

How to Maximize Your Online Learning Experience

1. Introduction

Online learning can be effective and efficient if you have the same level of commitment with the traditional face-to-face classes. Some educators even suggest that it is more beneficial to students because it brings greater flexibility for learning in terms of time, location and pace. There are two basic modes of online learning. The **synchronous mode** (e.g. a virtual class) happens in real time and allows interactions between you, your teacher and classmates. The **asynchronous** mode usually comprises a wide range of learning activities which are designed for self-paced learning. You may also organize a study group or explore other learning resources in your free time to get the most out of your online learning experience.

In the following sections, we will present how you should get ready for 1) online learning in general, 2) a virtual class using Zoom and 3) self-paced learning.

2. General Advice for Online Learning

Mindset

- Have an open mind for online learning and using technology.
- Commit yourself and attend virtual classes as required.
- Treat virtual classes the same way as you would in traditional classes (e.g. prepare for class, listen attentively, participate in learning activities actively, asking questions, etc.).
- Hold yourself responsible for your own learning because your teacher may not be able to remind you of assignment due dates verbally or visually as often in traditional classes.

Time management

- Create a weekly schedule or a study plan. Designate certain hours to attending virtual classes, completing assignments, participating in discussion forums, finding extra learning resources in e-library, etc.
- Make sure you stick to your schedule. You may consider rewarding yourself with a treat when you complete a task to keep you motivated.

Networking

- Some students may feel apathetic in an online learning environment because of insufficient in-person connection. Consider pairing up with fellow classmates to get peer support (e.g. share resources, remind each other about assignment due dates, build a virtual study group, work collaboratively on projects, etc.)

- Don't be shy. Ask for help from your teacher when you encounter difficulties.

3. Virtual Class using Zoom (synchronous)

1. How should I prepare for a Zoom class?

- Get yourself familiar with Zoom. Find basic instructions here: <https://cuhk-edtech.padlet.org/web/azkhbq5sjnfo>
- Find a quiet place where you are less likely to be distracted. If you study at home, ask your family members/ roommates to respect your "study mode". Turn off your phone so you won't be interrupted.
- There is a "[Virtual Background](#)" function that enables you to show your face without showing your surroundings. You can mute or unmute your mic at any time.
- If possible, use a laptop/desktop because it is easier to participate in the interactive activities with these devices.
- Some teachers may conduct more sophisticated learning activities that require the use of more than one platform/device. In that case, be prepared to use one desktop/laptop and one more mobile device for the best effect.
- Make sure that you have a reliable internet access.

2. How can I get the most out of a Zoom class?

- Actively engage in learning activities designed by your teacher.
- If your teacher enables the "[Chat](#)" function, use the opportunity to communicate with the class. Note that there are two message options: "send to everyone" (public message) and "send to someone" (private message):
 - Share your thoughts with classmates and teacher through public message. Your ideas may spark an intriguing discourse in the class. You can also share files to elaborate on your ideas in the chat box.
 - Ask questions publicly. Your classmates may be able to help you.
 - If you can, help your classmates by answering their questions too. You learn more when you teach.
 - If you don't feel comfortable to ask questions publicly, send it to your close friends in the class or the teacher through private message.
- Speak up and ask for help (use the "[Raise Hand](#)" function) when you need it.

4. Self-paced Learning (asynchronous)

1. How can I find support from my teacher?

- If your teacher sets up time for virtual office hours on Zoom, don't hesitate to use it. Schedule an appointment for consultation and further guidance.

- You can send “[Course Message](#)” to your teacher on your Blackboard course.
 - Sending an email is also an effective way to get help from your teacher. The course outline usually has the contact information. Make sure your email title is clear and concise so that your teacher won’t miss it.
2. How can I get peer support?
- Connect with your classmates by participating in the “[Discussion Forum](#)” on your Blackboard course on a regular basis. It will help you better understand course materials and build a closer relationship with your peers. You may find that your peers are helpful when preparing for exams and getting constructive feedback on assignments.
 - If you already make a few friends in your class, consider creating a virtual study group using Zoom to study difficult topics together.
 - If your course has a social media site, use the site to get to know your classmates and get help.
3. I want to start a virtual study group. How should I begin?
- Try inviting your classmates via in-meeting chat during Zoom lessons or the course forum on Blackboard. Make an open announcement to all or those you would like to invite about the study group and leave your email for others to contact.
 - Gather your groupmates on Zoom, Google, Skype or social media platforms for updates, meetings and collaborations.
4. The library is closed. How can I find academic resources for my study?
- The CUHK library has online resources such as e-books and academic journals that can be accessed off-campus. Check out the [library website](#) for detailed instructions.
 - Search engines such as [Google Scholar](#) is also useful in finding reliable academic sources.
 - Contact your course instructor or TA if you need more discipline-specific advice.
5. I want to work on a group project with my classmates. What tools can I use?
- Consider these tools for multi-party online conferencing: Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout.
 - Consider OneDrive, Google Docs, and Dropbox for easy file sharing and document collaboration.

* The document is prepared by Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research, CUHK. For any technical questions regarding Zoom, Blackboard and Office 365, please contact elearning@cuhk.edu.hk. For any other questions regarding learning strategies, please contact

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