

Have Students Develop a Course Plan and Weekly Schedule

Planning work time for online courses can be particularly challenging since there is no scheduled in-class time. Typically, a 15-week online course requires at least six productive hours of learning time each week (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). The learning time includes activities such as reading and processing content, participating in online discussions, completing assignments, and/or collaborating in group work.

During the first week of the course, it is helpful to have students identify the times, the places, and other logistics for completing coursework (see *Developing a Coursework Plan* below) and then use this information, along with the course calendar, to develop a specific plan for completing weekly assignments (see *Weekly Schedule* template below). Require students to meet with you during virtual office hours or set up an appointment to review their plan, and help them assess whether the plan is realistic and adequate to meet the demands of the course. It's helpful to remind your students that it can take 10 scheduled hours to achieve six productive hours—due to interruptions, transitions to the scheduled place to work, and sometimes simultaneously managing work and/or home-life obligations. Helping students to be realistic about how much time they will need to schedule to complete coursework will help them to meet course expectations successfully. (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016).

Below is a guide you might use to help students develop a coursework plan.

Developing a Coursework Plan

Since we do not have scheduled time in a classroom, it is helpful if you take time now to decide specifically where, when, and how you will complete your coursework throughout this semester. Please use the questions below to plan where, when, and how you will complete the coursework.

When to work?

In the first column of the coursework plan below, fill in the time frames that you have available each day to complete coursework. Remember, even blocks of 10 to 15 minutes can be effectively used for engaging with some aspects of coursework. Make sure that you have at least 10 hours available throughout the week, or you may have trouble completing the coursework.

Where and how to work?

Focused work. Some assignments, such as those that require reading, writing, and critical thinking, are best done in places where you can sit down and focus. Make a list of the places where you can accomplish focused work (e.g., home office, home sofa, coffee shop, library).

In the second column of the coursework plan, rank the places that you have listed—from the most productive to the least productive.

Chunked work. Not all online coursework needs to be completed while sitting in front of a computer. Some coursework such as watching a video lecture, listening to a podcast, or reading

discussion forum posts can be carried out on your smart phone or other mobile device. This means you may be able to engage with some course content while you are doing other things such as standing in line at the bank, taking a break at work, waiting to pick up your children, commuting to or from work, and exercising.

In the third column of the coursework plan, write down any of your daily activities that lend themselves to integrating small chunks of coursework.

Coursework Plan. Read the descriptions above, and fill out the following table to help you assess when, where, and how you will engage in your coursework. The information in this table will help you develop your weekly schedule.

Coursework Plan (Example)

When to work	Focused work	Chunked work
Mondays, 8:00–9:00 a.m. and 7:00–9:00 p.m.	1. library (most productive)	1. driving to work
Tuesdays, 8:00–9:00 a.m. and 4:00–6:00 p.m.	2. home office	2. picking up kids from practice
Wednesdays, 7:00–9:00 p.m.	3. coffee shop	3. during my lunch break
Thursdays, 7:00–9:00 a.m. and 5:00–7:00 p.m.	4. on the couch	4. waiting for my doctor’s appointment
Fridays, 12:00–1:00 p.m. and 4:00–6:00 p.m.	5. at the office (least productive)	5. jogging
Saturdays, 6:00–8:00 p.m.		
Sundays, 8:00–10:00 a.m.		
Total estimated time each week: 18 hours		

Developing a Weekly Schedule

Weekly schedule. For this activity, use your coursework plan and the course calendar to schedule the location and time needed to complete the assignments for the week.

Schedule where to work. For assignments that require more concentration or higher level thinking, such as reading articles, writing discussion board posts, or working on problems, schedule time in the places you identified as your most productive places.

For assignments that require less concentration, such as watching a video, listening to a podcast, or reading discussion threads, schedule time in places that are the most enjoyable for you or that fit into your other work/life activities.

Schedule when to work. When looking at the time you have allotted for coursework each day, be sure to account for any time you need to transition to your chosen online working place. For example, if you plan to complete one hour of work at Starbucks, you should schedule more than one hour so that you have time to get there, settle in, and get your coffee.

Specify tasks to complete during each work period. Weekly modules require diverse tasks such as reading chapters or articles, watching a video, responding to discussion posts, or writing a reflection. Decide on a specific task you plan to complete for each scheduled block of time. Some assignments such as discussion board posts require multiple steps (1. Reading/watching new content, 2. Thinking about the questions, and 3. Writing your post), make sure to schedule time for each task.

Get your tools and resources ahead of time. If you have a writing assignment than requires you to cite sources, schedule separate time to search for appropriate articles or other resources prior to your scheduled time for writing, so that you can focus on writing during your allotted writing time.

Below is an example of a weekly schedule that you can use to help you build your own.

<p align="center">Weekly Schedule (Example)</p> <p align="center">Plan a schedule for each week based on your coursework plan and the course calendar. Make sure to note due dates.</p>		
When will you have time to work on weekly assignments?	Where will you work?	What will you accomplish at the specified times and places?
<p>Monday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:00–9:00 a.m. • 7:00–9:00 p.m. 	home office	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make a weekly plan, and collect all readings for the week. 2. Start the weekly reading assignment.
<p>Tuesday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:00–9:00 a.m. • 4:00–6:00 p.m. 	coffee shop library	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finish the weekly reading. 2. Write notes for my discussion post.
<p>Wednesday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:00–9:00 p.m. 	home office	<p>Discussion post due at 11:59 p.m.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write, revise, and post to the discussion forum. 2. Prepare for my reflection paper assignment due on Sunday. (Finish the readings, and complete my prewriting and brainstorming.)
<p>Thursday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7:00–8:00 a.m. (on the way to work) • 5:00–7:00 p.m. 	in the car on the couch	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to the podcast. 2. Read and respond to the discussion posts.
<p>Friday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4:00–6:00 p.m. 	home office	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete the draft for my reflection paper.
Saturday, no work scheduled		
<p>Sunday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:00–10:00 a.m. 	home office	<p>Reflection paper due at 11:59 p.m.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revise my reflection paper, and submit the completed work.

Coursework Plan Template

When to work	Focused work	Chunked work
Mondays,	1. _____ (most productive)	1. _____
Tuesdays,	2. _____	2. _____
Wednesdays,	3. _____	3. _____
Thursdays,	4. _____	4. _____
Fridays,	5. _____ (least productive)	5. _____
Saturdays,		
Sundays,		
Total estimated time each week:		

Weekly Coursework Schedule (Template)

Plan a schedule for each week based on your coursework plan and the course calendar. Make sure to note due dates.

When will you have time to work on weekly assignments?	Where will you work?	What will you accomplish at those specified times and places?
Monday,		
Tuesday,		
Wednesday,		
Thursday,		
Friday,		
Saturday,		
Sunday,		