

# Tips to get things done, as best you can

These are trying times and difficult conditions to learn and work under. Please be kind to yourself and those around you. You are doing the best you can.

The tips below are intended to help you feel better about your capacity to be engaged and focused in a meaningful way. One problem with tip sheets is that they are not nuanced; some of the suggestions below may not seem practical or relevant to you. If a tip seems interesting and you'd like some help implementing it in a way that works for you, we are here to help! Please see contact information at the bottom.

You can skip to relevant information in this tip sheet by using the Navigation Pane under "View." Click the arrow in front of a topic to see more information.

## I feel unfocused and unmotivated in a 'work from home' environment

- Pretend like you are going to class. Shower, get dressed, collect your materials, prepare your water, coffee, and snacks.

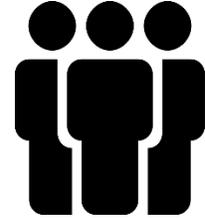


- If you wouldn't typically have your phone or laptop out in class, avoid using your phone or any non-academic websites.
  - Use the WebEx or Zoom desktop app and don't open your internet browser.
  - Use a different browser that doesn't have your bookmarks or history
  - Use a site-blocking app like StayFocused, RescueTime, Freedom, Forest, Calm for Chrome

## I miss my usual workspace (the library, my desk, the SEC, friend's house)

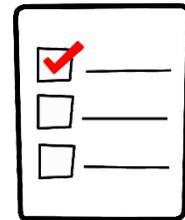
- What made that space a good fit for you? Can you re-create any of those elements at home? Some things to consider:
  - Noise level / distractions (Do you need some background noise? Total silence?)

- Lighting (natural light from windows? Lamp light? Over-head light?)
- Ergonomics (Type of seating? Being able to stand? Swiveling or rocking a chair?)
- Social options (A quiet but present study partner? An engaged study group?)
- Negotiate with housemates/family on where and when you will work
  - You may need to share space or have a rotation so everyone in the house can access the resources they need.
  - Agree on times that they will not disturb you so it is easier for you to focus. They may need the same from you.



## I'm overwhelmed by everything I need to do

- Start with a 'brain dump' of everything you need to accomplish for the week. Write it all down somewhere. Reference any updated syllabi or assignments so you don't miss anything.
- Use an Eisenhower Matrix (also known as Covey Squares) to prioritize your tasks by Urgency and Importance.
  - Watch a brief explanation here (you can skip to 1:30 if the intro doesn't hold your attention!) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hSs1NhmpOI>
  - Read in more detail here: <https://jamesclear.com/eisenhower-box>
- If you like calendars or are a visual person, plan out your day or week in an hourly calendar (Google calendar or iCal, for example). This way you can visually see how much time things will take and be motivated to start now!
- If you dislike calendars, make task lists by day of the week.
  - Adapt the MoSCoW method (typically used in project management) into a "Must-Should-Could" method for prioritizing tasks. One thing that MUST get done, one thing that really should get done (but could be a "must" for tomorrow), and one thing that could get done in an ideal world if there is enough time left over
  - Watch and Read more here: <https://www.kecg.co/blog/2018/7/22/task-prioritisation-hack-using-moscow-method>



## I have trouble getting started once I sit down to work

- Notice when your brain has the best focus during the day. You could track this in a notebook or calendar (digital or paper). Then, make a schedule to work at those times.
  - Need help making a schedule? TM&SS can help!
- Many humans have a good period of focus within the first few hours after waking up. Use it to your advantage and do some reading or coursework then.
- For some, your energy levels may be unstable or unpredictable. This can be frustrating and we sympathize. You may already have coping tools and habits built to work with this. If you don't, reach out to resources who can help.
  - SAS offers support to students with disabilities
  - Your treating clinician may work with you to develop a plan



## I tend to hyper-focus or feel that I should be working constantly. I'm going to burn out.

- Don't work through lunch or dinner; give yourself that time to evaluate what you have accomplished and adjust your goals for the afternoon/evening
- Plan 'brain breaks' that let you shift gears to a different type of cognitive task. If you've been using the verbal/language part of your brain for a while, shift to the visual part of your brain.
- Take movement breaks. Fix a cup of tea, do some yoga, wash the dishes, make your bed, go for a walk around the block.
  - These breaks are great because they have a natural stopping point! Avoid breaks that are easily extended, like watching a show, scrolling social media, taking a nap, etc.
- If you have a hard time returning to work after a break, do not take a break when you finish something. Instead, do a few minutes of the next task so that you have an unfinished feeling to help motivate you to return to work.
- Sometimes people who are not used to taking breaks feel guilty. Research shows many people who take short breaks can get more done in less time. Trust the science. The guilt will fade with practice. You can even tell the voice that "Tufts said I should and can take breaks!"



I have trouble keeping track of time. I underestimate how long things will take, or spend too much time on one task.



- Use a timer to ‘count up’: when you sit down to work, set a timer to keep track of how much time you have dedicated to that task. This will let you estimate how long tasks take, and also determine when you need to take a break or shift tasks.
- Use a timer to ‘count down’ in a helpful way: use this for tasks that tend to absorb and overwhelm your attention, take too long, or you just want to get started but not complete
- Timers also help to make sure a ‘break’ doesn’t turn into a ‘vacation’ (i.e. go on for too long)
- Pomodoro timers use a 25 minutes on, 5 minutes off cycle. Many of these timers can be customized to different periods.
  - <https://tomato-timer.com/>
- If you don’t like the idea of a timer, you can use a bell that chimes at set intervals, to help you mark the passing of time and reclaim attention
  - <https://insighttimer.com/>
- Try out visual timers to help you see the passage of time!
  - Time Timer: <https://www.timetimer.com/>
  - Visual Timer App: [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=at.cwiesner.android.visualtimer&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=at.cwiesner.android.visualtimer&hl=en_US)
  - Sensory Timers: <https://www.online-stopwatch.com/sensory-timers/>

I need concrete strategies for self-care and emotional regulation.

- For guided meditations and exercises: <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>
- For guided meditations, sleep stories, mindfulness mini-classes: <https://blog.calm.com/take-a-deep-breath>
- For positive affirmations and motivation: <https://www.thinkup.me/>
- Telehealth resources are available through Counseling & Mental Health Services: <http://students.tufts.edu/health-and-wellness/counseling-and-mental-health>



For individualized support with any of these tips, and more, please contact Time Management & Study Strategies or Student Accessibility Services.

Time Management & Study Strategies (TM&SS) consultants are available for virtual meetings. You can find out more here: <https://students.tufts.edu/academic-advice-and-support/academic-resource-center/what-we-offer/time-management-study-strategies>

The SAS Learning Specialist is available for virtual meetings with students with disabilities. You can request to meet with the Learning Specialist by emailing [kate.pillette@tufts.edu](mailto:kate.pillette@tufts.edu)