Be friendly!
- Maintain a respectful and professional tone.
- Avoid banter, heated discussions, or arguments.
- Always think before you click send. These records are permanent.

3.5 Email etiquette

Email is the dominant form of communication for many professionals. It is crucial that students learn to compose professional, concise emails – not only to communicate in online courses, but to further their success in their academic journey, their career, and beyond. The ability to compose clear and convincing emails is one of the most underrated skills in business and professional settings.



3.5.1 Three common misconceptions about email

1. Email is a casual way to communicate and discuss ideas.

    - **Wrong.** Email is a big deal. It is the dominant mode of communication for professionals. While it may not seem significant now, the ability to create professional emails will be crucial to your success in the workplace.

2. Your emails should be light, trivial, and disposable.

    - **Wrong.** Emails are a permanent record of your thoughts and ideas. Always consider what you are saying before pressing send.

3. You will be judged by the content of your email, not the quality of your writing.

    - **Wrong.** If you can't communicate, no one will pay attention to the content. Grammar errors, awkward phrases, and poor writing stick out like a sore thumb.

3.5.2 The anatomy of an email

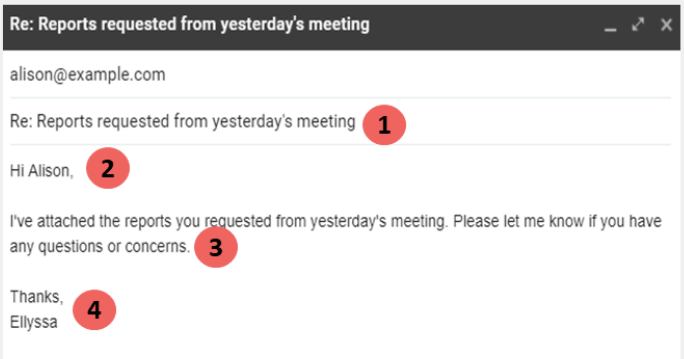
An email consists of four main elements: the subject, the salutation, the body, and the valediction. Below you will find a detailed diagram containing tips and suggestions for how to compose a professional email.[14]

PDF version of the diagram can be found here.

The anatomy of an Email

A typical email consists of four elements:

1. *THE SUBJECT*
2. *THE SALUTATION*
3. *THE BODY*
4. *THE VALEDICTION*



THE SUBJECT

- Choose a subject that is clear, concise, and related to the topic of your email.
- Ensure that your email is searchable (contains keywords).

"November Progress Report" or "Incident Report: Workplace Accident"

vs.

"Hey quick question" or "Problem in class..."

THE SALUTATION

- This is your first impression!
- Choose a salutation that is appropriate for the intended reader.
- Your credibility may be ruined if you choose an awkward or inappropriate greeting (i.e., "Hey dude!")
- Never use "Hi" or "Hello" when delivering bad news (use "Name")
- Never use "Hi" or "Hello' when emailing strangers. Try something more formal, such as "Dear".
- For business emails, last names are typically avoided.

CC BY NC SA

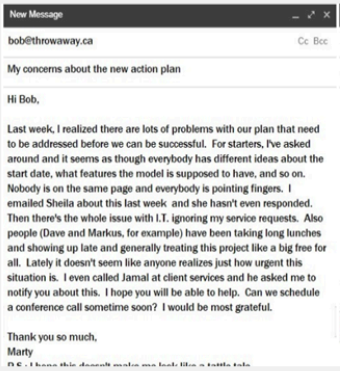
GROWTH & GOALS FRG

The anatomy of an Email

THE BODY

- Keep your email brief and to the point. Nobody wants to read your rambling!
- Use bulleted lists, when possible, to avoid blocks of text.

These emails are identical. Which one would you rather read?



