

# 7 Ways to Stay Focused When Studying from Home During Coronavirus

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Several weeks have passed since the outbreak of Coronavirus, and this has brought huge impacts on our daily life and the society. There is still a lot of uncertainties ahead of us in the coming few weeks. I sincerely hope we can stay connected during this difficult time and turn this crisis into a “Post-trauma Growth” opportunity. I want to share some tips to help you better focus while engaging in online study at home.

Studying from home can be very challenging because there are so many distractions at home, such as your bed, family members, your pet, the fridge and all the other entertainment activities you can do at home. It is very easy to get distracted and lose your motivation, leading to lower productivity. Therefore, it is crucial to be intentional about how you spend time at home.

Another important thing to know is that you will use more willpower than usual to stay focused while having so many distractions, and this is tiring for both of your brain and body, not even mentioning the stressful coronavirus situation. When we are stressed, it is harder to focus our attention. Our brain is more likely to stay in the survival mode instead of the studying mode. But remember, your willpower is like your muscle, you can train and improve it.

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It is normal to feel powerlessness in the coronavirus epidemic, and this naturally triggers negative feelings and thoughts. Focusing on your study and other activities can help you cope with your stress and anxiety. There are three things that are helpful to be aware.

1. Our brain is not rational all the time, especially when we sense threat or danger.
2. Behavior changes faster than thoughts and feelings. If you want to change your negative feelings and thoughts, it is more effective if you start it from your behavior, healthy behavior for sure.
3. When you change your behavior, for example, doing belly breathing and staying focused in your task, it helps calm down your brain and change your feelings and thoughts.

Here are 7 ways you can use to help you stay focused and motivated when studying from home. Please also email us your best tips, so we can share them with more students.

### **1. Establish a routine.**

Set a time to wake up, have breakfast, study, work out and talk to friends. A routine provides a structure to get things down and give you sense of control. It helps to have specific action or behavior to get ready to study. This can be 10-15

minutes' preparation, and you can try making a nice cup of tea, keeping your study space clean, 5-minute mindful breathing or observation exercise, so you can step into the student role smoothly. Once you are fully engaged in your task, you feel happier. And it is important not to blame yourself when you cannot follow your schedule, self-blame usually takes away your motivation.

### **2. Get dressed.**

The clothes you wear have an impact on your study performance and productivity. When you wear sweatpants or pajamas, it can feel like you are not really working or studying, and this will leave you more vulnerable to distractions. It is helpful to have your own "Study Suits" or a "Watch/Bracelet of Super Willpower" with you when you study. This will help set clear boundaries between your roles, e.g. between a student and a couch potato. You can change back to pajamas when you finish your study tasks. During self-quarantine time at home these days, I tire my hair and do my make-up every morning to help me take up my professional working role. I also change to my gym clothes when doing exercise in the afternoon at home.

*"Self-blame usually takes away our motivations."*

### **3. Have a dedicated study space.**

Since you may use your own bedroom to study online, it is important to create a physical boundary between your studies and relaxation activities each day. And when you are in that space, make sure that only study-related activities happen there. Having clear boundaries between 'home' and 'study' will help us contain the stress and bring us sense of control.

### **4. Take notes when studying online.**

Your brain might get distracted more easily when you are taking online courses. You may prefer to observe teacher's facial expression, classmates' new hairstyle or play with your phone. Taking notes will keep your hands busy, so you won't be able to use social media or eat snacks. It will also help you concentrate on the course and stop you from falling asleep.

### 5. Work out during daytime.

Exercise can help improve your mood and energy, and it can also help train your willpower and concentration. Your brain will get tired easily if you study over 20 minutes, it is hard to continue staying focused after 45-minute study. You need to activate different parts of your brain and body so they can take turns to serve you, and the brain areas you use for study can take some rest.

### 6. Build in your social hours.

Studying from home means fewer distractions from your friends and roommates, but it also means more isolation. To help you stay motivated and productive, have social hours into your daily schedule is very important. You can specify the time that you are least productive of the day and use that time to reach out to your friends. Phone or video call will help you better engaged and connected with your friends.

### 7. Share your study plan with your family.

If your family members are at home when you study, share your schedule with them and ask them to work together with you to create the study space, so you will not be distracted by them when you study. Let them know the specific time you need when you study, so they can also support and keep you accountable.

The last thing I want to share with you is when we are facing the things we cannot control, we need to use them to remind us the things that we can control and engage in them. This is a challenging time but believe in yourself that you have the resilience to engage in your online learning at home!



*"One day, in retrospect,  
the years of struggle will  
strike you as the most  
beautiful."*

*— Sigmund Freud*

