

## Being Productive at Home: A Guide for Working Remotely

This guide will provide strategies you can use every day to stay productive and motivated while finishing your term remotely.

### DESIGN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Our environments affect our behaviour whether we are aware of it or not. With respect to getting work done—or the habit of productivity—our surroundings will be helping or hurting us.

**Good Cues = VISIBLE**

**Bad Cues = INVISIBLE**

- A cue is a thing (time, location, object) that makes us aware to perform a specific behaviour. **Seeing a textbook cues reading. Seeing a TV cues Netflix.**
- Arrange your environment so the cues to distractions are invisible. Put remote controls, gaming controllers, phones, etc. in a different room or drawer. **Sit with your back to the TV** so you don't see it. **Mute social media notifications.** The harder it is for you to access the distracting cues, the better. If we deem an action too much work to perform, we won't do it.
- Then, **arrange your environment so the good cues are visible.** Notebooks, pens, computer, coffee ... all the tools of a student are sitting on your desk/table and not hiding in a bag or under your bed. **Seeing these will remind you of the tasks you need to complete.**
- Now comes the question of where to work. If you have a kitchen table or desk, these make optimal locations. **Sitting at a table, leaning slightly forward over your work is one of the more focused positions to get work done.** You will be more productive and less likely to get distracted than lying on your couch or in bed.
- If you need to **rearrange furniture to optimize productivity...** then do it. This is your time to get creative!
- If you live with roommates, try working together at the same time. **This will help create a more motivating and supportive environment conducive to productivity.**

## BEATING PROCRASTINATION

We often hear words like motivation and willpower thrown around when it comes to doing or not doing our professional and academic tasks. This is problematic because they are natural shape-shifters, which makes them unreliable when it comes to a behaviour we wish to perform. This often results in procrastination. We procrastinate because a task looks hard, it is boring, and we get no instant gratification from working.

## BUILD A ROUTINE

Routine is important when it comes to productivity, and there are several parts we will discuss within this.

### 1. WHEN you will do the work

### 2. WHAT you will work on

#### WHEN you will do the work:

- Make a **schedule**.
- It is important for you to set aside **specific, concrete work periods** so when you go to bed each night, you know exactly what the next day will look like.
- Keep these sessions **small**.
- You are **more likely to work well for an hour than six hours**. An hour is smaller and more manageable.
- If an hour feels too long, work for 30 minutes.
- Take **breaks**. Breaks are important because our brains are not great at being focused and they need time away from work to rest and digest information. Try to keep those breaks 5 to 10 minutes in length. **The longer the break, the harder it will be to pull yourself back to work.**
- Be aware of **when you work best**. If you are not a morning person, do not schedule work then. If you are in bed by 9:00 pm, do not schedule work late the evening. The last thing we want is for you to feel like a failure for missing unrealistic work time.
- To really be a master, work on your **harder/more boring tasks at a time when you are most awake and focused**.

## WHAT you will work on:

- Yes, we are making lists here, but it is important to set small, specific tasks.
- The **smaller a task is, the easier it is**. The easier a task is, the more likely we are to work on it.
- You do not have to complete an entire reading in one sitting. Break it up into sections.
- **Make lists** of all the things you need to do in each class and when they need to be done.
- You can also **prioritize**. Are there tasks that need to be completed before others?

Put **WHEN** and **WHAT** together for optimal success. Here are two ways you can do this:

## 1: Implementation Intention

### 2: Habit Stacking

#### 1. Implementation Statement

A plan you make beforehand about when and where you will act.

**“I will (BEHAVIOUR) at (TIME) in (LOCATION)”**

Individuals who make a specific plan for when and where they will perform a habit are more likely to follow through. Your cues become time and location.

**“I will (write that blog post) at (2:00) at (my kitchen table)”**

#### 2. Habit Stacking

We take a new habit and attach it to something we already do.

**“After (CURRENT BEHAVIOUR), I will (NEW BEHAVIOUR)”**

Everything we do sparks the next thing we do. We wake up - check the temperature outside - and dress accordingly for the day.

**“After (making coffee), I will (write that blog post).”**

There will be things you do every day without thinking about them. Try taking some of the new things you have to complete at home and stack them on top of things you already do.

## CREATING INSTANT GRATIFICATION

This is very important when it comes to our behaviours. We repeat things that make us feel good and ignore things that make us feel bad. Let's be honest... homework rarely provides us with instant gratification. The **rewards of homework are long-term**... when the semester is over and we get our grades or we graduate from university.

However, there are a couple **ways we can create instant gratification when it comes to our work**. We just need to be able to see what we have achieved.

### 1. Paper Clip Strategy

### 2. Habit Tracker

#### Paper Clip Strategy

You don't have to use paper clips, but if you have something small on hand (marbles, coins, goldfish crackers), put them in a container. Then get a second empty container. Every time you complete a task (read a page, write a sentence, study a concept) you move one paper clip to the empty container. As the empty container begins to fill, we feel SATISFIED with what we are doing, and it encourages us to keep doing more.

#### Habit Tracker

This can take the form of a journal, list, or habit tracker sheet. Write down the small, specific tasks you wish to complete, then put a SATISFYING checkmark beside it. Or cross it off with a line. Either way, you can see your progress and what you have achieved.

## CONCLUSION - BE KIND TO YOURSELF

This situation is different. For many of us, this is a change to our working habits. Be kind to yourself. There will be some trial and error in figuring out what works for each individual. You are not failing to get work done, you are simply figuring out what doesn't work for you.

When we don't achieve our goals, we often fall into the "I'm not good enough" or "this is my fault" mindset. This is dangerous and we all do it. Attaching to the negative is much easier than the positive.

Stop judging yourself. Treat yourself as you would a friend. You would never tell a friend they are a failure for not reading 50 pages of their psychology textbook. So why tell yourself that?

The reality of the situation is that productivity is going to be a struggle. However, I am confident that implementing the above strategies will help.

**Good luck and keep in touch—Kathleen Hyndman, Learning Strategist, [khyndman@stu.ca](mailto:khyndman@stu.ca)**