

The 10 Step Guide to Successful Distance Learning

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As Bishop Brady prepares to Distance Learn for the first three weeks of January, there are many things students can do to help assure success. Consider the following steps when planning for distance learning.

Step 1 – *Designate a Workspace*

Choosing a work space, and setting it up to meet your individual needs is the first step for developing good work habits and yielding successful results. A regular location in which to work sends an automatic mental cue that says, “This is where I concentrate, this is where I accomplish things.” Consider the following as you decide where you will work:

1. Is it comfortable and welcoming?
2. Is it distraction free, for the time you will be working?
3. Is it well organized and outfitted with everything you need to do your work?
4. Does it send the message, “*This is where you do important work?*”

Step 2 – *Establish A Routine*

An advantage to distance learning is that it offers a certain degree of flexibility in designing your day and deciding when you will work. Sometimes, that can also be a disadvantage. While it may appear that there is more than enough time to get everything done, time can quickly dwindle away if it goes unmanaged. Establishing a daily routine has numerous advantages including;

reducing stress levels, increasing focus and productivity, creating good habits, and developing effective time management skills.

One of the most helpful, yet often overlooked benefits to routines, is how routines help with self-discipline. When you have a routine in place, you don't have to count on mustering up the self-discipline and energy every day, by deciding when you will start your work, and pulling yourself away from things you might consider more engaging. Given how quickly actions can become habits, starting off right is especially important.

Helpful routines when distance learning include:

1. Having an official “Start the Day” time. Just like there is a start to the school day, choose a time that you will start your day, and stick to it.
2. Establish blocks of time for “being in school”. Example: working from 9am – 11am, and again from 1 pm – 3 pm.
3. Have a designated time to end your day, so that it doesn't spill into all the other areas of your life.

Step 3 – *Plan Your Work Session*

Take a few minutes at the beginning of each work session, to decide how you will use your time.

1. Begin by consulting the Portal, Google Classroom, and your Agenda, to view your assignments and any recent additions, changes, or communication.
2. Make a short list of what you would like to accomplish in the allotted block of time. Example: 9 am – 11 am.
3. Estimate the amount of time needed for each item, and decide on the order you will do them in.

Often people become less and less effective as the clock ticks on, especially if they are remaining sedentary, and/or what you are working on is not tremendously engaging for you. A way to combat that is to:

- Predetermine how long you will work (perhaps 30 min) before taking a short break.
- Set your timer for that amount of time and fully commit to the task
- At the end of that time, take a short break (5 min).
- At the end of the break, return for another predetermined amount of time.

Step 4 – Taking Breaks – What works, what doesn't?

When you are in school, breaks are already built into your day, with a clear beginning and an end. Very little self-discipline is called upon when it comes to limiting breaks in the school setting. The bell rings – you go to class. Period. At home however, that's another story. The key to managing your breaks, so that they don't become a runaway train, derailing your plans to work, lies in what you do during those breaks, and in how long they last. Consider the following:

1. During work sessions – keep breaks short (5 min) Use a timer if necessary, to mark the end of your break.
2. Take a “true” break. Rest the eyes from all screens. Get up, walk around, get a breath of air, move your body, have a snack, hydrate.
3. At the end of the predetermined break time, return to the task at hand.

Step 5 – Be an Active Participant in Your Classes

When you are distance learning, face-to-face interaction is limited, so every minute your class gathers together in a zoom session, or interacts in any other format, is even more valuable. By attending and actively participating, you not

only increase your learning opportunities, but you also add a valuable social aspect to your experience, making the entire distance learning more engaging and enjoyable. Ways to insure you get the most out of your virtual classes are:

1. Treat your at-home class meetings, the same way you would treat in-school class meetings.
2. Attend every class and arrive on time – For those of you who might get lost on the way to class; watching Netflix, sleeping late, etc. mark all classes on your weekly calendar, and set reminder alarms if necessary.
3. Go to class prepared – just like when you are attending class at school, be sure you have everything you need for that particular class.
4. Be involved – ask questions if there is something you are unsure of, answer questions when asked, and contribute to class discussions.

Step 6 - Use Available Tools

There is a lot to manage when you are distance learning. Many of the built in supports of in-person learning; teacher reminders in class, assignments written on the whiteboards, and classmates chatting about classes, exist differently when you are no longer in the building having daily contact.

If you try to remember everything that is being done in each class, without supports in place, you are bound to be blindsided by missing an assignment, missing a deadline, or not being ready for an assessment. The following tools can be very helpful for managing your classes, and also your time.

1. *Agenda* - Use your agenda at the beginning of every week, in conjunction with the portal and google classroom, to write in all assignments, including tests, quizzes, and long-term assignments. Update it daily. Take it out at the beginning of each work session, to be sure you are on track.
2. *Plus Portals* – Be sure to check regularly for assignments and grades.

