

# Tips and Advice for Learning Online and Studying at Home

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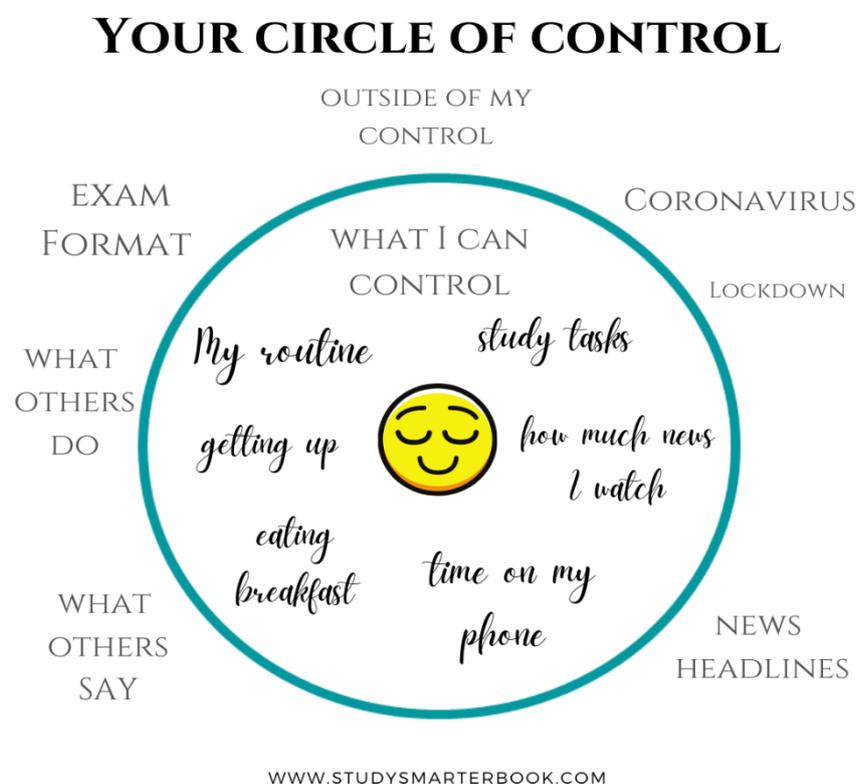
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Studying online and at home does bring some additional challenges and stress. Not to mention when this choice is forced due to a global pandemic. There are strategies that both students and parents can help put in place that will support learning. In this guide, I am sharing some key tips and advice on

-  Stress and Worry
-  Lack Motivation for Studying
-  Learning Online
-  Essential Learning Reminders

**Stress and Worry** – there’s a lot of uncertainty currently in relation to exams at the end of the year, lockdown restrictions and when they will ease so that face to face teaching can take place again. Too much uncertainty can lead to feeling out of control, stress and a sense of being lost. Our minds seek stability and answers and with increasing levels of uncertainty, we can find ourselves in a spiral of thinking, all the *what ifs* that create the opposite to feeling a sense of control and safe. This can be draining over time and negatively impact on our mental health and wellbeing, so it’s important to take some positive actions that will help manage ourselves during this uncertain time.

There is a level of uncertainty that doesn’t cause us stress. So, it’s important to re-balance what we can control and re-focus on that. This will

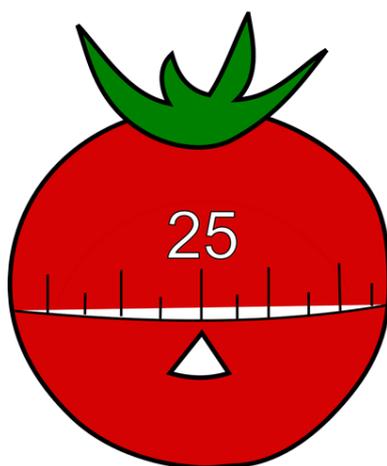


help to reassure our brain that we are safe as not everything is going out of control. The circle of control is a great exercise to go through either yourself or with your child.

