

## Transitioning into Quarantine Life: Being Productive with The New Normal

This new current state of uncertainty and restrictions has without a doubt knocked us on our backsides to some extent. 2020 has been a circus and the months of February, March, and April have tested many countries' economies, wellbeing, and members. Adjusting to the new societal lifestyle and work from home placements presents a huge challenge to many individuals. The question of productivity, workload, and salary come into play and has everyone anxious. How can we maintain our job and continue our studies from home? How can we properly adjust to this new remote state without becoming discouraged?



For perspective, I'm an American English teacher currently residing in Madrid, Spain, one of the hardest hit countries in the world by this current pandemic. One day, in mid-March, my co-worker and I were enjoying a beautiful beach town field trip and the next, told to return to our place of residence and not leave our home. March 14<sup>th</sup> was a huge societal transition here in the city of Madrid; schools closed, stay at home measures were set in place, and people could only leave for reasons such as supermarket runs, trips to the pharmacy, and walking your dog. Many people have been let go from their jobs and others have been assigned to work from home. Upon returning home, I asked my flatmate, who is a biochemist in one of the hospitals, how the situation was. I wanted a first-hand account rather than just relying on the news. She stressed that her hospital was almost full and health care workers were working diligently. This perspective was a pretty big wakeup call and I thought, although my job is suspended, that does not mean I can just sit around and do nothing for, realistically, an indefinite amount of time.

As someone who thoroughly enjoys the outdoors and whose job relied on it, the reality of fully transitioning indoors was difficult to accept. I had a very structured, specific, daily schedule five days a week, every hour of everyday was coordinated, but once that completely disappeared it left me with a feeling of loss.

Learning to accept that this new situation was completely out of my control was the first hurdle in finding a new normal. This situation is out of our hands even though we all desperately wish it was not. We all had a routine before, now we have one with a different structure. Daily interactions are replaced with phone calls and face to face meetings are now with video chat applications.

### Learn something new

Take some time to pick up that hobby you've been wanting to do.


Whether it's learning a new language, taking a wellness course, or painting, having a creative outlet allows you to enjoy and focus on something outside of work and study.



### Create a schedule

Choose select hours of the day (maybe the hours where you have the most energy and clearest mindset) and hammer out the work you need to get done!

Set alarms for breaks and an official 'clock out' time.



The routine that once worked for me as a student greatly correlates with what works for me now as a teacher. I graduated from the University of Arkansas in December of 2016 and if I can take one important thing away from my university experience after four and a half years, it's that I know how to stay organized with a large study and workload; still not sure if that's a negative or positive thing after four and a half years considering how expensive education is in America, but probably negative. I had a part time job while in university and learning to balance the work/study life was particularly challenging and at many times, especially stressful. It was clear that my

mental health was suffering.


One key factor I found to overcome disorganization and improve productivity levels was: ***write down the tasks you need to accomplish.*** You are more likely to complete your goals if they are written than if you were to just have a list in your head. Having a definitive way of tracking your tasks and responsibilities serves as a motivator and as a constant reminder of your goals and continuous accomplishments.



### Create a work/study space

Create a space in your flat or home solely designated to get work done. When it comes time for breaks or clocking out, remove yourself from that space.

Having a specific area to complete tasks will allow you to work more efficiently.





Nowadays, my daily work life includes the following activities:

- wake up and eat breakfast
- work on modules for a wellness course
- a few scheduled (25 mins each) basic level English classes
- work on modules for a creative certification course
- get some fresh air - some days I sit out on my patio to enjoy the sunshine with a book
- get active for around 30 minutes a day
- a nice glass of wine while cooking dinner and a movie or two



### Limit Distractions

Set your phone and tv remote aside while working and completing coursework. Limiting distractions will help you get your work and assignments done faster and more efficiently. Time track with the clock on your computer.



My tasks and goals are written in a large notebook that I check daily and I cross off each one when completed. I even have a task/tasks I want to complete on the weekend written down, even though they are not necessarily work or education related. Those things may just include a show I have been wanting to watch or a book that I want to start.

Additionally, on Sunday, Monday, and Friday nights, I have scheduled group facetime calls with close friends from my home state of Texas and here in Madrid. Maintaining your close social connections, even though you cannot physically see each other, is incredibly important in reducing the feeling of isolation. We have more time on our hands than we would probably like, but now is the time to reach out.

Most days, this list is in that exact order and some days it is not. Maybe I wake up much later than



### **Take breaks**

Taking breaks is a powerful thing. Even if it's for 5 minutes!

Give yourself some time to decompress and relax. Not every moment of the day needs to be filled with something productive.

expected and may skip the modules for the wellness course or really *really* do not feel like exercising that day, it happens! Of course, you will have days where you are feeling extremely unmotivated and that is okay; this is a tough situation to navigate. After I complete a task, I cross it off my list. The act of writing down the goals you need to accomplish for the day or week, cross that off! This will allow your mind to acknowledge the progression you are making even when that progression involves the smallest of tasks.

Additional key factors to staying productive and motivated during this time of remoteness:

- Take care of yourself: your mental health is vital during this time, prioritize it.
- Take breaks during your work and study hours. Every thirty minutes or so, remove your eyes from the computer or stand up and stretch. This will decrease the probability of screen time burnout. Do not let your day be continuously consumed with studying or working.
- Create a space in your flat that is only to be used for work and study purposes. This will help set apart the work and leisure tasks in your day to day life.
- Have a creative outlet. Pick up the hobby you have been wanting to start and do it leisurely.

Whichever few hours of the day *you* feel most productive, focus on that time to work on work-related or education-related tasks. Maybe it is completing a research paper that's due next week or a power point presentation that will need to be presented via a video chat platform. Understand yourself enough to create a plan that is best for you.

### **Stay Connected**

Stay in touch with close friends and family!

Talk to your parent and best friends from back home. Get more personal and organize face times a few times a week to minimize the feeling of isolation.

### **Self Care**

Get moving!

Whichever form of exercise you prefer, yoga, pilates, cardio, body weight exercises, get your blood flowing for about 30 minutes a day

Do your body a huge favor by decreasing your stress and anxiety levels!

With this disruption of our normal lives still in full force, many people are seeing a small light at the end of the tunnel. Whichever way your agenda takes you, find your groove, seek out social connections for warmth and encouragement, and prioritize your mental and physical wellbeing. It doesn't matter if you have learned a language or completed an extensive course, the important thing is that you come out of this a little bit better than before and you managed to progress in the things that you consider important in your life.

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