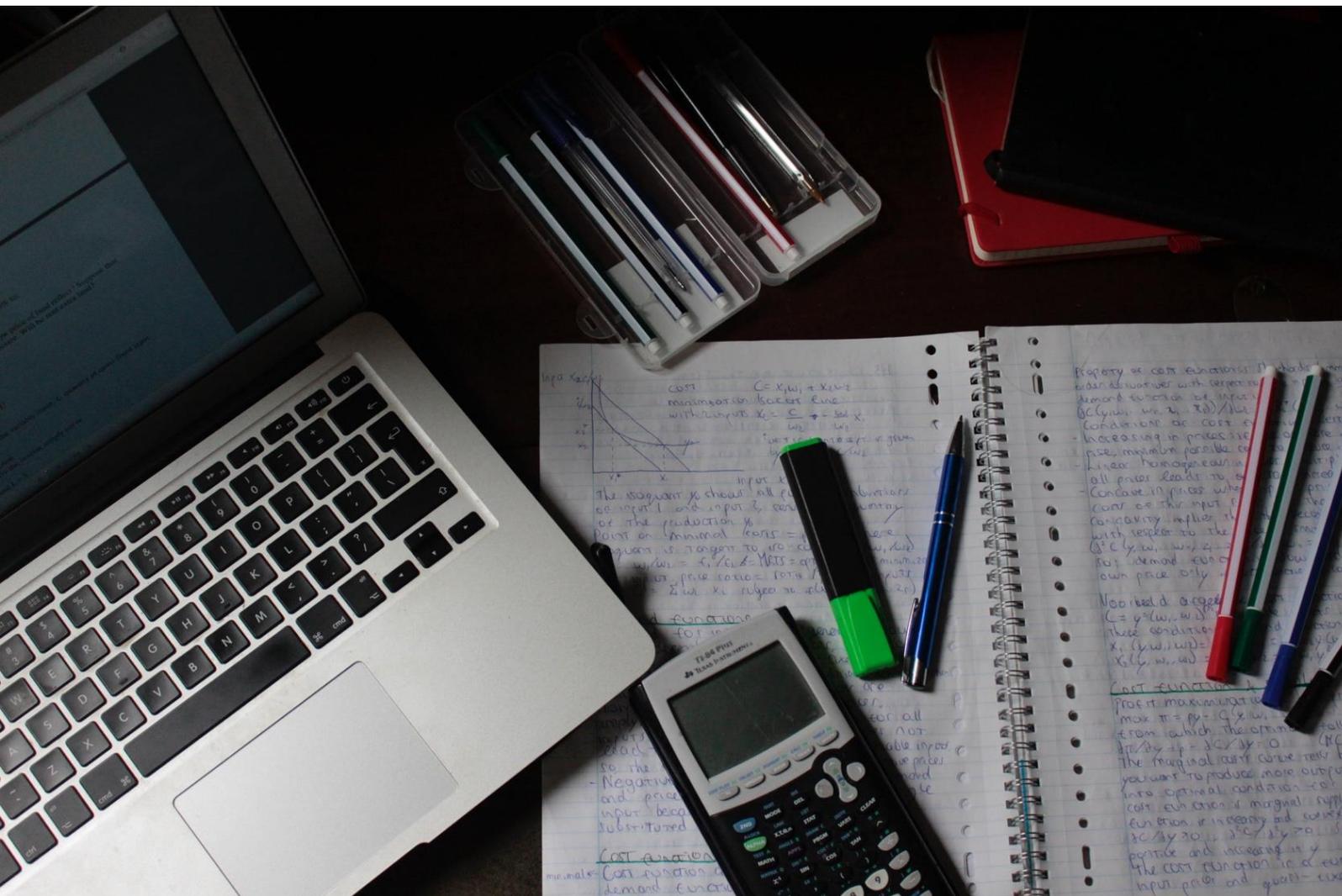


# Successfully studying from home

*Free PDF-Guide*



## Study Structure

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# Online University due to COVID-19

All students are experiencing (more) online university since COVID-19 happened, which has been a huge change in our daily lives. Since March 2020, all or most of the classes, lectures, meetings etc. have been online. Personally, I had never heard of Zoom, Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams, and now I am using these platforms every day, and I can barely imagine going to university. Only one time I went to university for presentations, and I could not find the classroom (felt like a freshman all over again).

