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# Successful At-Home Learning

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*A Guide from Lively Minds*

# Message to Parents

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With the recent school closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, at-home learning is quickly becoming a reality for many of our students, if it hasn't already. So how can we best prepare our students for this e-learning revolution?

Consider working through the following suggestions with your students to help prepare for at-home learning success. Remember that their worlds have also been turned upside down; let them guide the process as much as possible to give them some control and motivate them to succeed.

# 1. Create a Designated Study Space

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The school environment is one that students associate with studying and learning, but home is where so many other things happen. A dedicated area for studying is essential for at-home learning.

Think about what an ideal learning environment looks like for you, and individualize it based on what you know about where and how you learn best outside of school. Ask yourself questions like: Do I prefer...

- music or quiet?
- people around or alone?
- busy or calm?
- bright lights or dim?
- a big table or small desk?
- early or late?

## 2. Limit Distractions

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Distractions are everywhere, and it can become almost impossible to be productive if you don't take steps to minimize them.

Start by identifying your main distractions by asking yourself what keeps you from finishing your work? What are your top 2-3 main distractions?

How you can solve your distractions? For instance, if you're distracted by your phone, you can keep your phone in another room, silence your notifications, or turn off social media altogether.

It's very tempting to succumb to one of your distractions and before you know it, you have spent way more time on other activities that you didn't have planned!

## 3. Find Motivation

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Find ways to stay motivated and engaged in the learning process. Think about what motivates you to finish your work. Some people are motivated by a snack or treat, and some are motivated by something they enjoy doing. What are some rewards that you can give yourself after a job well done?

For instance, maybe you can have a bowl of ice cream when you finish your online school day. Or you can treat yourself with a video game or your favorite show. Use incentives that will work to keep yourself on track to finish.

## 4. Create a Study Schedule

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Online learning needs structure. Start by creating a daily schedule for when you will work on schoolwork. Decide what time you will start, and stick to that each day.

Schedule time for lunch and other breaks. Also, have a clear time to be finished with your day, and use timers to keep track of what time you are spending.

Next, create a calendar where you can list all important dates, like exams and deadlines for submitting assignments. Without a teacher in the front of the classroom frequently reminding you of deadlines, this becomes a much bigger responsibility for you.

# 5. Utilize Study Blocks

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Using chunks of time to get work finished is much more effective than trying to stay focused for long periods of time. Create study blocks by setting aside shorter periods of time, with breaks in between the times.

This is similar to what you already do in school with classes and passing periods. Estimate how long it will take to finish your math work, and spend that chunk of time working.

When you are finished, try taking a walk around the block or getting up for a quick snack. Physical activity helps renew your energy and get you back in a place to focus. Make sure you set a timer for your break so that you don't get lost in one of your distractions.

# 6. Break Down Projects

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Large projects often feel overwhelming, but they can feel even bigger when you are working on them outside of the classroom.

Start by identifying what the project goal is, and then determine the due date. Break down the projects into the smaller steps necessary to complete it. Then work backwards from the due date to assign dates for each of the smaller steps. This will give you a manageable project with realistic due dates to help you feel like you have it all under control.

# 7. Prioritize Your Tasks

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Online learning requires self-pacing, so you will need to refer back to your study schedule or planner frequently. You will have small assignments for each class, and you will also have large projects that you have broken down into smaller pieces.

Procrastination is the worst enemy of online learners, so make sure you stay organized and prioritize which tasks to work on and when. Create a system for documenting when you submit or complete tasks so you can visually see your progress. Challenge yourself to beat deadlines!

# 8. Create Daily Checklists

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Taking courses online increases the need for self-discipline, so organize what you need to work on by creating daily checklists. You should already have the due dates for each of your assignments and projects written on your calendar.

Each day, write out the tasks that need to be completed so that you don't forget anything. Spending a few minutes at the beginning of each study block documenting and prioritizing your tasks will help you stay on task and keep you from procrastinating.

# 9. Organize Materials

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Even though it's an online course, don't forget the benefit to having a system to keep your materials organized. Begin by making sure that you have all of the materials you need, like pens, pencils, calculator, highlighter, post-it notes, paper, and flash drive.

Next consider using binders and color-coded folders for handouts and notes for each class. Create digital folders for each course to organize online documents shared with you. Use a word document to copy and paste website links and other online resources that you want to explore further.

Taking the time to visit multiple websites or open every link might seem engaging at the time, but being able to refer back to them later will allow you to really take the time to take notes and digest the information.

# 10. Take More Notes

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Writing down the information from your online classes is even more important with at-home learning, and taking good notes is essential to learning and retaining the content.

Some students are tempted to type out all of their notes, especially because you are on a computer. But studies generally show that writing notes by hand allows you to remember the material better than typing it, even though there are some situations when typing your notes might be more beneficial.

# 11. Systematize Your Notes

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Create a system for notes so that you can find the information when you need it later. This can be more challenging when you are working from home because you do not have to put your notes into your binder or backpack before you leave class, and it is much easier to just leave papers laying around.

Take a minute to put your notes into the correct place in your binder or folder. Make sure that you write the date and subject at the top page of each of your notes in case you put them in the wrong spot.

Consider taking a little extra time to make your notes more interesting by using colors, pictures, or different fonts. This can help keep you engaged throughout your day of online learning.

# 12. Make Flashcards

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With online classes, it's very easy to fall into thinking, "I've read that information on the screen, so I already know it." However, to truly remember information, you need to quiz yourself. When you actively recall the information on your own, your brain is moving it into your memory.

Reading over the same information repeatedly creates a false illusion that you "know" the information when you don't. This is the reason why creating and using flashcards effectively is such a wonderful study skill.

Flashcard Tips:

- Make your own rather than using someone else's
- Study them in both directions, front and back
- Study them over a period of time, not all at once!
- Only use one clue and one answer per card



# 13. Use Additional Memory Aids

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In addition to flashcards, practice using other memory aids or mnemonic devices to help you learn the material.

One strategy is to use pictures to help you “see” the material you are trying to remember. Another strategy is to create rhymes or sayings to remember specific words or sets of information.

Create formula cards when you need to remember math and science formulas, and use blank maps to test your memory for geography tests.

# 14. Create Study Guides

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Even when taking online courses, it’s still very important that you create your own study guides. Study guides should be an assimilation of your notes and should include all important terms and concepts, all written in a concise format.

Plan ahead for how you are going to study for upcoming tests by working backwards from the test date and creating a specific written study schedule.

Ask yourself while you are creating your study guide:

- What is the test date?
- When will your materials need to be finished?
- When will you review, practice, and study?
- Which dates and times will you study?

# 15. Ask Questions... Virtually!

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For the most success, view the online classroom like a physical classroom. One of the most important keys to success in the classroom is to ask questions when you need help. This is even more important in an online classroom because if you don't ask your online instructor for help, you might quickly find yourself falling behind.

Contact the online instructor regularly and don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Asking a question you have might also help other virtual classmates if they are having similar difficulties.

# 16. Connect with Other Students

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One of the most challenging aspects of at-home, online learning is the change in social interactions. Make sure to join online discussions and online study groups so that you not only have social connections, but you also have the opportunity to learn from others.

Posts that engage others helps you understand classmates' views and helps you clarify your own understanding. Set up interactions with virtual study partners or groups so that you can support each other when preparing for tests or working on projects.

Try not to isolate yourself just because you are learning from home!