

**HOW TO:**  
**THRIVE IN**  
**YOUR ONLINE**  
**CLASSES**



**FROM THE**  
**STUDENT SUCCESS DEPARTMENT @ ECC**

**“I AM ALWAYS DOING  
THAT WHICH I  
CANNOT DO, IN ORDER  
THAT I MAY LEARN  
HOW TO DO IT”**

**-PABLO PICASSO**

# WELCOME

The mission of Elgin Community College is to improve lives through learning. We recognize that for many students this learning takes place amidst busy work schedules, family priorities, and other challenges. We have worked hard to develop a wide selection of online courses to allow students the ability to learn and progress toward their degree or certificate at a distance. This guide on how to thrive in your online classes has been prepared to equip you with the core strategies and approaches necessary to make the most of your remote learning experience. On the following pages you'll find advice and instruction on:

- Crafting your personal and academic schedule
- Organizing your physical and mental space for optimal performance
- Engaging with your online class for maximum impact
- Practicing good online citizenship
- Cultivating positive and productive mindset for online class success.

Let's get started!



# 1.

## MAKE (AND KEEP) A SCHEDULE

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**P**art of the appeal of online learning is the freedom and flexibility it can allow you as a student to carry on with other responsibilities you may have. But it would be a mistake to confuse this freedom and flexibility with a lack of structure or planning. Actually, successful online students become experts at defining their priorities and building (and keeping) a schedule that allows them to focus on the things that are most important to them.

The schedule that works best for you will always be the one you will actually follow, so you should decide how detailed you want to be based on what you know about yourself already. For example, some people are more likely to stick to a schedule that groups general tasks by the half hour or hour. Others find that being ultra-specific about what they will do in each moment of their day helps them stay on track and feel in control. You may find you're somewhere in the middle, and that's totally fine. In general, though, we recommend you start with something like this:

- 1) Decide on a day each week to build your schedule for that week. Sunday evening works well for most people, but you decide what works best for you. Then put this day/time in your phone or your computer as a recurring weekly alert so you are reminded to sit down and take 20 minutes to plan out the next seven days.

- 2) In your weekly planner, or on your calendar, start by plugging in your “non-negotiables”—these are standing or fixed events like your face-to-face class schedule, any

synchronous online class requirements, work schedule, time to eat, sleep, bathe, etc.

3) Then, based on the order of your priorities, can start adding in your other responsibilities or events. You should look through each class syllabus at this point to see what's coming up. Is there a big exam on Friday? Schedule an hour of study each night leading up to that. Is there a research paper due in two weeks? Set aside time to meet some small goals leading up to that (google the "chunking method" for more details on this). We also recommend logging in to each of your online classes at least three times each week, so go ahead and build minimum 15 minute chunks to do this for each class, spread across the week. In general, expect to spend 2-3 hours each week for each credit hour of your class reading, working on assignments, or studying. So for a standard 3 credit hour class, this means you probably need to schedule around 9 hours each week devoted to some aspect of that class.

Play around with different ways to build your schedule and different methods of keeping it (i.e. does having it on your phone work best? Are you more likely to use the calendar feature on your computer? Or do you prefer to write in a paper planner? Is one of the thousands of scheduling apps right for you?). There is no wrong way to do this. The only mistake you can make is to think you can keep all of your online class requirements, along with everything in your life, straight without some structure.

**“THE KEY IS NOT TO PRIORITIZE YOUR SCHEDULE, BUT TO SCHEDULE YOUR PRIORITIES”**

**-STEPHEN COVEY**

# 2.

## GET ORGANIZED

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**S**pending a little time upfront getting and staying organized in your online classes will save you time throughout the semester and help keep your stress levels low.

Now, organization for online classes comes in two main categories: organization your workspace and organizing your class content. Let's talk about each in turn:

### **Your Workspace**

When setting up your space to conduct your online class work, it helps to have a space set up in your house with everything you need there in its place. Some people like to go to the library, a coffee shop or some other place away from home. This is fine, but consider keeping a travel bag stocked with all the things you may need. In general, here's a good checklist for creating your workspace:

- Ensure there is reliable wifi for accessing, downloading, and uploading class documents.
- Check your computer periodically to make sure it is fully updated to meet system requirements, and that pop-up blockers are disabled.
- Find a spot with good lighting and not a lot of noise or distractions. Avoid soft surfaces (like your bed or a comfy couch), and use headphones with white noise, rain sounds or classical music to keep out distractions.
- Put phones on "Airplane Mode" or in a bag to limit distractions. Or consider using a "distraction blocker" app

like Quiet Hours, Cold Turkey, or one called Self Control, all found in the AppStore.