3. *Google Classroom* – Keep in touch with what is going on in your classes by checking regularly.
4. *Schedule Templates* – Schedule templates can be very helpful when planning out your day and your week.
 - Start by building in a Start Time and an End Time to your day.
 - Block out the times when you will be involved in zoom sessions, or other meetings.
 - Build in blocks of time that you intend to work.
 - Write in the subject you will work on during each block of time.
(Schedule Template is attached)

Step 7 – Communicate & Self-Advocate

It is easy to disappear during distance learning, to make yourself hard to find, and to *play ostrich* (stick your head in the sand and pretend the rest doesn't exist). It's also easy to skip a day or two, and then feel hopelessly behind. It can be challenging to learn new material in the distance learning format. Whatever the situation, advocate for yourself by reaching out to your teachers and classmates or to the many other available supports that are at Bishop Brady; your advisors, your school counselors, the academic coach, the campus minister, and the administration.

Reaching out is easy. Take the first step; send an email as soon as you feel you need help. And....be sure to read the emails that are coming your way! A helpful tip in this regard, is to put some time aside each day to read through your emails. Make it part of your daily routine!

Step 8 – Stay Positive with M & M's (Mindset and Motivation)

While distance learning is no longer new to us, it can still present unique challenges. Being aware of your mindset, and working to maintain your motivation, will help make the experience a positive one for you.

Mindset refers to a person's way of thinking about something; including their attitudes and opinions regarding the matter. The mindset you bring to the distance learning experience matters greatly in determining your growth and success. Author, Carol Dweck, identified fixed and growth mindsets. Quite simply, the fixed mindset is more stagnant. Examples being things like, "I don't like this." "I'm not good at this." "This wasn't good last time, and it won't be good now." A growth mind set is more expansive, leaving the door open to new experiences and growth. Examples being, "I'm planning to keep in touch with my teachers and I'm sure I will do better this time." "I learned what didn't work last time, so now I have some ideas of what to do." "I'm not good at this....yet." During the distance learning process, be aware of your mindsets, and what your inner voice is saying to you, and know that you can talk back to your inner voice and develop a more positive mindset.

Motivation refers to your reason for doing something, the thing(s) that keep you going, your "why". Motivation can be either extrinsic; coming from outside of you, like grades, rewards, parents, status, or it can be intrinsic; coming from inside of you, like doing something because it is personally enjoyable or meaningful, or you see its long-term value. Motivation can be a combination of both, and is necessary for any long-term endeavor. If you are feeling unmotivated and are in search of a motivation reboot, look first inside yourself for reasons why doing well matters. If that isn't enough, be sure to reach out to others. Remember the supports that are in place for you; starting with family, and the entire Brady community. Be aware of your mindset and motivation, and know that a positive mindset and maintaining motivation are critical components of distance learning success.

Step 9 – *Find Balance*

When you are learning from home, the natural boundaries between school, home, and other activities, dissolve. Many students, and teachers alike, feel that

they are **always** working, when they switch to distance learning. It may seem like there is no beginning or end to the work and that it is always there. The best way to avoid this feeling is by establishing boundaries between the work time, and the rest of your life. And the best way to do this is by planning **when**. **When** will you work? **When** will you start? **When** will you finish? **When** will you do other things?

Whether you are in-person or distance learning, having balance in your life is important. Having time to spend with family, to exercise, to play, to pursue hobbies and activities of your choice, makes life enjoyable and fulfilling. I do believe that when well planned, most of your work can be completed within the time frame of a school day. In most cases, this includes time that would have been spent doing homework after school hours. So, when managed well, most students should find themselves with more time than they had before.

Step 10 – Evaluate Your Progress

Whether you are distance learning or in-person learning, pausing to reflect upon what you are doing and to monitor your progress is always a good idea. Ask yourself, “Is what you are doing working for you?” You will know that it is if; your work is getting in on time, you are satisfied with your grades, and you don’t feel unduly stressed and overwhelmed. To periodically evaluate your progress:

1. Identify what is going well, and keep doing it.
2. Identify areas you can improve and brainstorm a list of actions.
3. Ask one of the many resources available for help.

Remember, success is not a one-and-done thing. People don’t achieve success and then sit back for the rest of their lives as a success. The same can be said for failure. Neither is permanent. As you periodically evaluate what you are doing, and whether your actions are yielding the results you are looking for, you will start to notice that you are doing it quite naturally, and quite automatically. It will be just one more tool in your toolbox of academic success.

Schedule Template

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00 am					
9:00 am					
10:00 am					
11:00 am					
12:00 pm					
1:00 pm					
2:00 pm					
3:00 pm					
4:00 pm					
5:00 pm					
6:00 pm					
7:00 pm					
8:00 pm					
9:00 pm					

