

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE SERVICES



Strategies for Successful Virtual Learning



Remote learning during a pandemic has forced us to reconsider how we manage our time and resources.

During these uncertain times, we've learned from the stressors and challenges of a virtual classroom head-on. Now that you're in a demanding graduate program, it's important to develop and implement successful learning habits.

We encourage you to access tools to support your academic and well-being needs as you balance the rigors of your graduate program with other responsibilities. It's natural to feel overwhelmed and anxious about the unknown, so be confident in the strategies and resources you can control. Read on for techniques to improve study habits and enhance your learning experience.





TECHNOLOGY

- Secure access to reliable technology, internet services, and laptop or computer.

Your student fees include [technology support](#).

As a student, you can access the internet on campus and can use the library computers ([check times here](#)).

Your online courses are through iCollege. [Click here](#) to become familiar with this learning platform and find iCollege support.

[The Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning & Online Education](#) has resources for success in a [virtual learning space](#), too.



Organize & Prioritize



Gather your deadlines and note them on a main calendar for all syllabi.

Whether using a digital or paper planner, writing down your schedule gets it out of your head. You are more likely to be accountable for your time when it's written down in front of you.



Making a to-do list is satisfying and will help you sort through your priorities.

One technique to stay organized is to categorize your assignments or tasks in an ABC list. Ask yourself if this task is something that must be done today, tomorrow, this week, or month?



Assign a priority for each task and label each by:

- A) what you must do (ex: an assignment due this week)
- B) something you should do (prepare for next week's class)
- C) something that's nice to do but can be left incomplete for now



Staying on top of all your responsibilities involves proper organization and understanding of your weekly and daily time allotment. Try to limit your daily goals so that you're not juggling too much each day.



Recognize that you'll need to take breaks. A brisk walk or gentle stretching helps you refocus and gives your eyes and mind much-needed rest from reading or screen time. Get into a healthy frame of mind by setting your timer for breaks.



College Advisor, Tyra, suggests these apps to remind you to take breaks from your computer:

- *Stretchly* (windows, macOS, Linux, and FreeBSD) delivers pop up with messages for encouragement.
- *Awareness* (Windows, macOS) provides break reminders with the gentle sound of a singing bowl.



Polish your time management skills

- **Time Management involves understanding your focused time allotment for each day and prioritizing your tasks accordingly.**

You can strengthen your productivity by practicing the Pomodoro Technique. Many of our students recommended this technique, and the GSU library offers Pomodoro Café sessions for free!

The Pomodoro Technique allows you to complete large or small tasks (like your dissertation/thesis chapter or research) by setting a timer for adjustable, small chunks of uninterrupted time (typically 25 to 30 minutes).

- You'll find resources for the Pomodoro Technique here:

[francescocirillo.com: The Pomodoro Technique](https://francescocirillo.com)

[todoist.com: The Pomodoro Technique](https://todoist.com)



LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

- Studying from home (and, possibly, working from the same desk), can make it difficult to separate yourself from other responsibilities.

Sharing a house with family, children, or roommates means balancing others' schedules, needs, and habits with your own, so it's important for everyone to have a designated work area. Try to maintain your own dedicated office or study space. Don't overburden yourself with clutter – physical or mental. Keeping your work desk clear of distractions helps you focus.

While laptops offer the freedom of movement, training your mind and body to work in a dedicated area will help you maintain a routine.



If possible, separate your workspace from the different areas of your life where you escape for relaxation. It's healthy to keep boundaries to trick your brain into associating certain tasks with designated spaces.



Keeping temptations within reach is one of the easiest ways to burst your attention bubble. Whether it's your Netflix queue or a friend's Instagram page, identify your distractions and remove them from view. Try to keep them out of sight and out of mind. Squash the desire to check social media, too. You might find that limiting distractions helps manage your stress levels.



There are different software or apps to optimize your study time. Our advisors have used similar tools to limit time on their phones, encouraging to step away from the computer. Most are free and available on different operating systems.