- Make sure you have all the notepads, pens, highlighters, folders and anything else you need for class close by.
- Only have out the materials you need for the task at hand. A cluttered desk or table top makes for a cluttered mind.
- If at home, let family know that you have important work to do for a specific amount of time, and ask them to respect your work time.
- When campus is open, ECC has lots of excellent study spaces throughout campus, and we love to see students taking full advantage of them.

### **Your Class Content**

A common challenge for students in online classes is staying on top of all the various class requirements and deadlines. Without the faculty member there to remind students of upcoming due dates in person, the disorganized student easily gets lost and overwhelmed. But this will not be you! Here's the bare minimum you need to do to keep everything in order:

- Make a folder and notebook for each class you are in.
- Print the syllabus for each class, along with any other essential documents, and include them in this folder.
- Review the entire syllabus in detail on day one of the class, and then review the calendar/deadline portion of the syllabus at least once per week (see advice on scheduling on the previous pages) and use that to determine what you need to complete each week for each class.

**“FOR EVERY MINUTE SPENT  
ORGANIZING, AN HOUR IS EARNED”**

**-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**

# 3.

## STAY ENGAGED

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Online classes can feel lonely. Without coming to a physical classroom on a regular schedule, it's easy to feel like you are being left to teach and learn material on your own. Most online classes, however, are actually designed around a central component of collaboration and conversation, it's just that this may not look the way we are accustomed to it looking in the "real world." Tapping into the community of learning in an online class takes a little effort, but it's an essential skill if you want to get the most out of your class and be successful. Here are some tips for staying engaged and leveraging your online community:

### Discussion Boards

Think of the discussion board of an online class like the heart of the classroom. It's where you get to pose questions for your instructor and other students, comment on class readings or assignments, and get to know your classmates. If you're not always comfortable speaking in a regular class, the discussion board space in an online class gives you time to think about how you want to word something and contribute to the class without fear. What an amazing opportunity this becomes! To make the most of your discussion board:

- Introduce yourself and engage with your instructor and other students. If you're naturally a little shy, this is a great, low-stakes, way to practice getting to know new people.
- Check the boards and post/respond regularly—try to review the discussion boards at least three times each week, posting or responding to other students' posts.

- Interesting and helpful conversations are never generic, so on the boards you should avoid general statements like “I like that” or “I disagree.” Instead, always explain why you think what you think or feel how you feel. For example, rather than just posting “I agree” in response to another student’s post that you like, you might write, “I agree with your interpretation of the reading assignment. I, too, thought that Santiago’s tattered boat in “The Old Man and the Sea” was a metaphor for his own frailty because...”.

### **Build your Network**

Invite other students to create study groups. For students who live locally, these don’t have to be online, and meeting up at the ECC library or other study spot can be a great way to create a real community from an online class. But virtual study groups can accomplish this as well. These virtual study groups, along with any virtual, synchronous component of the class itself, can also be a real benefit for people who find speaking up in a large classroom or around new people a challenge. From the comfort and security of your own home or personal space, you can be empowered to contribute in new and powerful ways! Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet are all great tools you can use to build connections with the real people in your online classes.

**“YOU CAN HAVE EVERYTHING IN LIFE  
YOU WANT IF YOU WILL JUST HELP  
ENOUGH OTHER PEOPLE GET WHAT  
THEY WANT”**

**-ZIG ZIGLAR**

# 4.

## PRACTICE GOOD “NETIQUETTE”

**N**etiquette is the word we use for appropriate email and online etiquette (hence, “net”-iquette, get it?). Netiquette involves a range of online behaviors you should know about and practice, some of which may seem obvious and intuitive, and others which may not:

- Unless you are told otherwise, always address your instructor using their proper title, for example: “Prof. Smith” or “Dr. Doe.”
- Always be respectful of your instructor and other students, even (perhaps *especially*) when you disagree about something. Failure to do so may be a violation of ECC’s Student Code of Conduct.
- Practice being both thorough and concise. This is a skill which can be improved over time with practice. But you have to practice.
- Don’t use all capital letters, because IT MAY BE INTERPRETTED AS YELLING and is disrespectful.
- Avoid texting abbreviations like LOL, OMG, SMH, or the letter “u” instead of “you.” This is a professional, college classroom and you should approach all content as such.
- Sarcasm can be difficult to pick up on through text, so avoid it altogether so no one misunderstands you.
- Think before you post. What you write can *always* be found, so avoid making a post or sending an email if you are agitated or emotional.

