

Tips for Successful Remote Work (or doing the best you can during a pandemic)

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Remote work and remote learning is not as simple as staying at home and working. It requires careful planning and discipline. This is certainly not an ideal time to learn how to telecommute. But no matter what, you will learn a great deal about yourself in the next few months, and those lessons will impact your professional identity and work habits for years to come. Here are some tips for laying the groundwork for success.

Create Your Workspace

Designate a location in the home as your workspace. It need not be a whole room, but you should ensure you have access to a good internet connection, a comfortable place to sit, a clear surface for your computer, sufficient light and any other essential work materials. You should physically distance yourself from distractions as much as possible. Working on the couch in front of the T.V. does not work!

Set a Schedule

Set a schedule and stick to it as much as you can. Use an electronic calendar (Outlook or Google calendars) and calendar all of your classes, deadlines, exams, etc. Be sure to carve out time for your classes and weekly class preparation. For major assignments, give yourself internal deadlines early enough that you will have time to revise your final draft.

Fill in your work schedule for jobs or externships as if you were going into the office. Let your supervisor know when you will be available for work-related calls, video conferencing and checking emails. Be sure to set boundaries on how much time you will devote to job or externship related work. You need to leave enough time for your academic courses.

Try to build in time where you don't have to watch a screen. It will give your eyes a break. Reading a paper book, or listening to a lecture in audio format only might be a way to vary your work.

Replace the Ritual of Going to Work/School

You no longer have the ritual of going to the office or driving to the law school. Set up new rituals that will mark the beginning of your work day. If you have time to take a walk, exercise, or engage in some other activity that will energize you, this is great to do before you start your workday. Try to begin and end your workday at the same time every day, to the extent that you can.

Make a Daily To-Do List

Develop a list of goals and assignments you want to complete every day. Be sure to carve out time for online classes or meetings. Having a list of goals will allow you to hold yourself accountable and avoid the natural temptation to procrastinate. Your to-do list will also help you feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.

Stay Connected

Be sure to stay in touch with your supervisors and colleagues via email. Try to set regular videoconference supervision meetings using your Zoom account. Do not be afraid to reach out and ask questions. Your supervisors, professors and law school administrators will only be able to respond to your needs if you remain in communication with them.

Get Your Support System On-Board

It's important to stay connected with friends and family, especially with the social isolation that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. But it's hard to concentrate and get work done if your phone is constantly buzzing. Try to schedule conversations and respond to texts during your scheduled breaks (e.g. meal times) or after you have finished your work day.

If you live with family or roommates, work with them to develop ground rules while you are working. Getting their input in the process, especially for children, will help them understand why the structure is necessary. You will need to maintain some flexibility as you juggle the demands of your multiple responsibilities—sometimes folding laundry or running an errand may actually feel like a break from working online.

Make the Most of Teleconferencing

Do not become invisible because of telecommuting. Engaging in face to face interaction with your supervisor is a better way to stay connected than email and phone calls. Be sure to pick a professional backdrop and dress appropriately when you are in a professional setting. Reach out to your supervisors and professors and set up meetings—they are dealing with the isolation of remote work just as you are, and will likely be happy to have a videoconference.

Minimize Distractions

None of us are good multitaskers. We think we are, but multitasking leads to stress and affects the quality of your work. Close unnecessary windows in your computer. If you need to concentrate on something, close your email and let anyone who might need to reach you know that you will be offline for a period of time.

Limit your time on social media. While social media helps us feel connected, especially in times of crisis, it can also overwhelm us. Install a social media blocker (e.g. Stay Focused) and limit the

amount of time you spend on social media. Delete especially distracting apps from your phone. Whenever you can, put your phone away entirely for large blocks of time.

Staying Focused During Online Classes and Meetings

Paying attention in an online setting can be hard, especially if there is not much opportunity for interaction and participation. Do your best to focus and take notes contemporaneously—don't assume you will have time to re-watch the recording of the class. Put your phone away so you won't be tempted to scroll through your Instagram. Keep your webcam on during a Zoom class even if your professor does not require you to do so—seeing yourself on screen will remind you that others can see you. Ask questions in the chat box or raise your hand. Your professors will be glad to have an engaged class.

Balancing Caretaking Responsibilities

Telecommuting is especially challenging if you have children or family members to care for. In the current crisis, you may have no choice. Be sure to communicate with your supervisors or professors if these responsibilities are affecting how and when you can complete your work. Everyone is facing these challenges in this moment, and your supervisors and faculty will be understanding.

Managing in a Time of National Emergency

In a time of national emergency, expectations of ourselves as professionals and definitions of work must be flexible. You cannot be efficient unless you pay attention to your psychological well-being, stay informed on public health and other updates, and stay connected to your community.

Be realistic in setting expectations. You won't be able to do everything that you would be able to do in an ideal setting, and that's okay. Communicating with your supervisors, professors and law school administrators is key.

Carve out time for self-care. Meditation, exercise, and reading or listening to books, podcasts or music for pleasure are necessities when you have been cut off from so many of the things that you normally derive pleasure from.

And above all, be kind to yourself, and remember that you do not have to do this alone.