New Message

bob@throwaway.ca Cc Bcc

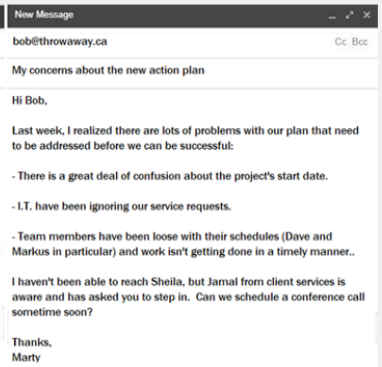
My concerns about the new action plan

Hi Bob,

Last week, I realized there are lots of problems with our plan that need to be addressed before we can be successful. For starters, I've asked around and it seems as though everybody has different ideas about the start date, what features the model is supposed to have, and so on. Nobody is on the same page and everybody is pointing fingers. I emailed Sheila about this last week and she hasn't even responded. Then there's the whole issue with I.T. ignoring my service requests. Also people (Dave and Markus, for example) have been taking long lunches and showing up late and generally treating this project like a big free for all. Lately it doesn't seem like anyone realizes just how urgent this situation is. I even called Jamal at client services and he asked me to notify you about this. I hope you will be able to help. Can we schedule a conference call sometime soon? I would be most grateful.

Thank you so much,
Marty

Hard to read, appears rather long, more likely to be ignored or skimmed through.



New Message

bob@throwaway.ca Cc Bcc

My concerns about the new action plan

Hi Bob,

Last week, I realized there are lots of problems with our plan that need to be addressed before we can be successful:

- There is a great deal of confusion about the project's start date.

- I.T. have been ignoring our service requests.

- Team members have been loose with their schedules (Dave and Markus in particular) and work isn't getting done in a timely manner..

I haven't been able to reach Sheila, but Jamal from client services is aware and has asked you to step in. Can we schedule a conference call sometime soon?

Thanks,
Marty

Clear, easy to read, avoids large blocks of text, more likely to be read through.

THE VALEDICTION

- NEVER skip the valediction, even for replies to replies or threads of emails.
- Ending an email with your name is the bare minimum.
- Choose a valediction that is appropriate for the intended reader.
- For friends, you may wish to use something more informal (i.e.,"Cheers!")
- Here is a list of safe valedictions for more formal scenarios:
  - "Best Regards"
  - "Best Wishes"
  - "Best"
  - "Thanks"
  - "Sincerely"

CC BY NC SA

3.6 Concluding activity

Complete the activity below to review the concepts discussed in this chapter.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/learningonline/?p=40

4. Motivation and self-care

In this chapter, students will learn techniques to stay motivated when learning online, as well as the importance of self-care. We will discuss how to maintain internal motivation, practice healthy study habits, and incorporate self-care into your daily routine.

Staying motivated throughout the semester is oftentimes one of the most difficult challenges students face. Students are constantly having to juggle their academic, work, and personal lives, which makes it extremely difficult for students to find the motivation to keep going. This mental hurdle will only become more prominent with the transition to online learning. The increased flexibility to students' schedules will require students to practice increased self-discipline, and without motivation, many students will find this challenging. Developing ways to stay motivated is just as important to prepare for online learning as any other chapter in this eBook. To be successful online learners, students must develop internal motivation and a healthy self-care routine.

In this chapter

- How to maintain internal motivation when learning online
- How to incorporate self-care into your daily routine

4.1 How to maintain internal motivation when learning online

Many students may be feeling a sense of helplessness as they approach this term of online learning. Students did not sign up for this, yet they will still have to overcome all of the new challenges and difficulties online learning poses regardless. Students may feel discouraged knowing that their difficult semester, in which they likely did not have much of a say in the first place (due to program requirements), is about to become even more difficult. How can you stay motivated knowing this huge roadblock lies ahead? Recall from the previous chapter the importance of fostering a growth mindset (visit chapter here). A growth mindset will allow students to approach this new way of learning as a challenge, rather than a roadblock. Students with a growth mindset will take on this challenge wholeheartedly, accept setbacks as a natural part of learning, and will develop the grit and perseverance needed to overcome these difficulties. In the following section, we will describe how you can use a growth mindset to increase your motivation and conquer any challenges you may face this upcoming semester!