**When using email**, all of the above tips certainly apply, but here are some other considerations:

- Write a brief but useful subject line. Put yourself in the recipient’s place and ask yourself, “what would summarize the purpose of this email?”
- Email is not text message, it’s professional communication. So be brief and to the point, but always include a salutation such as “Hello Prof...” and a sign off such as “Thank you for your time.”
- Always include your name and, we recommend, the full class code you are in with that instructor (i.e. CMS 101-770). Remember your teacher may be teaching five different CMS 101 classes, with 25 students each. The easier it is for them to identify you, the better they can address your concern.
- If using attachments, make sure they are in a common format and can be opened. Usually this is Word or PDF, but also be mindful of your google doc access setting.
- Avoid “Reply All” to mass emails you receive unless it’s absolutely necessary. Pro tip: It’s almost never necessary.

**“EDUCATION IS THAT WHOLE SYSTEM  
OF HUMAN TRAINING WITHIN AND  
WITHOUT THE SCHOOL HOUSE WALLS,  
WHICH MOLDS AND DEVELOPS  
INDIVIDUALS”**

**-W.E.B. DU BOIS**

# 5.

## MIND YOUR MINDSET

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**T**he mindset you bring to your online classes will determine the kind of experience you have, how much you learn, and ultimately what grade you earn. Commit to cultivating these key characteristics and you are guaranteed success in college and well beyond.

### **Personal Accountability**

Success in college (and, honestly, success in life) is largely based on how consistently we follow through on goals and aspirations we set for ourself. It is great to commit to getting good grades or earning your degree for your parents, teachers, siblings, or children. But the extent to which we commit to *ourselves*, and follow through on those commitments, determines the achievements of our life.

So we suggest taking some time prior to the start of your semester to write down your goals, large and small, and your reasons for enrolling in each class (there are a lot of great apps out there to help you goal set, like [this one](#)). Connect the class itself to a bigger goal you may have (complete a degree? learn a skill for work? get a better job?) and then *commit to yourself* that you will put in the necessary work to achieve your goal. Hold yourself accountable to the things you say are important to you with the understanding that if you do not change or build upon the things you do on a daily basis, you cannot expect your life to improve in the ways you would like it to improve.

## **Critical Thinking**

Online classes will ask more of you in several ways. To be successful you must accept and embrace this as fact. Lose any expectation that you will be able to passively sit back while information is neatly presented to you, like you might find in some on-campus lecture classes. Online classes will make you a better problem solver, learner and critical thinker, but only if you approach your classes with the understanding that you are responsible for your experience.

Critical thinking involves evaluating evidence, making connections between ideas, concepts, and the real world, and arriving at conclusions that produce intended results. In short, critical thinking is what will make you successful in classes, work, and life. So welcome any opportunity to stretch and flex your critical thinking skills in your online class experience.

## **Staying Curious**

No matter the format, subject, or requirement, working to find something interesting in everything you do—that is, staying curious—is one of the best ways to stay focused and excited about your classes, and to ensure the outcomes you desire. Don't be afraid to dive deep into a topic that interests you, or to develop an interest in something that seems, on the surface, dull or boring. Cultivate a curiosity in all that you do for school, and watch as that curiosity “pulls” you through the difficult moments.

**“IT IS OUR ATTITUDE AT THE BEGINNING OF A  
DIFFICULT TASK WHICH, MORE THAN ANYTHING  
ELSE, WILL AFFECT ITS SUCCESSFUL  
OUTCOME”**

**-WILLIAM JAMES**



# RESOURCES

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Knowing when and where to turn for help is a cornerstone of any real achievement. The following ECC Resources are excited to help you along on your journey to online class success:

## **Distance Learning (D2L) Technical Help**

Building C, Room C210  
847-214-7620  
[d2lhelpdesk@elgin.edu](mailto:d2lhelpdesk@elgin.edu)

## **Tutoring Center (online tutoring available)**

Building C, Room C230  
847-214-7256  
[tutoring@elgin.edu](mailto:tutoring@elgin.edu)

## **Academic & Transfer Advising**

Building B, Room B120  
847-214-7390  
[advising@elgin.edu](mailto:advising@elgin.edu)

## **Student Success**

Building B, Room B105.11  
847-214-7220  
[JLong@elgin.edu](mailto:JLong@elgin.edu)