

NINE PROVEN TECHNIQUES TO OPTIMISE YOUR REMOTE LEARNING

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An online education can feel more intense and less personal than face to face. But by taking control of your environment, as well as your remote learning intentions, you can enhance the experience.

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Long ago, Christopher Morley asserted that three ingredients were central to a good life: learning, earning, and yearning. For success, a person had to juggle these three needs.

But barriers can easily pop up to impede the path of learning. This is especially true when, as in recent months, you may have been operating in an unfamiliar environment, or out of your routine.

Remote learning can feel more intense, more draining, and perhaps at first a little less engaging than face-to-face sessions. However, as we increase our exposure and make small changes, we'll notice it can be more collaborative, touch more of our senses, and feel more personalised.

Yes, this involves choices that strengthen personal control. So take ownership of your learning environment, the associated technologies, and your learning intentions. As Stephen Covey said, direct your finite energies to "control what you can control".

ORGANISE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

A dedicated learning area may not be possible when operating remotely, so you'll need to find compromises between working and social spaces.

- **Attend to light and sound:** non-verbal clues help you communicate effectively, so pay attention to how you look and sound. Ensure the front of your face is well lit, rather than shrouded in shadow. Headphones help too, especially when the environment is a mixed-use space. A good microphone helps you get your points across to others – the acoustics do matter!
- **Consider ergonomics:** Holding a PC on a knee whilst seated on a sofa or lying in bed may be fine for social media – however, it's not suitable when learning. Instead, use an upright chair with your laptop stable on a table. Avoid handheld devices, too, as they are tiring to hold and it is harder for others to engage as they watch unstable imagery.
- **Set boundaries:** Clearly delineate a learning area and keep your learning activities within that space. Move out of that space when you need to socialise. That physical separation helps create a psychological separation. This lightens the cognitive load, which makes for more enjoyable learning experiences.

TAKE CHARGE OF THE TECHNOLOGIES

Platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom, Adobe Connect and WebEx all do similar things, but each tends to function in different ways and use slightly different terminologies. To increase your comfort and confidence levels with the technologies, spend some time practising. As a result, you'll spend less time chasing technologies, and have more time to immerse yourself in learning. By being tech-savvy yourself, you can help others collaborate more effectively, too.

- **Understand the range of tools.** Learning platforms allow participants to engage using text, image, sound and video. Take time to discover in advance how each tool works. It's good to feel comfortable in areas such as: writing (text, questions and polls); drawing (emoticons, annotation, whiteboards); speaking (voice, music); viewing (camera, video); and collaborating (group work, breakout rooms). Rehearsing with a buddy is a rapid way of skilling up.

- **Limit interruption and distraction.** Effective learning requires thinking, yet brains can't focus on and think about two tasks simultaneously; multitasking is unattainable. Yes, humans can switch between tasks quite quickly, but that rapid switching has a price: it impairs cognitive performance. Kill all interruptions to engage with the learning task at hand. Often, those interruptions are driven by apps or emails, which place demands on your PC. Closing down other apps has machine performance benefits too – keep open only those needed for the learning session.
- **Maximise machine performance.** Video-based learning platforms place certain demands on a PC. Two things directly impact performance and hence your learning experience: demands that apps make; and internet bandwidth. A faster internet connection makes a difference. Where others with high bandwidth needs share your router, they may impact response, too. Dedicated local connections work best, so the LAN tends to beat WiFi.

HOLD POSITIVE LEARNING INTENTIONS

Well designed remote learning programmes incorporate both synchronous and asynchronous components. Synchronous elements are structured online activities conducted in real time, designed for engaging, collaborative participation and practice. Asynchronous elements are conducted by offline participants, incorporating activities designed for acquisition of new knowledge as well as deeper, more personal reflection. In order to maximise the learning outcomes, be sure to give equal weight to all elements when engaging with remote learning.

- **Show up prepared.** A participant's level of preparation is a key factor in the success of remote learning. Asynchronous components are integral to a programme. Completion beforehand is vital for a programme to cohere; it isn't 'homework'. Asynchronous elements afford opportunities for more personalised and relevant learning experiences. So plan for it, set time aside, and be prepared by diligently completing each module in advance.
- **Collaborate actively.** A mediated learning experience may initially feel different to face-to-face learning, especially as remote learning requires that everyone connect and collaborate. That said, the more you do it, the more comfortable you will feel. The confidence you'll gain through active collaboration will help you to help others who may feel less comfortable. You'll also realise that your influence grows as you draw on what Bandura termed "social learning": how verbal and non-verbal actions model and positively reinforce more appropriate behaviours to others.

- **Manage your attention span.** Bite-sized learning is short, simple and specific. It can be an effective way to quickly learn how to do something, but to learn the ‘what, when, and why’ typically requires a more intensive investment of time. Remote learning programs are not just a sequential series of simple bites - they demand much greater attention, and screen-based attention requires concentration. This can be mentally exhausting, so it’s vital to frame realistic expectations beforehand. Chunk the learning down into manageable blocks that afford you sufficient time to recover, recharge, and go again.

TO ACTIVATE YOUR LEARNING MUSCLE, TAKE OWNERSHIP

The concepts outlined here relate to our soft skills, how our feelings about remote learning inform our thoughts, how our thoughts inform our decisions, and how those choices shape our actions. The good news is that each of us is at the centre of our own narrative. This means that in taking control, we can exercise positive influence to achieve more engaging experiences.

My thoughts turn back to ancient Rome and the ‘old Normal, where the Romans used to say: “quidquid discis, tibi discis” — “whatever you learn, learn for yourself.”

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www.managers.org.uk/insights/news/2020/july/nine-proven-techniques-to-optimize-your-remote-learning

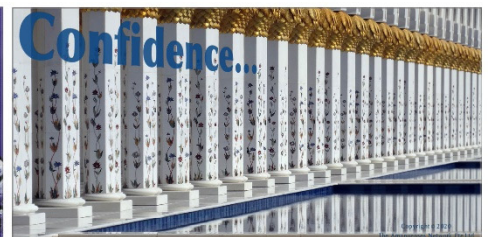
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