While going to this huge change during the last couple of months, all students had to search for the best methods to (still) pass courses and feel productive. Based on my own experiences of the last couple of months, I will share my tricks on online lectures, online meetings with teachers, online meetings with other students and studying from home (what feels like) all the time.

Experiencing all of university online over the last couple of months made me realize that online school and university is possibly 'the future'. Also before COVID-19, a big part of our daily lives took place online, and more and more of the whole study process too. So, not only do we have to get used to online studying on the short term, maybe also on the long term. Although online school/university has its advantages too (see benefits of online studying), it also requires more self-discipline (your bed is often only 10 seconds away). The fact that it is more boring when your friends are not sitting next to you and the awkwardness of online meetings, does not help either. Therefore, giving tricks for online lectures and online meetings is not unnecessary.

# Benefits of Online Studying

Studying online and online university actually has a lot of benefits compared to physical education. Of course, the whole reason of COVID-19 why studying online has become way more usual is in no way positive. But nowadays also apart from COVID-19, more and more of the whole study process take place online. Therefore, it is good to look at it at a positive way.

## **Less travel costs and also less travel time**

Not going to university actually can save a lot of time and money for some students, who do not live on campus or near the university. Besides, saving travel time can also be seen as sustainable.

## **More opportunities to adapt it to your ideal learn environment**

Of course, during the coronavirus, you have limited options in where to study and some study places, especially your bed, could decrease your productivity. But if you want it, you have the freedom to do it!

## **You have more freedom in when to study**

This can be seen as both an advantage as disadvantage. It requires more discipline but you have more freedom to study at the moments you feel most productive and motivated.

## **Contributing to your time management in a positive way**

If you are more an evening person, this is an advantage. This flexibility can contribute to an improvement in your time management

## **Developing more self-discipline**

The fact that most of your studying takes place in your room, requires more self-discipline. Your bed is near you and it easily gets boring.

Concerning following online courses, apart from university:

## **More variety in the possibilities of online courses.**

Literally everything can be studied on the internet through courses, both free and not; the opportunities are endless

## **Better opportunities to adapt it to your way of learning**

Because of the large variety and possibilities of following online courses, you can adapt this more to how you study the most effective and how you like it the most.

# Tips for studying from home

## Routine

### Sleep schedule

Try to go to sleep and wake up around the same time every day. Depending on the amount of work you have to do in the weekend, look if you want to continue this then. It makes it easier to continue the routine on Monday.

### Include breaks, both short and long breaks

Breaks, both short (5-10 minutes) and long (30 minutes – 1 hour), are necessary to clear your mind and increase productivity and concentration after the break. Try to avoid your computer during these breaks, as you probably are already on your computer all day long.

Ideas for long breaks: take a walk or go for a run, cook/bake and eat with someone (or alone of course), read a book or magazine, (less fun) do chores (needed to be done anyway)

Ideas for short breaks: get some fresh air outside, drink a cup of coffee or tea, do some yoga.

### Tips for creating an efficient study routine

- Begin with taking a good look at the important dates of the course/subject. When are deadlines? When is the exam? Write these down in your planner for a good overview. After that, take a look at and plan the lectures, group work, etc.
- What is the most efficient way of studying for this course? Exercising, summarizing, something else? Keep in mind that active studying is more efficient than passive studying.
- Try to stay on top of lectures. Go to / watch all lectures and make sure your notes are clear and complete. If not, do some research yourself at the internet after the lecture or ask someone.
- Make reading/summarizing/exercising a habit. Preferable a daily habit at a certain time, but this obviously depends on both your day and course.
- If you have more than one course, alternate with studying these courses to increase focus.

## Separate studying from leisure time

### Workspace

Make your desk really your studying desk and try to only study from it. Everything but studying is then separated from it, which could give less feelings of stress when not studying. After all, if you are just relaxing, but still do this in your 'study environment', you could think, well let's do one more thing for university. No! It stays important to do other (fun!) stuff as well.