"YOU MUST SEE DISTANCE LEARNING AS A CHALLENGE, NOT A ROADBLOCK."

4.1.1 How to use your growth mindset to increase motivation

Remember that a mindset is an internal dialogue about your own skills, as well as your ability to improve and grow. In a growth mindset, you know that your skills are only a starting point and with hard work and dedication you can continue to develop and improve. Always keep this in mind during the semester. Online earning might be a new concept, but you are already a successful student and you have the tools you need to grow and adapt to change. With each step of the way, if you keep an open mindset and tell yourself "*you can do this*!" then you will be successful. You will make your dreams a reality!

Here are some tips for maintaining internal motivation throughout the semester:[15]

7 Ways to Stay Motivated

WHEN STUDYING ONLINE

Stay Connected

At times, studying online can feel isolating, but it doesn't have to be that way. You will likely be able to connect with other students in the course using the courses LMS or virtual classroom. You may also wish to join an online group chat using social media to discuss course material and get help on tricky problems. Networking with your peers is a great way to build relationships. You can help each other stay motivated, work together on problems, and encourage each other to stay focused!

Take Study Breaks

Study breaks are an important part of a healthy work ethic. Taking study breaks can refresh your mind, restore motivation, and increase your productivity. Try and take a break after every 90 minutes of studying. This will prevent your mind from feeling exhausted or overworked. Take a break to do some yoga, go for a walk, have something to eat, make a coffee, try a meditation, or even take a quick power nap (10-20 mins)!

Create an Inspiring Study Space

Studying from home is actually one of the many perks of online learning. You are able to create a space where you are comfortable and most productive. However, you should refrain from lounging on the couch in your pajamas. While comfortable, this does not promote productivity. A tidy, well-lit space will help you study effectively. Add personal touches so you want to spend time there. Reserve this space only for school work to keep your home environment separate. This will help you get into the right mindset faster, avoid distractions, and stay focused and motivated.

Reward yourself for your achievements

7 Ways to Stay Motivated

WHEN STUDYING ONLINE

Develop a healthy balance

It is important to study and work hard in your courses, but you cannot let it become overwhelming. It is very easy to neglect your personal life, especially when you are learning online. Maintaining a healthy balance between school-life and home-life will help you stay motivated, positive, and focused. You must have a healthy balance between school, home, and friends and family – otherwise you will burnout. Learn to separate school from the rest of your life to prevent this.

Stick to your schedule

You must have a schedule to be successful in an online learning environment. Each day take a look at your schedule and check what deadlines you have coming up. You may wish to write a to-do list (in order of priority) to help you stay on track throughout the day. Completing your daily tasks and finishing assignments will greatly boost your mood and motivation. However, don't take on too much in one day or you will feel drained. If you do need to make a change, simply rearrange your schedule accordingly.

Follow a daily routine

Like having a schedule, a daily routine will help you stay on track and form healthy habits. Finding a routine that works for you and sticking to it will help you be successful and get more done. Try waking up at the same time each day, getting ready for your day ahead (get dressed, brush your teeth, etc.), and then sit down at your workstation. If you make studying a part of your daily routine, it will become habit. You will be more likely to actually study on a regular

4.2 How to incorporate self-care into your daily routine

Self-care is an important component of a healthy student-life that many often neglect. Academic life is tough, no doubt, but that doesn't mean we can push our own well-being aside. We need to take the time to acknowledge ourselves and put aside all of the stressors that are a part of student life. The pressure to excel academically, participate in various extracurricular activities, keep up with part-time jobs, and enjoy a social life not only acts to increase students' stress but also further takes away time for self-care and internal reflection. Studies show that the percentage of post-secondary students who feel some amount of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety has increased significantly in the last decade. In the same study, 30% of students cited stress as a negative factor influencing academics, while another 21% cited trouble sleeping as a part of their negative academic performance.[16] Clearly, a lack of self-care has become an epidemic for student-life and has negatively impacted students' success and well-being. It's important that you schedule in time for self-care into your daily schedule for this upcoming semester. Unsure what activities you should try to increase your self-care and "me time"? Check out some ideas below!

