



# FOR TEACHING



*From the desk of the Teaching and Learning Scholar*

**Student:** “Can you record class? I am having connection issues.”

**Advisee:** “What courses do I need for next semester?”

**Child 1:** “We are out of milk.”

**Child 2:** “I need help with my math homework.”

**The dog:** “I need a walk now!”

During this historic pandemic, faculty across the nation are struggling to make multiple transitions simultaneously. We have been asked to deliver our face-to-face courses using distance technology, attend virtual department/university meetings, and advise students for upcoming semesters. In addition, K-12 children and college-aged children are home and need assistance to continue their education; many parents are attempting to homeschool. Infants and younger children need constant supervision and care. Further, we are all experiencing significant emotional stress. We are beyond worried about what this pandemic means for the future of the world and our nation as well as our elderly parents, immediate families, friends, and neighbors. I am very concerned for my fellow frontline healthcare providers.

The purpose of this teaching tip is to offer some practical suggestions and share helpful resources for working from home. I confess I am struggling to make this transition. Zakrajsek (2020) recommends creating a designated workspace, planning to manage your time, and adopting self-care practices.

**Workspace:** Designate a defined workspace even if it’s temporary, for example, at the dining room table or snack bar (Zakrajsek, 2020). If your workspace needs to be portable, place needed supplies such as books, assignments, articles, and files in a briefcase, small suitcase with wheels, or (my personal favorite) a laundry basket. Pencils, pens, markers, and erasers can be stored and moved via a coffee cup. Ideally, try to find a private, quiet area for your workspace. You may have to negotiate with a partner to share child care or pet responsibilities (Zakrajsek, 2020).

**Time management:** First, it’s important to note that one size does not fit all. Similar to our campus work schedules (i.e., early morning or night classes), faculty do not typically work 9-5 schedules. Prokopets encourages remote workers to experiment with various schedules and strategies to discover what is most productive for them (n.d). Try some different times and methods as you attempt to establish a consistent daily schedule which includes start/stop work times along with planned breaks. Maintain your daily hygiene routine and get dressed for work. Be sure to carefully plan out your work day. Use electronic calendars, written agendas, and to-do lists to develop a daily action plan. I find that checking off items on my to-do list at



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the end of the day quiets my mind, as well as helps me set priorities for the next day. Utilize timers to remember to attend virtual meetings and define time parameter for tasks; one significant benefit from working remotely is saved commute time. Schedule hourly breaks, stand up, move away from your workspace, get a drink of water, look outside, or use your break time to check your personal messages (Cornthwaite, n.d.). Be sure to minimize distractions as much as possible during designated work time, such as TVs, cell phones, and social media notifications.

According to one poll, remote workers cited communication as their top challenge followed by lack of social opportunities and isolation (Prokopets, n.d.). One suggestion to maximize work efficiency is to determine a realistic plan for checking your email and online discussions. Be sure to share your communication plan with your students. For example, “I will respond within 24 hours to emailed questions or discussion posts. During the weekend before an exam, I will check emails and the course discussion forums for questions more frequently. You can text me if it’s an emergency between 9 am and 10 pm.” Improve virtual communication and meeting effectiveness by practicing good meeting etiquette, such as using the video feature to keep attendees engaged, adhering to an agenda, and sharing notes (Prokopets, n.d.). If you are leading the virtual meeting, plan to arrive a few minutes early and allow time for social interactions. Be sure to follow up with detailed notes and action plans.

**Self-care:** Recognize that you need to take care of yourself in order to take care of others. Establish realistic work-home boundaries (Prokopets, n.d.). Within your daily routine, schedule time to maintain your own health. Pay attention to your work chair height and body posture to avoid neck and back strain (Zakrajsek, 2020). I increased my chair height by adding a couch pillow and created a make-shift raised desk using an ironing board. O’Shaughnessy (2020) suggests performing simple desk stretches to ease muscle-skeletal strain. Consider playing music that relaxes you while working (Cornthwaite, n.d.). You might try yoga, meditation, and exercise to help manage stress. You can find numerous online yoga and meditation sites; for yoga sessions go to <https://yogawithadriene.com/intro-to-yin/> and for meditation apps visit <https://mashable.com/article/coronavirus-free-mindfulness-meditation-apps/>. I personally find outdoor exercise beneficial for my physical and mental well-being.

Many of us are feeling the impact on our emotional health. Berinato (2020) interviewed David Kessler (world-renowned grief expert) about the impact COVID-19 is having



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on our society. In the interview, Kessler discussed anticipatory grieving related to our loss of safety, normalcy, and connections. Kessler offers the following practical advice: find balance in your thinking (replace worst case scenarios with best case ones), practice mindfulness, let go of things you can't control, offer compassion to others, and allow yourself to feel all emotions (Berinato, 2020). Make an effort to connect with persons immediately around you and reach out to others who might be isolated. Everyone needs to share their emotions, fears, and concerns by interacting with others. Be forgiving when persons aren't coping well or perhaps acting out.

As we struggle to adjust to remote work, I am finding that keeping a consistent work routine, setting work-home boundaries, caring for myself and my son, and staying connected with family, friends, and colleagues is helpful. When I wrote Teach Tip # 8 about planning for inclement weather, I could not have imagined an immediate mandate to transition entire courses mid-semester to distance delivery. On a positive note, faculty now have numerous contingent course plans, virtual assignments, and recorded lectures available for future use. Many faculty are learning to use new technologies and are experimenting with different teaching methods. Some of these educational challenges will produce changes that will impact higher education in meaningful ways as we move forward. Finally, let's try to find something positive each day and support one another during these unprecedented times.

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