Studying online can be very convenient, offering a great deal of flexibility. However, it requires self-discipline, motivation, organization, time management and as much time as on-campus study to be successful. The following are study tips for online learners to help you stay focused and motivated.

Expectations of you as an online student
The first thing you need to realize is that online courses are not an easier way to learn, but rather a more convenient one.

To successfully learn online, you need to dedicate a significant amount of your time, and fully commit to your study, just as you would do for an on-campus course. You should also have in mind that when you take an online course, you will be expected to:

- Fully commit yourself and participate in the online classroom.
- Be familiar with the online platform, e.g., Moodle.
- Work with classmates effectively.
- Complete all tasks and assignments on time.
- Be self-disciplined.

Understand how online study works
- Submitting assignments
- Accessing discussion groups
- Contacting lecturers
- Accessing library facilities
- Enrolling in courses
- Accessing Support Services

Getting all this sorted before you start will help you feel in control and ready to focus on your course.

Make sure you understand in advance how your course will be assessed. Are there exams and how and where are they held? Are there set contact hours? Are there times when participants need to be online at the same time?

- Good internet access.
  Internet technology and home computers, while extremely reliable, are not immune to Murphy’s Law. Don’t leave it to 5 minutes before the deadline to upload your assignment. “My internet was down” could sound like the modern equivalent of “The dog ate my homework”. To avoid mishaps, give yourself a buffer and save your work repeatedly and backup regularly. Using cloud storage can enable you to access your work from your smart devices if needed. Reliable internet access is one of the most important tools in online study.

- Dedicated space for uninterrupted study.
  Whether you decide to study in your bedroom, your living room, or study, ensure that this place is quiet, organized, free of distractions, and available for use at any time (having to clear your stuff from the dining table so the family can have dinner is not a good situation). Your study environment is an important consideration when you are studying online, so make sure that it facilitates your study routine. Ask your friends, relatives, and colleagues to respect your “study time” and consider turning off your phone and logging off of all social networks when studying.

- Study plan.
  Good planning is vitally important in online study, particularly as you do not have the structure of scheduled lectures and tutorials of on-campus study.
• **Plan ahead.**
  Don’t wait until the day before an assignment is due to start working on it. It will stress you and stress will prevent you from effectively completing the online task. Furthermore, knowing when all of your assignments are due until the end of the eLearning course will facilitate your time management.

• **Have an effective calendar system.**
  Online learning needs structure; create a study calendar that will help you remember all important dates, like exams, or deadlines for submitting your assignments. You can save your calendar in your computer and in your mobile device. You should use a semester planner and put it up in a prominent place in your study space. It is a good visual map of your commitments for the semester and a constant reminder of what is due next. It can also be a good motivator as you cross off the completed tasks.

• **Create a weekly plan**
  Your weekly planner will contain all your regular commitments, like work, family commitments, sport etc. At the start of each week, schedule time to complete study tasks. This is an excellent way to prioritize your study plan and stay on track with your studying.

• **Set time limits.**
  Know how much time each task will take to complete, whether it is for a specific assignment or researching a topic. Open ended study periods are not productive. Plan when and for how long your study period will be and stick to it. If despite your best efforts you cannot concentrate or just feel stuck, stop for a break; move on to a part of the assignment that you can progress with, even if it is just doing the references. Maintaining momentum is important. You will often find that the part you were stuck on will be clearer to you when you get back to it.

• **Stay on track**
  Stick, as closely as possible, to your study plan. Procrastination is the worst enemy of online students, so make sure that you stay organized and you are not falling behind. If you are having difficulties submitting your assignments on time, contact your course coordinator and let them know. Be aware of the implications of late submission and the processes for requesting extensions where life circumstances impede your progress.

❖ **Ask for help.**
  While it may be constructive to look for answers to your online course-related questions independently, hesitating to contact your course coordinator when you are stuck may be problematic. If you don’t ask for help when needed, you may end up falling behind and not be able to keep up with the online course. Build a relationship with your course coordinator and avoid misunderstandings by contacting them regularly and informing them who you are, and how you could use their help. By asking your course coordinator to clarify problems, you will also help them not only to evaluate your level of understanding of the online material, but also to get an idea of the overall effectiveness of the online course. Finally, due to the open nature of online courses, by asking a question, you also help at the same time your classmates, who may be having similar difficulties. If you don’t ask for help when you need it your course coordinator may never know that something is wrong.

❖ **Join in on online discussions.**
  Online learning doesn’t have to mean learning in isolation. Connecting with your virtual classmates or your online course’s forum will greatly enhance your eLearning experience. Participate actively in online discussions and online tutorials. Remember to be respectful of others points of view, always write in complete and clear sentences, avoid txt-speak, and be aware of cultural differences.

❖ **Keep motivated.**
  Don’t underestimate the effort needed to fully commit to your online course. To make sure that you stay motivated and engaged in your online learning experience:
  - Create a study routine that is realistic given your other commitments.
  - Create a space that is conducive to study and has everything you need at hand.
  - Regularly remind yourself why you are doing this program.
  - Accept that life gets in the way at times and be flexible enough to accommodate occasional changes to your routine.
  - Reward yourself when you complete a challenging task.
  - Make sure that you maintain balance and take time out.

Follow these study tips and you should be able to make your online learning a productive and rewarding experience.

**Acknowledgement**
This page includes material adapted from eLearning Industry, seeklearning and material developed by UNSW Educational Support Service

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