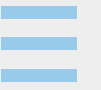
- *Forest* helps people beat their phone addiction through incentives. Users earn credits by not using their cell phones and plant real trees around the world with the credits.
- *Flipd* helps users stay accountable to their goals by tracking productive and non-productive hours. Flipd has helped millions around the world get more done, achieve their goals, and feel good doing it.
- *Flora* helps you focus on healthy habits, time management, and to-do lists all while keeping you off your phone. With Flora, you can opt-in to support global tree-growing organizations

Multitasking can drain your time and energy. In order to concentrate on the task at hand, try to resist balancing too many responsibilities at once when possible.

Share your schedule

Let your family or roommates know your schedule and your set times not to be disturbed. It's important that you are mindful of that time, too. Remind yourself not to waste or negotiate your availability and mental strength. Acknowledge that you don't need to be available 24/7. It's not selfish to put yourself and studies first. Create a set schedule for tackling tasks and share it with others.





Smile, and turn on your camera

Turning on your computer camera (even if not required) will help your online experience feel more like in-person attendance. Showing your face forces you to engage and will make you feel included as you pay attention to your instructor, materials, and colleagues.

Your instructor and classmates will recognize and appreciate your effort; it's a respectful acknowledgment of your dedication to learning. Join the conversation to connect with your peers.

Participating actively in class fosters a sense of meaningful community. Despite the physical limitations of virtual attendance, you can still build comradery with your classmates and faculty by engaging in discussions. By going beyond assignment submissions and engaging in class, trust that you are contributing toward inclusion, support, and connections.

Offer feedback and ask questions

Whether it's through written discussion posts or commenting on a classmate's thoughts, offering thoughtful feedback lends credence and value to your interactions. Likewise, engage your intellectual curiosity as you would in a class by asking questions. No doubt, a classmate is wondering the same as you so don't be shy. Your questions and responses can spark informative discussion.

At times, all the online posts and discussions may seem monotonous. However, think of them as a method for notetaking; writing down your understanding of the subject helps your brain retain information and conditions your memory. It's a powerful tool toward success!

Submit the instructor evaluation; your feedback is important for the faculty and future students. Don't be afraid to share what worked well and what could use improvement. Your opinion matters.



Manage expectations and set goals

- Keep your focus by setting attainable, manageable goals

You'll stay motivated if your goals are positive and shared with mentors, faculty, family, and colleagues.

Trying to be perfect doesn't feel good and can be harmful to your mental health: avoid the worry of perfection...it leads to procrastination and unhealthy feelings like impostor phenomenon. Do the best you can by managing your expectations, recognizing your limitations, and setting realistic, practical goals.



Applaud yourself for working toward earning your degree; keep your focus by setting attainable, manageable goals. To help you stay motivated, keep your goals positive and share them with others. You'll hold yourself accountable when you share goals with your mentors, faculty, family, and colleagues. This is the community that can help you achieve your goals with their support and encouragement.




Realize your limitations. Your goals have a long-lasting, meaningful impact, so keep striving toward them. Consider your strengths and circumstances when goal setting. Visualizing your goals keeps them in the forefront and can give you a boost when feeling stressed or less than motivated. Let yourself imagine how you'll feel once you've achieved them.

Get SMART with a goal setting guide

If not familiar or comfortable with goal setting, this acronym will help you plan out your goals in a manner that's SMART:

17.



Specific: Goals are much easier to achieve when not ambiguous or vague. Decide upon a specific goal to work toward and consider if you have the resources you need to achieve them. If not, think about how you can secure those resources.

Measurable: Being able to track and measure your goals helps you stay on task. Set goals that you can measure in concrete terms.

Adjustable: Like life, goals do change; understand that it's okay for journeys to change direction or timeline. Be flexible and adjust your goals and needs accordingly.

Relevant (or Realistic): Does this goal fit in with my overall goals or the larger picture? Think about whether these goals match your overall values and other aspects of your life.

Time-based: Setting deadlines keeps you on track; challenge yourself, remain focused, and use your time effectively by setting goals with an anticipated start and completion date. Prioritize and organize your tasks on one main calendar for all syllabi, tests, or assignments. Test methods that work best for you. If something doesn't work the first time, see what else you can do for a better fit.



