Top Tips for Virtual Learning
for engineering students from engineering students

From Kayli Rentzel / Mechanical Engineering, Class of 2020

I graduated from Penn State in May 2020 with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering and a bachelor of arts in Spanish language with a certificate in international engineering. I served Penn State Society of Women Engineers as secretary and president, was a leader in the Women in Engineering Program Orientation, participated in the Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship Program, and was a Global Engineering Fellow. I am currently a mechanical engineer at Voith Hydro Inc. in York, Pennsylvania.

My last semester of senior year changed abruptly into a virtual learning experience. While it was not something my friends and I were anticipating, we adapted quickly to the new challenges of virtual learning. Through our virtual classes we learned very valuable lessons about virtual learning. I surveyed my friends and put together this list of tips to help you be successful!

1. **Make a designated workspace**
   Or two. Your bed is NOT a productive place to work. It’s comfy, but maybe too comfy. Try having a set place that helps you focus. Maybe you need to move around during the day. Just make sure you are choosing places where you can focus and sit up straight.

2. **Develop a routine or schedule**
   Some people work better having the same schedule every day. Try going to bed and waking up around the same time. Others might want a day-to-day schedule with each day looking different. Simply setting a structure for your day will keep you on track. Also, give yourself some “buffer time” for technical difficulties.

3. **Set boundaries with your support system**
   Living at home with your parents or with a roommate can be challenging. They may expect you to participate in the chores and activities you typically do when you aren’t a full-time student. Make sure you are open with them about the time commitment you need to make with your schoolwork. Be clear with them what time you need to set aside to do work and what time is free time.

4. **Create to-do lists**
   It can be very easy to get assignments mixed up or forget about them. Keep a running list or daily to-do list to stay organized. Also, with different Zoom links and websites, it may be smart to bookmark certain pages you’ll need to use regularly.

5. **Discover how you learn best**
   Discover what study strategies work best for you. It is important to recognize that certain things might come easier to your friends and that’s okay! Everyone learns at a different pace and in a different way. Be patient with yourself and you will find the best way for YOU.

6. **Go to class during the scheduled time**
   Even though you don’t have to physically go to class, it will give you structure throughout your week. It is the foundation of your learning. From there, you can determine what you need to review or ask questions about.

7. **Collaborate with friends**
   Many engineering classes encourage you to work together on assignments. Working with friends is a great way to build off each other and apply what you have learned. Each of you may have picked up on different key points in the lecture or reading and working together can help you all understand the whole picture.

8. **Communicate often**
   The most challenging part of working in groups is communication. Some first-year classes like engineering design focus on group projects to introduce you to engineering. Make sure you communicate reliably to group members so you can be successful!

9. **Ask for help**
   Penn State has a variety of resources to help you be successful. Don’t be afraid to reach out for help. Professor office hours are a great place to clarify material you learned in lecture or review homework. Advisers can help you with academics, career resources, and connecting you with other services you need. Penn State Learning offers tutoring and guided study groups for most engineering entrance to major courses like physics, calculus, and chemistry. All these things are still happening virtually!