Study Strategies and Skills for the Abbey Distance Program

When you consider taking online courses, it's crucial that you have strong study and time management skills. Online courses require more invested time than a face-to-face course. Here are some tips to help you improve/manage your time management and study skills:

**Time Management**

- **Look at the syllabus** at the start of the semester and make a note of major assignments. Mark them on a calendar you check regularly so you know what workload is coming in the weeks ahead. Don't forget to factor in prior commitments that may interfere with your regular study schedule, such as weddings or vacations, so you can give yourself enough extra time to complete assignments.

- **Create a weekly schedule** that you follow, designating certain hours each week to read, watch lectures, complete assignments, study, and participate in forums. Commit to making your online coursework part of your weekly routine, and set reminders for yourself to complete these tasks.

- When working on your assignments, **try time-blocking**, allotting yourself a certain amount of time for each task before moving on to the next one and setting a timer to keep you accountable.

- **Check in periodically** throughout the term, and look at how you're spending your time. Ask yourself: *How much time am I dedicating to course reading and assignments? Am I regularly underestimating the time it's taking me to get things done, forcing me to cram the nights before the exams?* A little self-reflection and adjustment can go a long way.

- **Set a strict guideline on assignments.** If an assignment is due on a Monday, do not wait to do it until Sunday night. It creates unnecessary stress and anxiety. For bigger assignments, such as outlines and essays, it is beneficial to set a personal deadline to finish 2 days before the actual deadline. Two days is an ideal time to do extra revision and editing to any work. It allows 1 day for rest and 1 day to revisit the work with clear eyes. Finishing work early means you have more time to ask questions or make improvements.
Technology Management

- **Be sure to log into Canvas before the first day of class! Gather contact information for the course** and/or obtain necessary technical assistance before the first day of class. Make sure you have a phone number or email for IT, your instructor, and a classmate outside of your Canvas course in case you cannot log in.
  - [https://www.belmontabbeycollege.edu/helpdesk/](https://www.belmontabbeycollege.edu/helpdesk/)
  - [https://support.bac.edu/students/](https://support.bac.edu/students/)
  - 704-461-6247
  - support@bac.edu
- **Be aware of Canvas's maintenance schedule.** In case of system maintenance is planned for a specific date, make sure any assignments due around the same time are submitted in advance.
- **Make sure that you identify and are familiar with the technology** that you would be using in the course. Routinely check that the software needed for your online courses are up-to-date. Before every term, review the technical requirements from Belmont Abbey College to make sure you are prepared.

Study Space

Set a specific time and place to study. When choosing a place to learn and study, look for a few essential qualities.

- **Light:** A dark room or space can become claustrophobic and even depressing. It will also lead to faster eye strain and fatigue. If you have a dark home or office, consider adding extra sources of indirect light. You can buy inexpensive desk lamps at Target or Walmart for less than $10.
- **Ergonomics:** If you try to sit on the floor with your laptop balanced on your knees, you're going to wind up with a sore back, a stiff neck, and aching shoulders. Ergonomic work spaces allow you to focus on the study materials. When you're uncomfortable, pain and stiffness will distract from your work and make you less likely to return to studying. Make sure you have a comfortable chair, desk, or table for work.
- **Ambiance:** Some people can work easily in a crowded coffee shop or restaurant, while others need absolute silence, and still more need to listen to music or keep the television on in the background. Don't assume that you learn best in pure silence. Experiment with different environments to figure out how best you work.
- **Supplies:** Do you need a fresh cup of coffee? A bottle of water? Maybe a bag of carrot sticks in which to snack? Before you sit down for an online course, get everything you think you might need. If your coffee is within easy reach, you won't have to interrupt your studying to go into the kitchen.
- **Avoid distractions** when studying such as surfing the net, talking on the phone, etc. Let everyone in your home know that you're taking an online course. Ask them not to bother you while you study so you can focus on the material. You might even turn off your phone and close your internet browser tabs except for the one you use for studying. Once you get distracted, returning to work becomes increasingly difficult.
Study Skills

- **Break Down Tasks.** It is easier to retain small amounts of information at a time, and it is not as time consuming. You do not feel as though you are "cramming". Small breaks in between sections allow your brain to refresh and give the extra boost to continue on.

- **Create a timetable** that breaks your study schedule into 1-hour study blocks with 15 minute breaks in between. This studying style will seem less daunting and allow you to keep on top of your work. By studying in small blocks, your brain is also better able to understand the information.

- **Connect with peers** and team up for study groups, group assessments, stay in touch, and help each other with proof-reading, tips, and exchange of resources. Students learn from each other and cooperative learning is the same online as in any traditional college. Of course, you can also seek guidance in the real world. Maybe you have a friend or relative who has experience with the course material. Getting help from someone you know might feel less uncomfortable, especially if you're new to online learning.

- **Ask for help** when you hit a wall. It's hard to ask for help. However, if you remain stuck during your online course, you must speak up if you want to get the education's full value. Generally, with online classes, one week is built off the knowledge of the past week. If you do not understand week 1, you will have greater difficulty in week 2, and so on. Many teachers set up preferred communication channels, whether it's email, instant messaging, or a virtual office or Q&A discussion board in the course. Try to use that channel to get answers to your questions. Just remember to phrase your question politely and to give as many details as possible.

- **Set specific goals** for each study session. Research supports the value of SMART goals which are **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-specific.** Write down your goals, and set new goals when appropriate.

- **Utilize available learning resources**, including the Academic Resource Center's tutoring services, online tutoring with ThinkingStorm, and editing tools like Grammarly to support your work. If you have a documented disability, be sure to contact the **Accessibility Coordinator** to arrange appropriate accommodations.

Some ideas adapted from Baylor University and Princeton Theological Seminary