

Managing Time Online – Faculty Edition

The pandemic has been hard on all of us and us faculty is getting ready for the Fall, many of us are going to teach exclusively online. Some faculty might feel pressured to be available 24/7 in order to accommodate the asynchronous nature of online teaching and to be responsive to student needs. However, you do not need to be online 24/7 to be a great online teacher (repeat: you do not need to be online 24/7 to be a great teacher). Being present in the online classroom is about predictability, reliability, and a splash of personality.

This resource will give you some ideas for on how to manage your time in an online classroom while reserving time for research and self-care. As always, try a couple of new things out first, see how it goes in the Fall and adjust accordingly. Don't try to do all at once - pick those that speak to you and those that you can integrate into your work habits fairly easily.

Make a Plan and Stick to it.

Online classes, particularly asynchronous ones, are less structured since there are no set times for class meetings and many things that faculty normally would do in the classroom – giving feedback on assignments, clarifying misunderstandings, class activities, responding to questions etc. – now need to happen in a virtual space without set times. To manage your time, consider establishing a regular schedule.

Importantly, retaining a regular schedule also creates predictability for students as they will know when you will post lecture videos, assignment feedback, or respond to questions etc. To this end, consider sharing your schedule with your students.

Before the semester starts, think about your work week and answer these questions:

1. When do you record and upload lectures and other course materials?
2. What time are you grading assignments and when are you providing feedback on assignments?
3. What time are you checking and responding to student emails?
4. What time are you checking in on discussion boards and other interactive activities?
5. When do you send out announcements?

You might have other tasks on your list, or you might want to break your tasks into smaller steps, but whatever your tasks look like, add them to your weekly plan.

Plan for the unexpected

It is also a good idea to plan for the unexpected. Reserve 1-2 hours every week for unexpected things that need your attention or to catch up on your weekly schedule. You were super productive and do not need those extra hours? Reward yourself and take these hours to do something fun.

Make Time for Research

The weekly schedule should also account for your research time. For example, if you are most research productive in the morning, block out a couple of hours in the morning every week to focus on your research. Guard this research time with all your might!

Take Breaks

It is easy to feel that you constantly need to be available to students if students are active in the classroom at all times of the day. Do not let this distract you from taking breaks.

1. Schedule in time for self-care. Block out the times for your favorite exercise class, a walk in the park, or playing with your kids or pets.
2. Set working hours and stick to it. Your teaching should occur Monday-Friday during regular business hours.
3. Keep your weeknights/weekends for yourself, your family, or your research if that's what you like.

Example: Weekly Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Respond to Student Emails Check in with struggling students Post weekly lecture	Research	Respond to student emails Check into discussion board	Research	Check into discussion board Create material for next week
Noon	Yoga	Eat lunch outside	Stroll in Park	Kickboxing	Get lunch off campus
Afternoon	Create/Post Weekly Announcements Grading	Office Hours/Respond to student emails Post grades	Create material for next week	Office hours/ Respond to student emails Grading	Grading Catch up time (3-5 pm)

Remove Distractions

We all have been there: we sat down ready to finish the class prep only to get distracted by social media, the news etc. To keep you on track, try to remove your common distractions. You can go old school or use new technology to keep you focused!

Get rid of your phone:

1. Turn on the no disturb function on your phone, turn your phone on silent, or turn off your phone
2. Put your phone in another room and put it on silent (or leave it in the car when you're in your office)
3. Hand your phone to another person and make them promise that they won't return the phone to you until you accomplished a specific task or worked for x hours
4. Install anti-procrastination apps on your phone. My personal favorite is the [Forrest App](#)
5. Turn off notifications for your social media, your email etc.

Remove distractions from your computer:

1. Close your email client
2. Disable any notifications (email, slack, Dropbox, skype etc.)
3. Disable phone calls, texts etc. on your computer
4. Install a blocking software for your web browser that temporarily blocks access to a list of websites that you can select yourself
5. If you can, turn off WIFI on your computer

[This article reviews several apps available for both positive encouragement and negative reinforcement.](#)

End the Tyranny of Emails

Checking and responding to emails is probably the biggest distraction. To keep you focused on the task at hand, consider adopting some of these ideas:

1. Do not continuously check and respond to emails. Reserve your email checking times for times in the day when your brain needs a break
2. Consider including a statement in your syllabus on when students can expect email replies from you. For example, *I will respond to any email inquiries within 24 hours during regular business hours. This means if you email me on Friday at 3pm, I will reply to you by the following Monday*
3. Let students know that during office hours you will respond immediately to any emails
4. Consider asking students to put URGENT in subject line if it truly cannot wait
5. Remove your work email from your phone
6. Use the snooze function in your email program that allows you to snooze emails for a specific period of time. [Here is a tutorial on how to use the snooze function in Gmail.](#) Another email client that has great snooze functions is [Airmail](#) for iOS/Mac.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

There are many great resources out there that allow you to save some time so you can focus more on cultivating relationships with your students. Consider adopting some of the ideas below:

Utilize your LMS:

1. Take advantage of your LMS automatic grading function at least for some assignments
2. Use the LMS announcement function and preload announcements/reminders for the full semester

Streamline your grading:

1. Use rubrics to simplify your grading and feedback
2. Allow students to opt-in for assignment feedback: detailed, limited, no feedback
3. Limit duration when students can email and contest grades (for example, one week after students receive the assignment back)
4. Have all deadlines be on the same day/time of the week to reduce confusion

Managing Student Questions:

1. Create a template bank for common email replies or assignment feedback. You can build on the bank over the years where you simply have to copy and paste certain emails or assignment feedback.
2. For frequently asked questions, create a common place where students can find answers. This is a good task to delegate to your teaching assistant:
 - Create a FAQ section for your course
 - Set up a class chat either in your LMS or [consider adopting Slack](#). You might want to encourage students to answer questions for their fellow students to create an interactive experience that also lowers your own workload.

Create course materials you can reuse:

1. Create lecture content that you can use every semester: when creating lectures or other videos, do not include references to specific dates, due dates etc.
2. Create a course specific tutorial on how to use the LMS, where to find the gradebook, etc.
3. Utilize existing lesson plans that are available online. [Visit my website for suggestions if you are teaching gender, human rights, current events, or international relations](#)

References

Darby, Flower; with James M. Lang. 2019. *Small Teaching Online*. Jossey-Bass: San Franciscio, CA

Sull, Errol Craig (2019). "THE 12 Key Rules to Manage Time in Online Teaching" in *Distance Learning* 15(2): 59-62

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