Overcome burnout and cultivate resilience

- It's natural to experience stressful moments during your academic journey, but it's important not to be overcome by burnout

When we experience prolonged work or study stress, it can leave us feeling physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted. This leads to motivation loss, lack of focus, or feelings of cynicism or disengagement. To identify and recover from burnout, you should begin by understanding that burnout is common. You are not the only person feeling this way.

Help yourself by recognizing the signs and addressing them immediately. Don't ignore burnout; instead, reflect upon what's working well and note what changes you can make.



Practicing a self-reflection habit allows you to address how you feel and track your progress. Nurturing resilience and developing your strengths helps you prioritize opportunities for meaningful engagement and accomplishments. When you make self-care a priority and set goals to align with your values, you'll experience self-acceptance, personal growth, and a sense of purpose.



Cultivating resilience is especially important for knowing how to handle setbacks and adversity. A quick internet search points to the benefits of strengthening resilience. Listen to members of the Georgia State University community discuss the importance of resiliency. (You can watch the Office of Graduate Services recording under [past events](#)).



Unwind and reward yourself

- Your overall well-being is just as important as your other tasks so schedule time for yourself

You are more likely to be productive when feeling balanced and happy. Take small, mindful steps toward positive changes by incorporating healthy lifestyle choices into your daily routine (like proper sleep, good nutrition, and avoiding habits that deplete your energy and happiness). These steps will help you avoid burnout, too.



Take time to reset and recharge your emotional and physical needs. Enjoy a longer bike ride or catch up with family, friends, or favorite podcasts. You'll be more productive when you're in a healthy frame of mind and spirit. Remember that both physical and mental nourishment are foundations to your overall well-being. It's important to prioritize your mental health needs.



Consider your phone an asset during stressful times and use it to follow informational or motivational social media accounts. For example, our students like the uplifting Millennial Therapist on Instagram, Therapy for Black Girls site, and NPR's Life Kit.

Do remember to take the time to enjoy your efforts and accomplishments. Rewarding yourself in healthy, relaxing ways motivates you to keep up the good work.



Help is available through the Counseling Center

- **Did you know that as a student, you're entitled to 15 free counseling sessions?**

If interested in professional help, please contact the [GSU Counseling Center](#). Whether seeking individual counseling or group sessions with other graduate students, counseling professionals can provide tools and resources to empower and support you. For same-day appointments, call 404-413-1640 to speak with a counselor. If in crisis after business hours, call 404-413-1640 and you'll receive prompts to be connected with an after-hours therapist.

Helpful Links & Resources

Online learning can seem isolating, but you are not alone. You have the tools to succeed and feel empowered. Please refer to the resources available to you, whether through your department, university, or wider Atlanta groups. Your classmates, student organizations, the Graduate Alliance, as well as community resources are excellent sources of encouragement to help you thrive.





Helpful Links & Resources

✓ Campus Resources

- [Office of Graduate Services](#)
- [GSU Graduate School](#)
- [GSU Access & Accommodations](#)
- [GSU Library](#)
- [GSU Writing Center](#)
- [GSU CETLOE](#)
- [GSU Counseling Center](#)
- [Panther's Pantry](#)

✓ Atlanta & Community Resources

- [Free 99 Fridge](#): Free community fridges located all around Atlanta with produce & nonperishable food and toiletries
- [Hosea Helps](#)
- [United Way of Greater Atlanta](#)
- [Ride United](#): United Way partnered with Lyft to provide free transportation and food deliveries. Dial 211 or click the link.
- [NAMI \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\) Georgia](#) searchable community resource directory
- National Suicide Prevention lifeline: 1-800-273-8255



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THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE SERVICES



If you have any questions at all

Don't hesitate to ask.

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Authored by Mariam Qureshi, Academic and Professional Development Manager, with recommendations from [College Advisors](#) in The Office of Graduate Services, College of Arts & Sciences, Georgia State University. This guide is intended for graduate students in the College of Arts & Sciences at Georgia State University. Updated 4/30/2021. Designed by Shana Bagley.