4.2.1 Self-care and mindfulness

A great way to take some time for yourself is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is a technique that allows individuals to remove themselves from their surroundings and take part in an internal reflection. Research shows that those who participate in mindful practices have greater present-time awareness, increased well-being, reduced stress, and even achieve higher scores on assessments. Research also shows that mindfulness activities can improve attention and energy, even after being practiced for only a short period of time (i.e., five days).[17]

So, what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is a combination of **present-time awareness** and **emotion control**.[4]

Present-time awareness:

Distraction is an inherent part of student life. Students are constantly plugged into their devices, checking social media, managing relationships, worrying about bills or rent, and multi-tasking in order to meet deadlines and complete schoolwork. These constant distractions make it difficult to focus and keep attention on the task at hand. Reflect on your own present-time awareness right now. Do you find yourself distracted and unable to maintain focus when studying, in class, etc.? Are you constantly worried about the next deadline or thing you have to do? If so, you may benefit from completing mindfulness exercises to increase your level of present-time awareness. This skill will be especially important when learning from home. Students will need to block out their home life in order to focus fully on their courses and complete assignments, and vice versa when it's time to return to home-life. The ability to focus on the present will be extremely valuable and crucial to maintaining productivity in an online learning environment.

Emotion control

Mindfulness activities have been proven to help individuals increase their emotional intelligence and the ability to control their reactions. Through mindfulness activities, such as meditations, you will be able to develop the skills needed to accept your feelings and let them pass without becoming entangled, distracted, or off track. Next time you are feeling overwhelmed with thoughts or emotions, try to follow these three simple steps:

1. **Recognize your emotions.** Emotions are a natural human experience. Perhaps you feel angry, disappointed, or anxious. Your instinct may be to lash out, but instead, take a moment to recognize exactly what you are feeling.
2. **Allow them to pass rather than acting out automatically**. It is quite normal for us to react automatically based on our emotions rather than in ways that are helpful. Now that you've recognized your emotions, let them pass instead of letting them dictate your response.
3. **Skillfully respond**. Now that you have let your emotions pass, you can respond to situations in a way that is helpful instead of harmful. Take a moment to consider the situation, then respond. This awareness will prevent any outbursts of emotions and lead to more proactive responses.

To experience the full benefits of meditation, try out these free meditation podcasts:

- Mindfulness of the Body and Breath
- Three Minute Breathing Space
- The Body Scan
- Sounds and Thoughts
- Befriending

These activities were taken from the Frantic World website, which has many other resources to help build mindfulness!

4.2.2 Exercise and healthy eating habits

It is important to take care of your physical health, too. In one study, it was found that more than one-half of university students in Canada and the United States are not active enough to gain health benefits.[19] Similarly, in another study, researchers found that 59.6% of students (n=110) were aware of the meaning of a well-balanced diet but still reported consuming junk foods as their snacks and having unhealthy eating practices.[20] Clearly, the majority of students neglect their health and well-being. Part of self-care is taking care of your physical health. Not only will eating healthy and exercising regularly have long-lasting effects on your well-being, but it will also improve your academic performance. Students who are physically active are more likely to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance (e.g., memory, concentration), and the ability to focus and remain on-task.[21] Students should incorporate healthy eating and regular exercise into their self-care routines.

Unsure of how to eat healthily? Here are some tips:[22]

- **Watch your portion sizes**. Eating too much food can be harmful to your health and your waistline. Try and learn what portion sizes are appropriate, rather than filling your plate. For example, a serving of meat should be around the size of your cellphone. Check out this free

resource to learn more about portion sizes!

