

Friendly Tips for Distance Learning

Dear students and family members,

This crisis, as you know, is unprecedented, but online (or distance) learning has now been around a long time. Despite the stress we're all under right now, it's actually good and useful for you to learn how to succeed at online learning, since it is likely you will take at least one online course at your next college.

Here are a few tips to make online work as smoothly as possible for you--and these tips apply even when you're not in a time of emergency. Most important of course is the **health and safety of you and your loved ones**. If this creates a crisis, please inform a teacher, administrator, and/or social worker immediately.

Learning Environment

- Figure out the hours and location that will best work with your schedule and needs. Let your family members know what you need for success (eg "Please try not to disturb me between 9:30 and 11 am), and work things out as reasonably as possible.
- Because it can be hard to differentiate work time from family or relax time, decide on what will mark "work time" for you. E.g. sitting in a certain chair = work, or putting phone on Do Not Disturb mode means work time, or even wearing something or placing a certain object (a pencil case) in front of you means work time. Then when work time is over, you take off your work outfit, or move the worktime objects away, and then you can do other stuff.

Communicating with Teachers

- You are suddenly learning the hard way to take more initiative and take charge of your time and schoolwork. You may be relieved not to have teachers bugging you, but you may actually miss the bugging. Don't think that just because you don't see us daily, your assignments are not really there. All of us have assigned work. Yes, we are being very flexible and patient, but school still is mandatory. We are all balancing this.
- Tell your teacher if you need help or clarification, or if you're having problems. **YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT TILL THEY REPLY** in order to submit your work! We are all trying to reply as quickly as possible, but you will have to be patient with us too. And if you submit partially done work, it may be easier for us to help you because we can see what's giving you difficulty.
 - This may vary from teacher to teacher, but many of you will need to learn the lesson that sometimes, it is better to hand in an assignment even if it's sloppy, incomplete, or you're not sure you did it right. You don't want to let it all pile up, and have 6 half-done assignments that you haven't turned in and have zeroes for, and then when you finally talk to Prof. X, you forget your questions and you've lost some of your assignments. Better to get partial credit than none.

- Just like in school, teachers all have different styles and requirements. Just like always, it is your job to keep track of who is asking you to do what.
- We have already benefited from many of you expressing what is working and what's not, what your family needs, and where you're fine. Keep communicating with us. We want to know what your lives are like. We will help in whatever way we can. Don't apologize for having problems.
- If you know students who have not been in touch, or who don't have good technology, or who have other needs, please speak up on their behalf. Thank you to the several who have done this already!

Technology

- Some online learning is **synchronous** (real-time), like a Zoom meeting where you're talking to the teacher live. Lots of it is **asynchronous**, meaning you do it on your own time & submit when you're ready. Lots of colleges have online learning systems. You probably have to get much more accustomed to typing long emails, and reading long emails, since we can't do it in person!
 - Many college online systems have Discussion Boards, and a standard formula is this: the professor posts a weekly question, and you have to answer it by a certain deadline. You then have to respond to a minimum of 2 other students by a second deadline.
- We are discussing how to make the work we're asking less overwhelming for students, given the extraordinary circumstances. However, one thing you have to understand is that online learning means we need to send you *what you would learn in the classroom, AND what you would do for homework*. This is why many students find online courses *far more work* than in-person courses, because you have to read the prof's lectures, or figure out the textbook for yourself. This is hard! We know it's hard. We are all working to make this system better than what we have quickly begun this week, with little prep time. Hang in there!

Emotions & Moods

- This is a very emotional time for most of us. That's OK. It's important to take care of yourself and your loved ones, and get some fun, peace, and joy when you can, even in tiny bursts.
- Try to enjoy your learning. You won't enjoy everything, but you have some favorite classes, so try to keep enjoying them. Try to enjoy some of the cool technology you are learning to use. Some of you are enjoying the time to concentrate and catch up on stuff, so that's great.
- If you like, keep a diary or journal of your life at this time. This is historic--you will remember this year for many years to come. A diary can also help you let off steam.

- Keep in touch with your friends and family members who you're not seeing right now. We all need human contact. We all need to help each other.
- Again, both social workers are very ready to help you out, just as they always are. Their emails:
 - Dana Hamilton: dhamilton@bhsec.bard.edu
 - Tamar Mitchell: tmitchell@bhsec.bard.edu