

4 Tips for Learning Online

This guide is designed to offer advice on succeeding in remote courses. The topics covered include:

- **Taking charge of your course**
- **Managing your time, space, attention, and learning**
- **Mastering new course formats: Video lectures and discussion boards**
- **Building community in the online environment**

Taking charge of your course

When you are taking classes at CC, your professors and peers provide you with a structure and a social context for your learning. When your course moves online, however, the course management system (Canvas) will provide much of the structure for the class, and you may find yourself working more independently than you would in a CC classroom. These changes in the class format will require you to be more proactive. You will want to:

1. Spend time getting to know how the course is organized in Canvas

Your first task is to get a sense of how your course is structured. Chances are that faculty will be using Canvas in different ways than they have in your past courses at CC. Most faculty will be organizing their classes through **modules** in Canvas that may or may not be linked to a **homepage** or **syllabus** that provides an outline of the course. In some cases, faculty may just be uploading course materials into **files** or **modules** without a map.

Find the map of the course (either the **homepage** or **syllabus**) or create your own map. To get a sense for the overall course structure, you might ask:

- *Will the class meet at a set time each day?*
- *Where is the course content: readings/ lectures/ images/ videos/ sound recordings?*
- *How will you be participating in the course: synchronous (real-time) communications or asynchronous discussion boards; quizzes; uploading responses, papers, audio, or video files?*
- *What synchronous communication platform will your course be using (Big Blue Button, Zoom, something else)?*
- *At what times will assignments be due and how do you submit them?*
- *How will the professor be communicating critical information?*
- *Will the professor be hosting virtual office hours?*
- *Who else is in the class and how can you be in touch with them?*

If the structure of the class is unclear to you after spending time exploring the course, be sure to talk to your professor immediately. Structures that might seem straightforward to a designer may not always translate in the design.

2. Assess your technology

You will want to identify what technology is necessary for participation in the course. We understand that not all students will have the same access to reliable technology and connectivity. Make sure to let your professor know immediately if you are unable to access the course at any point during the block or if you are unable to complete assignments because you lack the requisite technology. Contact the [Solutions Center](#) with you technology concerns.

Managing your time, space, attention, and learning

As a CC student, you are used to being in class for 3-6 hours each day. But in an online environment your professor will not be spending as much time with you. This means you will be responsible for completing much of the work that you would have completed during class time on your own or working remotely with a small group. This shift might require different study strategies. You will want to **identify a place to work, create a schedule, manage your attention, and continuously evaluate your learning.**

1. Identify a space to work

At CC you have many spaces that are conducive to learning—quiet spaces with tables, chairs, and adequate lighting, where you can work purposefully. When you are learning in your home or residence hall, you might find yourself drawn to common rooms and comfy couches. You will be better served by identifying a dedicated space that you designate as your classroom and creating an environment where you can focus.

2. Create a schedule

Because you are not in the CC rhythm—and you can't really leave the house—you will have far more unstructured time. This can jeopardize meaningful learning. Make a schedule for yourself and commit to keeping it.

First: Get the lay of the land

- Look at the block as a whole and identify when major assignments are due.
- Identify when will you be “in class” online with the professor and/ or classmates.
- Note the varieties and average amount of daily coursework.

Second: Build a daily schedule

- Build your schedule around “class time.” If all or part of your instruction will be delivered asynchronously, you still want to decide on a regular time to be “in class” and stick to it.
- Schedule time for completing work to prepare for the next day of class.
- Build in time for leisure, self-care, and important people in your life.
- Budget for at least six hours of work each day.

Third: Check and plan

- Plan to check into your course every day, even if you are not “meeting.”
- Note what is and is not working in your approach to the course.
- Revise your daily schedule as necessary.

Use whatever calendar program suits you, **but do plan every day**, noting the time you will be spending on different tasks. Set a goal to stick to your schedule and reward yourself when you do.

3. Manage your attention

When you are sitting in a classroom, you experience a certain amount of social pressure to demonstrate you are paying attention. Sitting in your room at home or in your residence hall, you might feel yourself tempted by any number of distractions. You might even kid yourself that you can multi-task. When you attempt to multi-task:

- Your assignments will take more time to complete
- You are more likely to make mistakes
- You will remember less of what you have learned

When you are “in class,” close all windows in your browser except for Canvas, disable your email and chats, hide your cell phone, ask your family and friends for some privacy, and work.

4. Evaluate daily what you know and what you do not understand

When you are in class at CC, your professor and peers provide you with immediate feedback on your learning. In an online environment, you may not have access to these social cues in the same way. Take a step back every day and evaluate what you know and what you don't understand. Ask yourself questions like:

- *What was the most important insight that I gained?*
- *What do I need to do differently to get more out of the class?*
- *How can I approach assignments to be more successful?*
- *What kinds of problems keep tripping me up and why?*
- *How would I feel if I had to teach a class on the material I am learning?*
- *How is my study schedule working? Am I giving myself enough time?*

Also be sure to seek out your professor, other students in the class, and support in the [Colket Center](#) for feedback on your learning.

Mastering new course formats: Video lectures and discussion boards

Online instruction often employs different modes of instruction than in-person classes. You may need to shift your study strategies to accommodate for these new modes.

Video lectures

Many of your professors will be using lecture capture or narrated PowerPoint presentations to deliver the content for their courses. This means you might be responsible for watching lectures on your own time and using virtual office hours to ask questions. Watching videos online can be a very passive form of learning. To learn well in this format, you need to make your experience of the lecture active. To get the most out of lectures:

1. **Prepare for lecture by completing the reading first.** Draw upon the reading to enhance your understanding of the lecture material.
2. **Take notes.** You might think you don't need to take notes because you can refer back to the lecture, but taking notes will help you focus on the material.
3. **Stop and review.** Stop periodically (every 5-10 minutes) throughout the lecture and write down everything you can remember. Plan to listen to the lecture more than once for critical details you might have missed.
4. **Integrate** your notes and your summaries of the lecture.
5. **Make resources for studying:** outlines, flash cards, generate possible quiz questions, etc.

Discussion boards

Most CC students become accustomed to the norms and practices of seminar style discussions. It is likely, however, that in an online format, you will be asked to engage in discussion differently. Specifically, your professor might ask you to contribute to class through posts to a discussion board.

To be successful in this new format, you will want to:

1. Understand the expectations and ground rules for the discussion board. Review your syllabus for guidance about how often to post, the type of content to include in each post, and the best ways to respond to others' posts. Pay special attention to any rubrics that your professor might provide for evaluating your posts and reach out to your professor if you are concerned that you are not meeting their expectations.
2. Read others' comments before posting and connect your ideas with what you are reading.
3. Make sure that each post you write is clear and well-structured. Take time to clarify the message you want to communicate in your post and organize your content into concise paragraphs.
4. Respond to others' posts in a supportive and challenging way. Be sure that your responses to others are respectful, positive in tone, and do not appear angry, even when you wish to disagree or present an alternative viewpoint.
5. Use language that is appropriate for an academic environment. Avoid writing in a way that is too informal (i.e., writing that resembles a text message).

Work to build community

At CC, you are used to spending a lot of time physically present with your professors and your peers. The time you spend together in class fosters close personal relationships that are motivating for learning. You can certainly develop close relationships in an online environment, but you may need to be more intentional about reaching out to your professor and other students in the class.

Plan to have at least one direct exchange with your professor or classmates every day through emails, chat, discussion board comments, and/or synchronous discussions.

Content adopted from Page, C. and Vincent, A. (2018) Learning to learn online. Kwantlen Polytechnic University Learning Centres.