- **Stay hydrated**. Choose healthy drink options when you're thirsty (i.e., water, milk, and 100% fruit or vegetable juice). Try and stay away from energy drinks, pop, and coffee. While these drinks may help you stay awake and alert, they have many negative health effects. Use these resources to learn more about energy drinks and caffeine.
- **Eat proper meals**. Make time in your day to eat proper meals. Don't use sleeping in or being too busy as an excuse to not eat. Eating regularly will boost your brainpower and help you stay focused.
- **Have healthy snacks ready to go.** University life is busy. It may be tempting to order something at McDonald's instead of taking the time to make a healthy snack. Try and have snacks ready to go. That way, when you are hungry you can quickly grab a healthy snack and continue studying. Here are some healthy snack options you may wish to try:
    - Fresh fruit (apples, oranges, kiwi, mango, strawberries, etc.)
    - Fresh veggies (carrots, cherry tomatoes, sliced bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower)
    - Trail mix
    - Popcorn
    - Yogurt
    - Pretzels
    - Crackers (whole grain) and peanut butter

4.2.3 Try a new (and engaging) hobby

Learning a new hobby can be both engaging and rewarding. This may be a great self-care option for you to take your mind off of everything else going on in your daily life. Here are some ideas you may wish to try this upcoming semester:

- Painting
- Colouring or drawing
- Knitting
- Journaling
- Creative writing

4.3 Conclusion...

The need for motivation and a proper self-care routine is going to become even more prominent as students transition to online learning. Online learning demands much more self-regulation, time-management skills,

and effort, leaving students feeling drained. Additionally, the lack of defined boundaries (i.e., home time vs. study time), loss of normalcy, and lack of a need to leave the house each day will only act to further increase students' feelings of being overwhelmed or overworked. It is absolutely critical that students foster habits that will increase their internal motivation, as well as create an appropriate self-care routine that fits into their schedule and leaves them feeling rejuvenated and ready to tackle the next project.

5. Resources

Within this chapter, you will identify the resources you have available to help you succeed in your academic studies and university life! Successful students reach out to their community for help when they need it and make use of online tools. This is especially important when learning remotely!

Taking advantage of the resources you have available is key to your success. Below you will find that there are

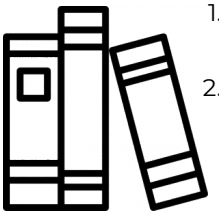
numerous online resources available to help you with your studies and your personal life! Don't be afraid to reach out and take advantage of these resources.

In this chapter

- List of general resources for students
- Institution-specfic resources

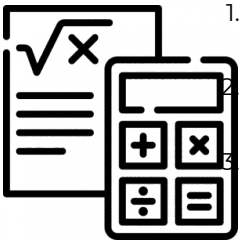
5.1 List of General Resources for Students

5.1.1 Resources for tutorials, studying:



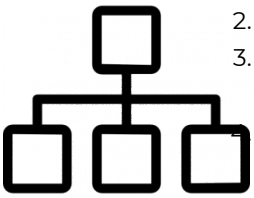
1. Khan Academy: Short lessons in the form of videos on a variety of topics. These video tutorials are educational, concise, and accurate.
2. Quizlet: Students can study a variety of topics through online quizzes, flashcards, and games.

5.1.2 Resources to assist in calculations and solving problems:



1. WolframAlpha: Computational software that provides step-by-step solutions for many calculus, integral, science, and finance problems.
2. Symbolab: Step-by-step math calculator for trigonometry, calculus, and algebra problems.
3. Desmos: Graphing calculator. Available online or as a mobile app.

5.1.3 Resources for improving learning skills (i.e., organization):

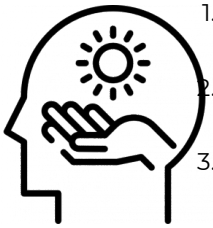


1. Evernote: An organizational tool for note-taking, task management, and prioritizing.
2. Flipped Classroom Tutorials: YouTube videos to improve your learning skills.
3. Fail to succeed!: Compilation of inspiring videos to overcome failure, develop resiliency, and foster a growth mindset.
4. Bubbl or Coggle or MindMeister or Miro: Brainstorming tools that allow you to create flowcharts, mindmaps, or other visual representations.
5. Asana: Web and mobile application designed to help individuals (or teams) manage, track, and organize their work.

