Transitioning to Online Learning During COVID-19

Transitioning from the traditional classroom to online learning is no easy task – especially if you have never taken an online course before. Many university students are accustomed to working independently, but online courses take self-directed learning to a whole new level. Although it may not be your preferred method of learning, taking courses online can actually benefit the average student in many ways. For one, it's less intensive because you have the choice to work at your own pace. Also, it helps improve your self-discipline which is sure to translate to other areas of your life. Plus, you can show up in your pajamas from the comfort of your couch!

Here are a number of strategies that will help you succeed in your online courses:

Treat your online course the same as a course that you attend in person.

Follow the same class schedule you had before COVID-19; this makes it simple for you to manage your time. If a professor has pre-recorded your lectures and you already find yourself falling behind, take back control of the situation and set up a schedule. Plan blocks of time for yourself to watch lecture videos and review the textbook. Once you have a big picture of what needs to be done, start each day with a daily task list. If you need accountability, find a partner that you can email your to-do list to each day.

Apply the Plan-Monitor-Evaluate Model.

The plan-monitor-evaluate model is a tool that allows you to understand your own thinking and learning. In other words, this is a metacognitive strategy that suggests using three steps when learning.

- **Plan:** Decide what you need to study and how you would best learn the material.
  Hint: Problem-solving course material will require a practice session, whereas a course focused on theories and concepts may require more reading and note-taking.

- **Monitor:** Track your progress to help you determine if what you are doing to learn is actually working for you.

- **Evaluation:** Reflect back to see if you met your learning goals. Evaluation usually occurs when you receive your exam or assignment back from your professor; however, another great way that you can evaluate your own learning is by using practice tests or by having a classmate quiz you.

Planning

Monitoring   Evaluation
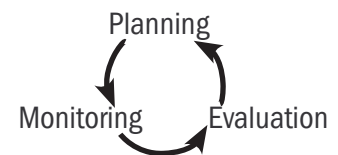
Find your learning community.

Feelings of isolation can be common during this pandemic, so it is important to form a learning community remotely. Think of a learning community as your support network during the course. That could include your professor or TA, your tutorial group, a group of peers, or even just a learning partner. Consider setting up daily or weekly check-ins to connect with your learning community. During these meetings you can discuss the course material, quiz each other before a test, or simply share and socialize a bit. This group of people will understand you when you're struggling and will be able to give the appropriate advice. It's also important to remember your larger learning community. Your professor may expect you to contribute to online discussions or ask you to post in an online forum, so make sure you contribute in the timeframe expected.

Learn to be strategic when you read.

Learning to be strategic when you read involves utilizing strategies to help you construct the meaning of the text. The following are four useful steps when reading:

- **Skimming** involves quickly reading through an article or a chapter of a book to get a general understanding of what is being discussed. It is the process of quickly reading headings, highlighted areas, and chapter objectives and summaries. Skimming allows you to survey the gist of the chapter without in-depth reading. This strategy will help you in the next step.

- **Questioning** is a strategy that helps you keep focused during in-depth reading. After a section has been skimmed, you will gain some idea about the meaning of the text which allows you to then create relevant questions about the content. One popular reading strategy is called the SQ4R method which suggests you to turn headings into questions. Once a heading has been turned into a question, you can then focus on answering the question while reading.

- **In-depth reading** involves reading the text carefully. It does not mean you have to read every single word; rather, it means you read to understand the deeper meaning of the text. Sometimes it may mean you have to read a paragraph two or three times to understand. When you are in-depth reading, you can use the questions you created to guide what you read. The idea is to answer the questions while reading which can also lend well to note-taking.

- **Note-taking** will help most people better retain what they are reading. Aside from the SQ4R strategy, another popular method used to read and take notes is called the RAP strategy.

  Read (a paragraph or a section).

  Ask yourself some questions about what you have just read.

  Put the answers in your own words and make notes.

Take advantage of virtual office hours and online academic support.

When you are feeling stuck, you need to reach out for help. You are not alone, and are part of a larger community at Ontario Tech University. Students are learners after all, and are expected to have questions, so do not hold back. Your professor or TA will have virtual office hours, online appointments, and email. Also, the Student Learning Centre offers a number of academic support services to help you with problem solving, writing, and studying. There are workshops, study sessions (PASS) and one-on-one appointments to help you through the learning process. These services are covered by your tuition and are all online for you. Also, don't forget there are a variety of other Student Life services to support you in this new online learning environment.

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