

CAST Study Skills Handbook

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Learning online presents unique challenges, among them:

- Loss of the **daily structure** that comes from studying alongside others
- Less **interaction** with instructors and classmates
- **Isolation** from the social network that comes from being on campus
- Increased **family expectations**
- Emotional and personal **stress**

Not everyone will experience all of these challenges, but even one of them can make it harder to excel in your courses.

There's a lot you can do to overcome these challenges!

Studying from home requires increased **independence**.

- Set realistic **goals and deadlines** for yourself
- Identify and **minimize your distractions**, both when you're in class and when you're studying
 - e.g., turn off phone notifications when you're doing course work
- If possible, create a study space where you can **work without interruption**
 - Communicate with your family about when your classes meet
 - One student I spoke to attends online classes from her building's roof, because it's the only quiet place she can find
- **Get help** if and when you need it
 - Reach out to professors -- they'll try to work with you to help you succeed
 - Work with CAST tutors
 - Take advantage of other resources (there's a list at the end of this document)

Without the structure that comes from being physically present in a campus community, scheduling your days is crucial to your success.

Make sure to **schedule all of your obligations** -- not just the school-related ones!

- Start by filling in the times your **classes meet**
 - If at all possible, avoid doing other things during class
- Add to the calendar all upcoming assignment **due dates**
- Add to each day the time you'll use to **complete your homework**
 - It's best to dedicate specific blocks of time to your school work -- that helps you keep from being overwhelmed or procrastinating
- Add all **other obligations**
 - If you're working, put your **work hours** into your calendar, so you don't create scheduling conflicts, and so you have a realistic picture of how much time you have
 - Don't forget family / **household responsibilities!**
- Schedule "**me time**"
 - Self-care is important -- give yourself "time off" from responsibilities if possible
 - Use technology to stay in contact with friends
- **Share your schedule** with your family
 - Communicate with them about what they should expect regarding your workload
 - When are you **available to help** with errands and chores?
 - When are you **absolutely unavailable?** (e.g., when are your classes?)
 - This helps if you need to share devices like laptops or tablets

Be realistic with yourself about how much you can accomplish in a day. This is always an important aspect of student success -- and it's even more important when you're learning from home, when you're juggling various responsibilities, and when you may be dealing with uncertainty and stress.

Plan ahead!

- Set reminders on your phone / computer so you don't miss classes
- Keep track of due dates
- Schedule specific assignments for specific days and times -- don't get caught off guard by suddenly realizing you have a 10-page paper due tomorrow

When you're studying or doing homework, try the **Pomodoro Technique**. To do this, you'll use a timer to manage your work and breaks. The idea is that you work intensely for a relatively short period of time, then give yourself a very brief break so you don't burn out.

The Pomodoro Technique works like this:

- Set a timer for 25 minutes
- Work without interruption or distraction until the timer goes off
- Set the timer for 5 minutes and take a break -- check social media, get up and stretch, do whatever you want until the timer goes off
- Reset the timer for 25 minutes of uninterrupted work again
- Repeat as needed

There are many apps and online tools that can help with scheduling, time management, and other aspects of online learning. There are many more out there than would fit on this list.

Scheduling apps for students:

- My Study Life -- <http://mystudylife.com>
- myHomework -- <http://myHomeworkapp.com>
- The calendar on your phone
- Google Calendar -- <https://calendar.google.com>

Timers for work-flow management:

- Your phone's timer
- Tomighty (Pomodoro Technique timer) -- <https://tomighty.github.io>

Distraction blockers limit your ability to access the websites that distract you

- Freedom -- <https://freedom.to>
- SelfControl (Mac only) -- <http://selfcontrolapp.com>
- Focus (Mac only) -- <https://heyfocus.com>
- FocusWriter -- <https://gottcode.org/focuswriter/>

Ask for help when you need it!

It's ok to **ask your instructors** for what you need from them. These circumstances are new for all of us -- many of your instructors have never taught online before and don't know what works for their students. Please communicate with them about what's working, and what isn't.

If your instructor has **office hours**, that's a good time to meet, if you are able.

Email your instructors, either to ask questions or to ask about other times they could meet with you.

If you need extra time for an assignment, **ask for an extension**. Not all instructors can grant every request for an extension, but there's a chance your instructor will work with you.

Create study groups with other people in your classes -- use video-conferencing software (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.) to study alongside your friends. This can help you feel a little less isolated as you get your work done.

Reach out to CAST for tutoring or academic coaching. (See the "Resources" section for more info.)

COLLEGE RESOURCES:

Library Guidance:

- Use **Ask A Librarian** to get assistance via email, phone or Zoom (<https://www.mmm.edu/offices/library/ask-a-librarian.php>)
- The library has **LibGuides** that can help you learn how to use the library's resources (<https://mmm-library.libguides.com/>)
 - Guides to Blackboard, Zoom, JSTOR
 - Info on finding primary sources, on secondary sources, on citing sources and creating annotated bibliographies, as well as LibGuides for specific courses like Writing II.

Resources for Remote Instruction:

The college has additional resources that can help you get started with online learning technology, including guides to Zoom and Blackboard, as well as information about free internet access. For more, please visit:

<https://www.mmm.edu/offices/dow-zanghi-health-center/updates-regarding-coronavirus-covid-19/resources-for-remote-instruction/>

The Center for Academic Support and Tutoring (CAST) is currently providing tutoring services online. CAST offers help with specific subjects and assignments, and also has Academic Coaches who can help you figure out how to juggle your schedule and manage your workload.

To schedule an appointment, visit <https://mmm.mywconline.com>

- If it's your first time using CAST, you'll need to register for an account before you can schedule an appointment
- Once you've registered and logged in, you can use the dropdown menu near the top of the calendar page to select the subject you'd like to work on, then pick an available time
- If you'd like help keeping on top of your schedule and work in general, select the subject **Academic Coaching**

The Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC) is operating remotely with regular hours (see below). If you're currently outside of NYState, their counselors may not be able to work with you, but they can help put you in contact with someone in your area.

- The majority of sessions are conducted via telemental health (phone and video sessions). More information about telemental health, including FAQs, can be found on the CWC website.
- To schedule an appointment, please email counseling@mmm.edu or call the office at (212) 774-0700
 - include your phone number and a good time to call back.
- If you've already been receiving services from CWC, you can email your counselor directly
- **CWC Website:** www.mmm.edu/cwc
 - Note: the CWC website has resources like guided meditations that you can download
- If you are experiencing an emergency, call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK, NYCWELL at 1-888-NYC-WELL, or 911

Pass/Fail Grading Option:

- Do the best you can this semester
- Tell your professors if you need help (deadline extensions, guidance, advice, etc.). Professors are being instructed to work with you!
- If you anticipate wanting to take a class Pass/Fail, talk to your faculty advisor and read up on the option on the College website. Restrictions apply.
 - <https://www.mmm.edu/offices/academic-advisement/grading-policies.php#passfail>
- Contact the Office of Advisement (advisement@mmm.edu) or the Center for Student Services (CSS@mmm.edu) for questions about how it could affect your academic standing, financial aid, or visa status