



## Working from Home: A Guide for STU Interns

This guide will provide strategies you can use every day to stay productive and motivated while completing your internship 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 intern 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, both for your internship and academic work.
- 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. It will be easier to work if that is what the people in your environment are doing as well. Make sure if your internship requires phone calls or video conferences that you are considerate of the people you share your space with, and give them advance notice, or take calls in a separate room if possible.



## 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. What then comes from this is procrastination. We procrastinate because a task looks hard, it is boring, and we get no instant gratification from working. But we don't feel good while doing it. We feel anxiety and failure.

You are not the problem. Your approach is. Here are some things you can do to sweep procrastination under the rug and not your homework.

## BUILD A ROUTINE

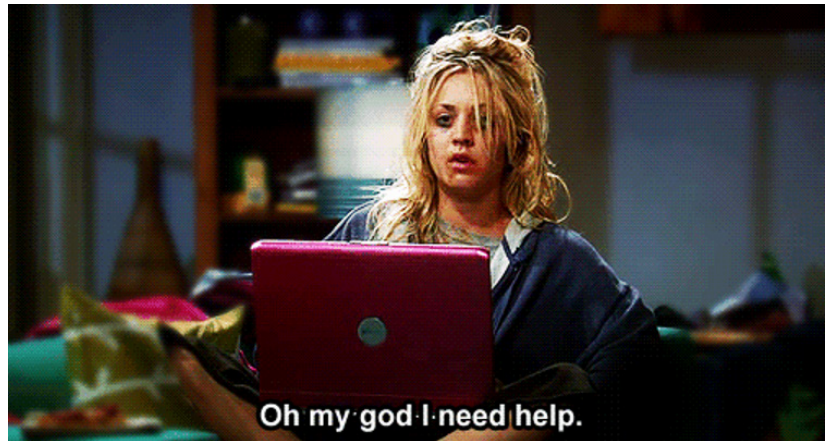
Routine is important when it comes to productivity, and there are several parts we will discuss within this.

### 1. WHEN you will do the work

### 2. WHAT you will work on

But first, set yourself up for success, before you even begin to work. We've all been here.

Try to create a work from home routine that mimics your regular routine as much as possible. Structuring your day similarly to how it was when you physically went into the office will make this transition to work from home life easier.



### Some ways to do this:

- Wake up at your regular time, not 10 minutes before you are supposed to be working. Shower, get dressed, brush your teeth, and have breakfast. Working in your pjs can be fun, until your boss wants to have a video call in 10 minutes, and you realize you haven't changed your clothes or taken a shower yet.
- Plan out your day/week in a way that works for you and stick to it. Whether that is creating a to-do list every morning or blocking out your weekly work, class and study time in a planner, try to find some structure.
- Don't forget to schedule breaks. It's easy to get distracted at home. You're working at the kitchen table and realize the dishwasher needs to be emptied, or that laundry needs to be folded. Resist the urge to do those things immediately (abandoning your work or studies in the process) and instead schedule short breaks throughout your day, and at least one longer meal break.

Now you are ready to sit down and get to work.

## **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.
- And take breaks. Breaks are important because our brains are not so 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 read 50 pages at once. You can read 10 pages... five times. Break down your work assignments similarly.
- 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 (internship work) 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.

There will be things you do every day without really 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.

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

## SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

- 7:00 – 8:30 AM:** Morning routine (Wake up, shower, eat, coffee, etc.)
- 8:30 – 9:00 AM:** Check emails, plans tasks, touch base with supervisor
- 9:00 – 10:30 AM:** Work/Study
- 10:30 – 10:40 AM:** Short break
- 10:40 AM – 12:00 PM:** Work/Study
- 12:00 – 1:00 PM:** Lunchtime!
- 1:00 – 2:30 PM:** Work/Study
- 2:30 – 2:40 PM:** Short break
- 2:40 – 4:30 PM:** Work/Study

Depending on your class schedule, your day might look different, but use this as a model and create a daily schedule for yourself based on your courseload, assignments and internship work.

## COMMUNICATION

When working remotely rather than in an office environment, good communication is crucial for success. You may be used to just popping into your supervisor's office to ask a question or for clarification, but when working from home, you will need to find alternative ways to stay connected and make sure you are on the same page.

### Communicating with your supervisor/team

- A check in call at the beginning of the week to review your workplan and schedule with your supervisor is ideal. Set aside half an hour every Monday to go over expectation and work for the week. Even if you don't do any more work on your internship that day, at least you will have a clear plan to follow.
- Stay connected with your supervisor and the rest of your coworkers through whatever means they use to stay in touch, whether that's a program like Slack, Microsoft Teams or Gchat. A simple "Good morning!" when you check in for the day will let your team know you are there, and make you feel more connected.
- Be responsible for managing your tasks and time, but make sure you communicate your needs with your workplace, and that you understand theirs too. This keeps you visible and engaged as an employee and teammate.

### Communicating with the people you live with

- Working from home can be complicated when sharing a small space like an apartment and requires planning and open communication.
- Make sure you communicate what you need to focus and be productive with the people you live with. Set up "work zones" and "quiet hours" in your space and try to keep those separate from places and times where you relax. If you have to do a video or conference call, let your roommates know in advance to make sure you won't be interrupted, and also that you won't be interrupting anyone else. If you need to, go into a separate room in those instances. And of course, wear headphones and mute your microphone when you aren't talking to minimize distractions.
- Set boundaries for interruptions. You (hopefully) get along with the people you live with. While that makes for a happier living situation, it can make it easy to get distracted from work when your roommate keeps showing you videos of dogs on Instagram. Let them know what is and isn't acceptable when you are working and enforce those boundaries. Use your break time for socialization.



## **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 with a degree.

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. Basically, you 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**

Don't forget to be kind to yourself. If you are struggling to complete tasks through the day, break them down into smaller chunks. 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. Our lizard brains are still wired to think there might be a lion behind that rock. 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 textbook or completing a work assignment in one day. So why tell yourself that?

The reality of working from home is that productivity is sometimes going to be a struggle. However, I am confident that implementing all/some of the above strategies will help.

**Good luck!**