

## An Emergency Field Guide to Helping Students Succeed in Online Classes

The decision for many colleges to move coursework temporarily online, to send the majority of staff and faculty home to work remotely, and to limit campus resources was not made lightly. The knowledge that the best way to protect communities was going to come with substantial risk to students' success has been a heavy burden to bear.

The academic success team at Wallace State Community College has been helping students manage unexpected obstacles to their education and overcome challenges for nearly a decade. In that time, we've learned a few tricks about supporting students who are overwhelmed by work or technology. One practical way to assist students is to connect them to resources like laptops and mobile hotspots that can be borrowed from colleges and public libraries. But what can instructors do when the challenge is greater than access to technology? How can instructors help when students are overwhelmed with time management, frustrated with technology they dislike, or already certain of their defeat?

### Have students create a schedule

Have students build a schedule as if they were still physically in class. Students who are able to set specific days and times when they commit to logging in and working on their online classes—whether they have one class or six—are more likely to succeed. If ENG101 meets twice a week for two hours each meeting, then a student in ENG101 should be logging into their online ENG101 class twice a week for two hours per session at minimum.

**PRO-TIP:** Have students break down their “awake” hours and color code a chart filling in those hours. Students can use four colors: one for homework, one for class time, one for studying outside of class, and one for other personal commitments. (This strategy is mostly used by non-traditional students with childcare, eldercare, or work responsibilities). Students often find there is more room in their schedule than they realized and the visual cue helps them feel less overwhelmed. Encourage high-achieving students to allocate free time for relaxation and hobbies.

### Have students set short- and long-term due dates and create a list of reasonable steps to produce their work on time or ahead of schedule

On one side of a piece of paper, have students write down all the short- and long-term goals they are working toward and the dates by when those things need to be completed. On the other side, have students prioritize the tasks for the upcoming week. They now have a to-do list for the week that allows them to complete the most urgent projects first, but also includes steps toward finishing larger projects.

**PRO-TIP:** Advise students to break down tasks for reaching their goals into specific steps. The steps can be small, such as “Read five pages by Monday night.” or “Spend an hour Thursday night working on the research paper outline that is due in two weeks.”

### Use Google Voice's free texting service

Many students do not reliably respond to email, so calling or texting them is necessary to offer additional support. Because instructors may work with hundreds of students a year, it is impractical to give out their personal cell phone number. Google Voice can be used to text students, and it is much easier for instructors to check and reply to texts only during operating hours.

**PRO-TIP:** Don't try to text more than one student at a time or it will become a group message. Do not initiate any texts that would violate FERPA. Instead, keep things general and allow students to be as specific as they would like to be.

### Conclusion

Remote, flexible education is the education of the future. While many academics still prefer roundtable discussions to online discussion boards, our current situation is causing us to evolve as instructors and support staff to accommodate the changing needs of our students. Developing an expanded arsenal of tools and rising to the occasion is what we have always done as instructors to help students succeed.

Susan Peek, Success Coach and Prior Learning Specialist

For more information, contact the author at Wallace State Community College, [susan.peek@wallacestate.edu](mailto:susan.peek@wallacestate.edu)

---

---