Imagine a safe and protecting circle around you or think about drawing a circle. Inside are all the things that you can control, so think about what these are....they are likely to be small yet very important things in your life: your routine, getting up, having breakfast, your study schedule, the tasks you are doing, time on your phone, how much news you watch. These are the things that you want to focus on more and put your energy into these things.

Outside of your circle of control and those things that you can't control such as the exam format, what others say and do, the news and coronavirus. The question for you to consider is this: are you putting too much of your energy on these things that are outside your control? Are you thinking too much about them, talking too much about them? Acknowledge them yes, but then re-focus on what you can do now, today.

**Lack motivation for studying** – sometimes it can feel like an uphill struggle to get going and be motivated to study and learn. Continuous procrastination and not getting going can be down to overwhelm. It seems too much to deal with and so we just keep putting it off or we'd rather play games or be on our phones. A useful technique for overwhelm is to break down the work into smaller and more manageable chunks. The pomodoro technique helps to get you started (which is half the battle!). It's breaking down time into 25-minute chunks and having a set task is important so, decide what you will work on for the 25 minutes. Then spend 25 minutes of quality concentration and effort. Put away any distractions until you have a break. Then reinforce that you have been productive, you can do this. You can reward yourself after your daily win by spending time doing non-study activities.



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### **Pomodoro Technique**

Set your task, decide what you are doing

Set timer for 25 minutes

Work on task until timer buzzer sounds

Take a **SHORT BREAK**, stretch, cuppa etc

Repeat for another 2-3 rounds then take longer break!

**Learning online** – You might be thinking, learning is learning, study is studying. What difference does it make when you are learning online?



With online learning, especially watching recorded videos and participating in live online sessions, the biggest challenges are distractions and mind wandering. Yes, those shiny distractions that grab our attention, and before you know it, your focus is lost, and your mind goes elsewhere. Analysis of 6.9 million online courses found that the median

engagement time was just 6 minutes! That's not a lot of time before getting distracted online. One of the most distracting devices that we have is our mobile phone. It's just so easy to access your phone when you are online and who can resist it? All the notifications that we receive, all the apps that are designed on purpose to invite and tempt us into check our phones regularly and to keep scrolling. Our brains get a dopamine reward. And it's easy to understand why we create these habits.

When online, it's keeping your brain engaged like a puzzle. Our brains need activity. Use questions to keep your brain thinking and more switched on. Questions lead to learning so how can you include questions when learning online?



- Pause the video every 5-10 minutes and ask yourself some questions. What's the main point here? What do I understand from this? What does this mean? How does this link to what I have learnt before?
- If you don't fully understand something put a big question mark next to it. Then you want to find answers to your question marks. Ask other students if they understand it. If yes, ask them to explain it, it will help you both to reinforce what you are learning. Ask the teacher. Google your question.

**Essential learning reminders** – Here are some points especially for parents in relation to learning effectively.

- ✔ **Questions lead to learning** – Re-reading notes or a textbook is not necessarily good studying. Yes, your child will need to read information but use questions and testing to help their learning and help them remember what they are learning. A practice test improves long-term retention of knowledge or they can summarise or explain a topic in their own words.
- ✔ **Space out study topics** – Break up larger teaching content into smaller units. Every 10-15 minutes include a question or activity. Space out studying of topics and mix them up. It's not about studying one single topic for five hours, better to do 5 different topics for one hour each.
- ✔ **Connect to prior learning** - Use pre-activities (questions, tell me about) to help surface knowledge that learners already know. Use recapping questions e.g. revisit important concepts from a previous activity or recap on foundation knowledge. New knowledge will link with this prior knowledge more easily and effectively.

Suzanne Fergus is an Associate Professor and has a PhD in organic chemistry. With over 15 years as an academic, she has published extensively in peer-reviewed academic publications. Her passion and outstanding commitment to teaching were recognised by the Royal Society of Chemistry in 2016 with a Higher Education Teaching Award. In 2017, she was awarded a prestigious National Teaching Fellowship in the UK. In 2020, she published a book [Study Smarter: a lecturer's inside guide to boost your grades](#)

