

A Warrior's Guide to Combating Online Learning Challenges

#WellbeingWarriors

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Flexibility, freedom, self-paced studying, a comfortable learning environment. I mean – what could be better than attending class in your pyjamas!? You may agree that these are some of the advantages of online learning. However, there can be a dark side to online learning. This article hopes to shed some light on the possible negative effects and how to combat these challenges.

Social isolation

Peer-interaction is greatly reduced in an online learning environment. Communicating with fellow students and your lecturers can become a challenge when all interactions take place remotely. Social isolation can cause loneliness, which could increase symptoms of anxiety and feelings of sadness. These uncertain times might also contribute to increasing these feelings of anxiety. Negative thinking patterns could be exasperated for individuals who are prone to get lost in despondent thoughts. It is normal for a person struggling with anxiety to want to connect with others and being surrounded by other people could help boost your mood, but social distancing has led to a decrease in human contact. The goal of social distancing is to be physically separated, but not lonely.

Here are some ways to lessen feelings of loneliness:

- **Use technology to your advantage.** Connect with fellow students and lecturers online. Email your lecturer for guidance or talk to fellow students via online platforms.
- **Face-to-face from a distance.** The next best alternative to seeing friends and family is video chatting. Share your feelings and concerns with them.
- **Practice self-compassion.** Lockdown and social distancing are tough. Show yourself kindness if you experience negative emotions or destructive thoughts.
- **Engage in meaningful tasks.** These can range from housework, reading, to finally starting that project you've been unable to dig into.
- **Keep your sense of humour.** Keep sending memes to your friends. Watch fun and silly video clips and movies.

Quote by unknown author: "Every time you find some humour in a difficult situation, you win."

Procrastination can lead to poor academic performance.

Procrastination can be a major problem, affecting online learning and academic performance. Students tend to wait for submission dates to approach before completing assignments and your academic performance could suffer as a result of poor time-management and lack of self-discipline. Face-to-face classes might help with the accountability and monitoring of academic activities.

Tips to reduce procrastination:

- **Keep a schedule.** Make use of a daily planner to schedule all academic-related tasks. Break large intimidating tasks into smaller manageable pieces.
- **Eliminate common distractions.** Procrastinators tend to look for distractions that can take them away from the task. Figure out your distractions and eliminate them while studying.
- **Incorporate regular breaks.** Regular breaks can help you refresh and reflect. This gives your brain a chance to rest and get ready for the next online study session.
- **Find a study-buddy.** Not being in a physical classroom can make you feel disconnected. A study-buddy in your course can help keep you accountable and motivated.
- **Reward system.** Increase your motivation by rewarding yourself after a productive day of studying. Remember to prioritise your mobile data for academic work and not use it all for relaxation purposes.

Quote by Michael Jordan: “Obstacles don’t have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.”

Physical health risks from overusing electronic devices

Spending an extended amount of time working on a computer or smartphone can have negative effects on your body. This includes eyestrain, headaches, sleeping difficulties, fatigue, and muscle tension. These negative physical effects could lead to unproductivity and adversely affect your learning.

Try out these strategies:

- **The 20-20-20 rule** When using any form of a digital screen for long periods, use the 20-20-20 rule. After every 20 minutes of screen time, take a 20-second break to look at something at least 20 feet (6 meters) away. This will help reduce headaches and eyestrain.
- **Screen brightness.** Try lowering the screen brightness to match the brightness levels of the light around you. This can reduce eyestrain and help with sleeping difficulties.
- **Get up and move.** Even just taking a 5-minute break every hour to get up and walk around, can be very beneficial. Do some [stretches for muscle tension](#).
- **Practice self-care.** Do self-care activities that do not require an electronic device (e.g. cook/bake, meditate, journal, exercise, listen to music, take a bubble bath / shower, etc.)
- **Avoid cramming sessions.** Prepare for all academic activities in advance to avoid last-minute cramming sessions on your electronic device.

Online learning doesn’t just happen, it requires careful planning, implementation and dedication. Online learning has many challenges that could lead to poor academic performance if not addressed properly. Using the abovementioned tips and strategies will help reduce the possible negative effects of online learning and be your key to success in your studies.