

You might start the day full of good intention, but by 11am, you find you haven't actually achieved anything, unless you count being up-to-date with social media, drinking three cups of coffee and watching television.

I've been working from home for over ten years; I find it pretty easy to do and it may help that I'm a morning person. I don't find the discipline of it a problem either, but I do know some people will find that working or studying at home to be difficult, especially when juggling study, work and family.

However, I do believe it's possible for everyone to successfully study at home, if you set yourself up to succeed. Here's a few of my own tips that have probably helped me along the way.

### **Location, location, location!**

You are not going to be able to concentrate if you are surrounded by distractions, whether that's television, children or household chores. That means you might need to seek out a local library or coffee shop; many of them have free wi-fi available.

Your study area needs to be just that, an area for study. Even if it has to be the kitchen table, you can set it up as a study area; organise laptop, notebooks etc and set it up the same each time. This way, you will associate the area with study and your concentration will improve.

Your study area should, ideally, be lit with natural light and in any case, be well-lit. It needs to be a comfortable temperature and away from the TV, pets and children. You should try to keep it tidy, so you can find everything you need straight away. A good chair can also make all the difference. Under no circumstances, work from your bed. Beds are for sleeping in and aside from the temptation to sleep, studying on a bed will give you terrible posture.

### **Dress for the occasion**

If you're studying at home, it might be tempting to laze around in your pyjamas all day, not shower or brush your hair, but the clue is the word "laze". You need to get up, get showered and get dressed for work.

That's not to say you have to put your finest suit on, but some of us need to be in work clothing, whether that's a suit or smart clothes, to get in the mindset for work (or study); casual is fine but pyjamas are not! Dress to be comfortable, but dress to get ready to work.

### **Schedule your time**

It's not always easy to stick to a schedule, when juggling work and home life, but it is a lot easier if you have a schedule in the first instance. Some of us are more alert early in the morning, others are night-owls, so try to schedule study-time to suit your own preference.

Try to set yourself a schedule and stick to it: aim to start studying at a set time on study days. Schedule in time off, too. Our concentration tends to dip after about 45-minutes of study, so schedule in a walk in the park, maybe some chores like laundry or walking the dog as part of your timetable. That way, it won't interfere or play on your mind during study hours.

If your routine isn't working, or you're in a bit of a rut, change the routine! Do you need to clear some chores before you can sit down and study? If so, do them. Don't cut out your friends; you may not be able to go out with them as much as before, but you can schedule in a night off with your friends - think of it as "reward-time", if you need to. Study-life balance is as important as the much-heralded work-life balance!

## **Set yourself up to succeed**

I listen to the radio all day; the changing presenters through the day give me a schedule. When the pop quiz comes on, it signals that it's time for a tea-break. My point is not the merits of any particular radio station, but, in a way, the presenters feel like colleagues; they get me through the day, quietly going on in the background. A few of us work best in silence, but most of us prefer some kind of background. I've not used it, but I understand there's an app called Coffivity, with background coffee shop chatter or birds chirping, that I'm told is great. Experiment to see what suits you best.

Eat. Schedule in meals and food along with everything else. Try to avoid snacking (guilty as charged) and instead set yourself up with meals and more healthy snacks and fruit.

Make notes! I can read a paragraph three times and it might not go into my brain. If I write down a note about it though, it's far more likely to stick. There's probably some science between the difference in brain function in reading something compared to writing the same information, but from my experience, unless I write something down, I've got very little chance of retaining that information. So, make notes.

## **Know when it's time to stop**

Know when it's time to shut down the computer - and shut it down. It'll give you a sense of closure for the day. This is especially important if your study space is also your personal space. If I'm still working late in the day after an early start,, I'm probably not very efficient and should stop. Closing the computer is the point at which you take time for yourself: read a book, take a walk, play a game with the family. Give yourself time to unwind, especially if you're studying in the evening.

Knowing when it's time to stop also includes knowing when it's time to ask for help. If you are stuck or don't understand something, re-reading it five times is unlikely to improve matters. So, ask your tutors for help. They want you to succeed - almost as much as you do - so ask them; talk to fellow students, either personally or online, about it. Search the internet if you're out of hours, or send an email to a tutor and either move on to another section or give yourself some time off.

## **Enjoy studying**

You might be studying because your employer has asked you to, or to improve your own skill-set. Whatever the motivation, enjoy it. I wish I'd been told to enjoy school a bit more. Yes, there's assignments and exams to complete, but if you enjoy the study experience, those marks will inevitably be higher than if it's a painful process, so start the day with a smile on your face and no matter what the outcome of the day, smile at the end of it too.

Everything is a learning experience, even if we learn that we don't particularly like certain aspects of our study course.

There's always tomorrow.