

ENGAGING IN ONLINE CLASSES

Taking part in online classes involves components like self management, class participation and effective communication. Here are some useful things to try incorporating into your remote work: see what works for you and be in touch if you want to learn more!

Know the expectations, and plan ahead

- Read the syllabus thoroughly and treat it like a contract to be fulfilled.
- Record your deadlines and coordinate them with other expectations in school and life. Tell your instructors if you see any obstacles and ask if you can rearrange your deadlines accordingly.
- Plan ahead, taking into account any potential delays in getting materials. For larger projects, set sub-deadlines for yourself that help you stay on track: you can use the [UTSC Assignment Calculator](#) as a model to work from. Make sure your plan gives you enough time to ask for help.
- Check your course's home page, discussion boards, announcements and your inbox regularly, and turn on notifications from your online course management system.
- Troubleshoot your technology in advance. Do your best to make sure you have a camera and microphone that work and a computer that functions without crashing. Take a look at these recommended technology requirements for remote/online learning: <https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/student-policies-guidelines/tech-requirements-online-learning>
- Spend time getting familiar with the interfaces being used in each course. Most undergraduate courses use Quercus: you can find how to turn on notifications at <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/tool-guides/quercus-notifications> and can get help at <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/educational-technology>. Other faculties might use different online management systems: for instance, OISE uses Pepper. Learning how to use these interfaces is a worthwhile investment of your time.

- Create a study space to attend your classes and do your studying. Working at a table is often best.
- Remember that people can see and hear you during online classes, so reduce background noise or stay muted, pay attention to your lighting and keep your computer stable.

Prepare for each work session

- Even if you don't plan to be visible to others, get out of the comfort of your bed or other intimate spaces and get dressed as if you were going to a "real" class. This will help you adjust your behaviour and thinking, and will signal your preparedness to others.
- Bring water and snacks to your workspace so you can care for your body while you feed your mind.

Make time for each class on a regular basis

- Make a flexible schedule for yourself that suits you and those around you, and use/adjust it regularly. Use calendars that include tasks and reminders, or set priorities for each day that will let you do the things that matter most to you at the best available times.
- Set aside times to handle your readings and homework. Look into whether your instructors are offering virtual office hours.
- Make time to check out everything your instructors have made available. You might not need to read optional material, but at least be aware of what's being offered.
- Multitasking divides your attention. Instead of having a television show playing in the background while you work, make the episode a reward for having gotten some work done.
- Working virtually with others can help you focus and stay on track. Join [Study Hubs](#), [Graduate Writing Groups](#), or similar programs to support your learning.

Challenge yourself to engage more

- If you're shy or using English as an additional language, prepare open-ended questions for class discussions. Doing this can help you communicate more effectively and shift the conversation towards subjects that interest you.
- Make notes of questions to ask and comments to share. Develop a note-taking system for yourself to differentiate between them, so you can jump to the item you need.
- Respond to peers and instructors. Ask questions, share your insights and build on others' responses. It's fine to disagree with someone else, but remember to be respectful of different opinions.
- It's important to ask questions because other students likely have the same concerns as you and your instructors want to hear from you. Take the time you need to formulate your thoughts.
- Engage with your courses in real time if you can. If lectures are recorded, you can use the video lecture control features (e.g. pause, repeat, forward/progress), but you won't have the option of asking questions immediately by raising your hand virtually or using the chat.
- Find out how to ask questions if you are not engaging live. If the options don't already exist, encourage your instructors to set up something like a discussion on Quercus or a session in Blackboard Collaborate.
- Compliment peers you admire and do your best to make connections with them. If you've been placed into a Quercus Group for a course, communicate with your peers in your Group space using Discussions, Announcements and Pages. To learn more, go to Group Tool: Student View.

Presentations

- Get used to the platform and test that everything works. A friend might help you troubleshoot your explanations of difficult concepts.
- Express yourself in plain language whenever possible to guide your audience's understanding.
- Try not to read a prepared script. Focus on communicating your ideas in a logical way. Encourage your audience to engage in questions and activities.
- Warm up your vocal cords and take deep breaths to enunciate well and stay calm.
- Count to 10 before breaking a silence.
- If you make a mistake, the audience probably didn't even notice. When necessary, acknowledge serious errors and offer corrections.

Practice makes perfect

- Make notes for yourself of your successes and of ways you want to improve. Watch your peers and ask them for tips! They might admire something you're already doing without even thinking about it.

Want to know more?

The Centre for Learning Strategy Support has resources, workshops, events and appointments to support you.

→ look us up online at learningstrategy.utoronto.ca

→ register for appointments and events at folio.utoronto.ca

→ or email us at clss@utoronto.ca