Something that can also be a useful tip, is to (if possible) switch workspaces once in a while. For example from your desk to the table in the kitchen. Sitting at one place behind your computer all day long can make you feel bored and tired, and just a tiny change in workspace could reduce this feeling.

### Dressing

Dress like you would normally do if you would go to university. If you normally wear make-up and/or put a lot of effort in your hair, you can still do this (to some degree). And at the end of the day, remove it and go back to your comfortable clothes, like you would normally do if you got home. This can give you a more 'productive vibe' and forces you to force studying more from your leisure and chill time.

### Hobbies besides studying – not on your laptop/computer

It is crucial to also do fun things to distract you from (the stress of) learning. Being on your laptop or computer all day is on the long term not very good for your health. Therefore, doing other things is very important.

## **Exercising**

Obviously good for physical health, but also surprisingly good for your mental health; it makes you happier (endorphin), more focused and it gives you distraction from stress.

- Take a walk frequently
- Start running

Personally, I love going for a run since I was about 15. Living close to a forest at my student dorm, and in the meadows at my parents', I really enjoyed going for a run, preferably every day, to be from home and just get some air.

- YouTube workout videos

## **Being creative**

- Painting / drawing, for example painting on numbers
- Follow a Bob Ross tutorial; calming, a real challenge, fun and a nice result!
- Try new recipes. Eating is necessary and baking and cooking can be fun, so try some new recipes.

## **Challenge yourself**

- Thirty days challenge in drawing, exercising, cooking etc. (lots to find on YouTube and the internet!)

# **Planning / Time Management**

## **Are you a morning, afternoon or evening person?**

The advantage of studying from home is that it gives you more freedom in studying in when to study. This could also be a pitfall as it requires more discipline, but still can be seen as an advantage of well, mainly when you are not a morning person. Of course, this also depends on your university and course, but if you have more freedom in managing your study time, adapt this to the time of the day you are most productive.

## **Look at your current schedule**

This could involve some confrontation with yourself, especially when it comes to social media.

A more extensive way to take a good look at your current schedule, is to write down every half hour what you've done the past thirty minutes, for the whole week. At the end of the week, so can see how you are arranging your time; what goes well? What could go better?

## **Making a planning / to do list**

The most cliché tip, but very important. Both a weekly planner and daily planner help you with increasing your productivity. A few tips on making a planner:

- Not too big tasks; split one big task up in smaller tasks, so that you will feel less overwhelmed
- Not too many tasks, not too less; find the balance, although this is difficult and takes some time
- Make priorities and underline them
- Find out what is best for you: starting with an easy task to get into the 'zone', or starting with a difficult task to just have that done.

## **Specific tips for making a study planning**

- Plan the readings, summarizing, exercising, writing the assignments globally (preferably on the computer). This does not have to be really precise, as you do not know how much time all the tasks are going to take. Still, it is important to have a global overview of what your upcoming weeks are going to look like. While planning, be realistic and rather plan too much time for tasks than too little
- Also plan and do activities unrelated to studying between deadlines, study days and in the evening. Alternating with studying and fun activities will keep you motivated and will avoid getting overworked.
- At the beginning of every week, make the tasks for the upcoming week more concrete and make a clear planning. While doing this, take a look at the previous week: what did you not finish last week and do have to catch up? Does the planning have to be more realistic or not?

# Motivation

As online studying can be quite boring, motivation to study is even more needed

## **Study buddies**

Study buddies really give motivation to study and to avoid procrastination. When your buddy is studying hard, you are less likely to go on your phone the whole time. Of course, during COVID-19, meeting with your friends has become more difficult, but you can still do this on a video call. It does not give the same vibe as studying together in real life, but it is a good alternative. Furthermore, it has become a trend in the StudyTube world to record yourself while studying so that other people can watch this live or later and study along.

## **Rewards**

Rewarding yourself has become more important in this time where all of your studying takes place online, which really is quite a challenge. Get yourself something to look forward to, in both the short and long term. In the short term, these are things like meeting with your friends or family, doing something fun, watching an episode of a series, movie, exercise, whatever! In the long term these are often holidays; think about the freedom you will have in the winter / summer holiday. At my university, we have retakes in February and August. It really is a good motivation to think 'if I study hard for this test, it will be less likely to retake it in February or August, so I will have a longer holiday!'