5.1.4 Resources for papers, writing, proof-reading, etc.:

1. Grammarly: A writing tool that can detect grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, tone/ style, and plagiarism.
2. Citation Machine: Free citation machine (APA, MLA, Chicago).
3. Creative Commons: Find images and video content to use freely within assignments.
4. Wiley or PubMed or Elsevier or Microsoft Academic: Online library databases containing credible journals.
5. Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): For formatting, citations, and writing references (APA, MLA, Chicago).
6. BibMe: Free citation machine (APA, MLA, Chicago).

5.1.5 Resources for your health:



1. Wellness Applications: Compilation of mental health mobile apps including AnxietyCoach, Breathe2Relax, Happify, etc.
2. Mindfulness Meditations: A playlist of 10 free meditation tracks that cover topics such as mindfulness, body and breath, and exploring difficulty.
3. Food Portions Toolkit: A guide and resource to learn more about portion sizes and healthy eating habits.

5.2 Institution-specific Resources

Below is a list of resources available to students at the University of Ottawa. Similar resources likely exist at other institutions (check your school's website for more information):

5.2.1 Student Academic Support Services (SASS):

SASS is uOttawa's Student Academic Support Service, which has many free services to help students succeed, including academic accommodations, students mentoring, counselling, and academic writing assistance. SASS will continue to provide its' services virtually:

- For **academic accommodations** (including those negatively impacted by e-learning), contact SASS at adapt@uottawa.ca.
- For **student mentoring**, visit their website to discover what services are available and take their self-assessment tool. Services may include study groups, workshops, visiting a mentor centre, and taking a look at their online study skills hub.
- For **personal counselling**, SASS is offering teletherapy and video conference appointments (due to COVID-19 guidelines). While services may not be in person, same-day remote sessions are available. Book your virtual appointment here. You can also find more information about this service here.

- For **academic writing assistance,** students may wish to connect in real-time using their Facebook chat service. Additionally, students can book a remote appointment with a writing advisor to discuss ways to further develop academic writing skills. For more info, visit their page.

5.2.2 uOttawa Library Services

The library services at uOttawa has several options to continue to support students virtually:

- As always, students can access the **online database**, Omni, to access numerous online resources and texts.

- For single chapters, a specific article within a journal, or microform material, the Library is providing **"scan-on-demand"** services. To request a text, simply find the item you need in Omni, click on the Scan-on-Demand form and complete it (only for texts that are unavailable digitally).
- The Library also offers **curbside pickup** services. Students may place a request for the physical copy in Omni and retrieve it at the self-serve pickup location at the main entrance of the Morisset Library (only for texts that are unavailable digitally).

More information about the library services can be found here.

Concluding Statement

Congratulations on successfully reaching the end of *Learning Online: A Guide for Students*! We hope that you found this resource both helpful and engaging. Now that you've worked through the content of the eBook, you have successfully set your priorities and goals, decided on a schedule (that you've put in a visible place), and have identified study strategies and resources. Now you're ready for remote learning! Be sure to keep checking back on your goals so you can monitor your progress, revise your plans, and then act on them. Be mindful, keep working toward a consistent growth mindset and have a great semester! Remember, you can do this!

Other OER's by the Flynn Research Group

Growth & Goals Module

Alison Flynn, Elizabeth Campbell Brown, Ellyssa Walsh, Emily O'Connor, Fergal O'Hagan, Gisèle Richard, Kevin Roy, and Robyne Hanley-Dafoe

View course-integrated module online:

English: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/growthandgoalscourse/

French: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/croissanceetobjectifscours/

View independent module online:

English: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/growthandgoalsindependent/

French: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/croissanceetobjectifsindependant/

Remote teaching: a practical guide with tools, tips, and techniques

Alison Flynn and Jeremy Kerr

View online:

English: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/remotecourse/

French: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/coursadistance/

Remote teaching: a guide for teaching assistants

Meredith Allen, Alisha Szozda, Jeremy Kerr, and Alison Flynn

View Online:

English: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/teachingassistants/
French: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/assistantsdenseignement/

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