

Prepare for Online Coursework: Student Guide

Planning your work time for online courses can be particularly challenging since there is no scheduled in-class time. You will need to schedule time for various learning activities such as reading and processing content, participating in online discussions, completing assignments, or participating in collaborative group work. To help you succeed in this course, start by developing a plan to tackle the work.

Since we do not have scheduled time in a classroom, it is helpful if you take time now, using the questions below, to decide where, when, and how you will complete your work throughout the course.

Where to Work

- Make a list of all the places where you can get work done (e.g., home, coffee shop, library). If you are going to work from home, have a dedicated space, if at all possible, and make an agreement with your family and/or friends that this area is your working area. You may also share the amount of time you expect to be working and left alone.
- Rank the places you have written down from where you can be the *most productive* to the *least productive*.

When to Work

- In a calendar or an organizer, write in your daily, scheduled professional and personal responsibilities.
- Find at least 10 hours outside of those scheduled times and block them off for coursework.

Tools to Use

- Not all online coursework needs to be completed while sitting in front of a computer. Take stock of your digital devices. Does your smartphone support an app that will allow you to complete some tasks while you are on a break from work, standing in line at the bank, and/or waiting to pick up your children? Can you listen to podcasts while you are driving, on a bus or train, or exercising? Remember, however, that this time is not 100% attention time, so it is not a time for processing complex or difficult content.

Weekly Schedule

Use the course calendar in the syllabus to plot out your coursework time and location for at least the first 2 weeks of the course. This will help you establish your work rhythm and figure out what works and does not work. Here is a list of things to consider:

- *Schedule where to work.* For assignments that require more concentration, such as reading articles, writing discussion board posts, or working on problems, schedule time in your most productive places. For assignments that require less concentration, such as watching a video, listening to a podcast, or reading discussion threads, schedule time in places that are the most enjoyable for you.
- *Schedule when to work.* When looking at the time you have allotted to work each day, be sure to account for any time you need to transition to your chosen online working place. For example, if you plan to get 1 hour of work done at Starbucks, you should schedule more than an hour, so you have time to get there, settle in, and get your coffee.
- *Specify tasks to complete during each work period.* Weekly modules require diverse tasks such as reading chapters or articles; watching a video; writing, reading, and responding to discussion posts; or writing a reflection. Decide on the specific task you plan to complete for each scheduled block of time. Some assignments, such as discussion board posts, require multiple steps (e.g., first, reading/watching new content; second, thinking about the questions; and, third, writing your post). Make sure to schedule time for each task.
- *Access your tools and resources ahead of time.* If you have a writing assignment that requires you to cite sources, schedule time to search for appropriate articles or other resources prior to your scheduled time for writing, so you can focus on writing during that allotted time.

Reference

Adapted from Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.