## **5-minute trick**

Starting is usually the most difficult thing. If you are in 'the flow' it becomes easier, but getting in there, hey, that is the struggle. Therefore, a trick is to just say to yourself; okay, only five minutes of studying, just five. You will see that once you have started, it is usually not as bad as you thought in advance, and maybe you will keep studying when those five minutes are over.

## **Last but not least: do not be too strict to yourself and do not forget to look after yourself**

Crucial! Health, both mentally and physically, still has the priority. If you do not feel well, do not be too strict in forcing yourself to be productive and study.

# Online lectures

Lectures in real life already could be difficult to remain concentrated, but this is even more the case for online lectures. Therefore, I will give you some tips to stay concentrated and get less distracted while watching them:

## **Pretend like it is a real-life lecture**

When the lecture is not live, pretend like you are watching the lectures in real life:

- **Prepare like you would normally do**

If you do not prepare lectures, nothing would probably change, but if you normally do this, keep doing that. Read the textbooks or articles, go through the PowerPoint slides etc.

### **Have your normal clothes on**

Of course, those sweatpants feel nice, but they probably give you a lazy feeling and will therefore decrease your productivity during lectures.

- **Sit behind your desk / table**

A bit the same as the previous tip. Normally, you would be behind a table in class, so do this at well from home. If you are in bed, this probably leads to less concentration.

- **Do not push the pause button, or try to avoid this.**

If you would not pay attention in class, you would miss something, and try to do the same for online lectures. This forces you to pay attention and therefore keep concentrated.

## **Avoid distractions as much as possible**

Tell your housemates not to distract you, throw your phone on your bed and make your desk clean. When you easily get distracted from other websites when watching your lecture, you could use a blocker of these website for one or two hours.

## **Try to stick to the normal schedule**

When all the lectures are being recorded and put online, try to stick to the schedule of watching them when they were just given physically. For example, if the lecture would be every morning from 9.00 till 11.00, watch it every day at that time too. It is obviously tempting to procrastinate as you can watch them whenever you want, but creating this 'rule' yourself will create a more structured routine.

## **Look at the speed**

This really depends on the lecturer and what works best for you. When a teacher talks slowly, it can be a solution to move up the speed to 1.5. Not only does this save quite some time, it is less boring and forces you to concentrate better to not miss things. In combination with 'challenging' yourself to not push the pause button and/or replaying something, will really improve your concentration.

## *My experiences*

Online lectures was lectures was not a new thing for many universities, at least in the Netherlands. Most universities already recorded some/most of their lectures (depending on the course), so that students could watch them live or later. Although this could make students a bit lazy, it is also a good system, as you could (re)watch the lecture as a way of preparing for the (re)exam. And, of course, if you had a long night or it was raining, you could just watch it from home, which is quite ideal. Most of the time, I did go to lectures physically, but to be honest, the main reason for this was to meet up with my friends. So when the coronavirus began, it was not really a shock to watch all the lectures online. However, I did notice that it took me more effort to watch lectures for a longer period of time without losing concentration, as it was every day more of the same. Although I am (now) completely used to online lectures, it still can be difficult to remain concentrated. And of course, I miss being with my friends during lectures.

# Online meetings with fellow students

The never-ending online meetings with other students. Depending on your course, but it could be the case for you that this is a daily thing. Although it could be more fun than studying online in your room alone all day long, it still leads to more complications than real-life meetings. Therefore, I will give you some tips from my own experiences.

## **Meet at the same time as a routine**

At the beginning of the course, talk with your groupmates about the following weeks. If you have a big project and/or paper to do, try to make the arrangement to meet every day (or how often is needed) at the same time. This routine gives structure and (hopefully) avoids people who do not show up. It also saves time in agreeing every time about what moment you are going to meet up the next time.

