

TOP TIPS FOR STUDENTS ENGAGING WITH LEARNING ONLINE

Many of you may be starting to learn online and at a distance for the first time or increasing your use of this in the coming weeks due to the impact of Covid19 coronavirus. This might feel a bit daunting at first. Remember that, even though it might feel like you are just talking to a computer, you are engaging with the same people you already know from your course. They will want to continue to share ideas with you and build on the conversations you have been having through the semester.

These tips outline some ways to make the most of learning online.

- 1. Be kind to yourself and help one another.** This is an unsettling time for students, and staff. Give yourself time to adapt to a new learning environment. Be proactive with communicating with your course mates and university friends. Set up course WhatsApp groups (or another platform if you prefer) for offline chat and engagement or use shared documents and course discussion boards to share notes and ideas. Form small virtual study or reading groups and work through online materials together. And don't forget to ask questions if you're unsure of anything.
- 2. Make sure you're 'online ready'.** If there is any reason why you will find it difficult to engage in online learning (e.g. poor WiFi connection, don't have a digital device, don't have the right software, need accessibility support) notify your lecturer in case alternative arrangements can be put in place.
- 3. Familiarize yourself with the virtual learning environment (VLE) that your institution uses.** Our VLE is called Vision, it is accessed through the student portal. You may also receive specific instructions from your course team on where find course-related information.
- 4. Find out what is expected of you as a learner** in the online environment and familiarise yourself with any assessment requirements, especially if these have had to change with the move to online learning. If you're unclear on any of the requirements, check in with your lecturer as soon as you can.
- 5. Set up a workstation that you can use for studying.** This should be a comfortable, quiet space, free of distractions but with good internet connection. A desk or a table can be much more comfortable in the long term than a bed or a sofa. You may wish to have home comforts (water, tea, sweets, fruit, tissues) at arms' length so you're able to settle in and stay motivated. Remember to take regular breaks away from your screen and your studies to rest, relax, eat, exercise and get outdoors if you can.
- 6. Build a routine.** Don't think of the time at home as time off; see it as a normal day at university. Create a timetable for yourself, including breakfast, and study breaks, any lecture / seminar times. Remember to check any office-hours or timetabled sessions on your course(s) and any deadlines. You may wish to use Google/Outlook calendar to keep track of your activities. There are many time management techniques, so find one which works for you.
- 7. Make use of online communication methods such as live chat and discussion boards.** These are an excellent way to immerse yourself in the course and they will make the learning experience more active and more engaging for you and for the lecturer. Ask questions, comment on what others are saying, and develop the conversations. You will communicate in different ways on various online formats (email, discussion boards, social media, online seminars). Be professional and appropriate, but don't be afraid to project your personality and show that you are a real person.
- 8. Look for online reading material in the library.** Through the online library, you'll have access to e-books, e-journals and other materials to help you complete your course including assignments. You can also have online support from the team of Academic Supports Librarians. If you don't know how to access library material online ask your lecturer or contact IShelp@hw.ac.uk
- 9. Familiarise yourself with what support services are available virtually.** You can access wellbeing support, disability services, counselling etc. through the student portal.
- 10. Be patient.** Your lecturers have been asked to support your learning online at quite short notice. This may be as much of a change for them as for you, so please be patient with them if things don't go right first time.

Online learning does not mean learning alone. There is support here for you. Keep in touch with your course and ask for help when you need it. Staff are always happy to hear from you and will continue to support you to keep learning.

Vital communications from the University will be sent to your Heriot-Watt email address. It is important that you check this at least once per day.

Your course lecturer is still your main point of contact and your course page on Vision provides you with course-related information and support.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Use the right channels to solve your problems. Is it something you can solve yourself, perhaps with a look on Google or YouTube? Or if your reading link is broken, try searching for the journal article yourself by using the library search. If you can't solve the problem, then use the right channels to access help and support. This will be signposted for you in your course / the student portal. Contacting the correct person will help you get your problem solved more quickly.

If you require IT support, are having difficulty accessing online Library resources or help from the Library or the Effective Learning Service, then contact ISHelp@hw.ac.uk

If it is course related, then contact your course leader via the contact details provided on your course site on Vision.

NOTES

FURTHER RESOURCES

Academic Study Skills guide (includes contact details for the Heriot-Watt Effective Learning Advisers) <https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/academicstudyskills>

Free access to Microsoft Office for Heriot-Watt Students <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/it-essentials/office-365.htm>

Getting started with online learning <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/get-started-online-learning/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab>

Preparing to learn online at university <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/preparing-to-learn-online-at-university>

Time management advice <https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/academicstudyskills/timemanagement>

Adapted from

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