## **Talk in the beginning of the meeting about today's tasks**

Write down the tasks of that day and week and talk every time at the beginning of the meeting what has to be done. This will increase productivity and motivation; everyone knows what he or she has to do and when he or she will be finished.

## **Give each other feedback**

Feedback can feel awkward and forced, but it is actually a great way of improving your group work. Tell each other once in a while what is going well and what could go better. Do this in the most positive way possible; always start with a positive note, and then talk about possible improvements.

## **Motivate each other**

Especially when meeting online, it can be difficult to actually start to work and to remain concentrated for a longer period of time. This makes it more important to motivate each other. If one person or some people start to complain about wanting to quit working, this demotivates others as well. So, if you notice that people get less motivated, you could say things like 'come on, let's work for a bit longer for a good grade and have a break in 20 minutes or so'.

## **Make clear appointments and write them down**

This may seem obvious, but it is crucial, especially if you are working in a large group. When meetings are online, it happens faster that someone misses an appointment or task that he or she has to do. Therefore, it is useful to write everything down as a group to-do list.

## **Roles**

Each person in the group having a role with specific tasks gives more structure during working on your project and meetings. These are a few examples of roles:

### *Chairman*

This person makes a planning/to-do list for the whole groups, so that everyone knows what the tasks are. It is also important that the chairman motivates the others.

### *Secretary*

Makes notes during meeting with teacher and each other.

Contact with teacher / mails (this could also be done by a separate person, the so-called 'contact person')

### *Someone who keeps an eye on the deadlines and warns the others*

It can feel overwhelming when you have a lot of deadlines for a course and you can easily forget one.

Therefore it can be useful to have one person that has a good overview of all the deadlines and warns the others about them.

### *The final check person*

This person makes sure that in the end everything is ready to be handed in. For example if your group has to write a paper, this person reads everything at the end, makes small corrections concerning the grammar and spelling. This person can hand it in, or a separate person could take this task.

### **Deadlines**

When the course itself only has one deadline at the end of the course, it is also a good tip to make smaller deadlines as a group itself, especially if it is a large project. For example, every Monday you could take to each other about what you would like to have finished by Friday. This gives motivation for the whole group to work harder towards a smaller goal.

### **Be (extra) careful in interrupting another**

What I experienced is that because you are not face to face with your fellow students, interrupting each other becomes more common. To be honest, if I do not really pay attention to it, I do it quite often, which is definitely not good.

### **Evaluate at the end of every (or most) meetings**

This does not have to be very elaborated, just a quick evaluation of you accomplished, what went well and what could be improved the next time (see feedback!).

### **If your WIFI does not work properly, say it**

This may be obvious, but sometimes people (guilty) do find it awkward or just do not mention it, but just do it (and try to fix it haha).

# Online meetings with teachers

Meetings with teachers are often either very awkward or just quite nice and even sociable. Actually, the same goes for online meetings, at least in my experience. Some useful tips are:

## **Prepare your questions or something you want to discuss extra well and write it down**

When preparing well for the meeting and write down, it becomes more fluent and less awkward, as silences are avoided.

## **Make sure your WIFI works well**

When meeting with the teacher it is even more important that your WIFI goes well, also to make the conversation more fluent and less awkward, and moreover, of higher quality. If necessary, use your hotspot of your phone. Or use the chatbox if it really does not work.

## **Act like it starts 10 to 5 minutes earlier**

Suppose the meeting is scheduled at 10.00, act like it is scheduled at 9.50 or 9.55. Getting late is definitely something you do not want, so this is a good way to avoid this.

## **Do not let awkwardness stand in the way of asking questions.**

Most students probably have experienced the following most awkward moments, namely that the teacher asks if anyone has a question on whatever platform you are using, and everyone remains silent (also awkward in real life). But do not let the awkwardness of asking questions online (and physically) prevent you from actually doing it.

## **Avoid eating / being too comfortable in general**

Of course, there is not wrong with being comfortable, this is actually good. However, act like you would do in a normal meeting, where you probably would not eat or sit slumped.

## **Be (extra) careful in (not) interrupting**

As you and your teacher are not face-to-face and the quality of the video and/or sounds are not always that good, it becomes more easily to interrupt each other, which you want to avoid.