

Working from Home Successfully

Businesses today in different industries offer working from home / remote working for their employees for a variety of reasons. It's such a flexible arrangement that meets both workers and company needs. If you are someone that has the option to work from home or find yourself in a 'work from home' situation, below are tips on how to work successfully.

To start, consider checking off the following things to ensure you are equipped to work remotely:

- Equipment:** What will you need to do your job (phone, laptop, web cam, microphone, etc)
- Internet access:** Will you have access to internet connection? Wifi? Is internet necessary?
- Account access:** Do you have access to programs and accounts to do your job? Will you need to connect to a Shared Network?
- Team contact information:** Who will you mainly be in contact with and do you have their contact information?

Knowing the answers to the above checklist will help you meet the minimum requirements to work remotely.

Strategies for Success

Working from home can be difficult. There are distractions all around you, from the temptation of your easy chair and just one more chapter to family members demanding your attention. The environment you work in can set the mood for whether you will be productive or idle. Below are some tips on how to work successfully from home:

1. Develop the “Working” mindset

Start by designating a workplace or workstation in your home - This will give you a clear separation for where you will do your work .

Dress as if you were going to work - It can be tempting to work in the comfort of your pajamas, however some [research](#) has shown that what you wear influences the way you think¹. Being in work clothes can mentally prepare you to work and also help you retain a sense of professionalism in case you need to go on a video call.

Use a “work” related prop - Having an object close by that reminds you of your regular work environment can help trick your brain into thinking it is time for work. For example, your company ID card or a mug you use for water.

¹ <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/minds-business/when-clothing-style-influences-cognitive-style.html#.WTmBucaZNBw>

Set boundaries for yourself - If you live with family or roommates, it would be best to let them know what your working hours are and to not disturb you during those times.

2. Manage Your Time

Set clear working hours - Choose what time you will be working and when you will finish. Preferably pick a time you can be most productive and consider when you would be able to communicate with your team members and manager.

Use your calendar - Plan and structure your workday to keep yourself on track. One useful technique is to block off certain hours of the day where you will focus on only one task. For example, everyday on your calendar from 9:00 am to 10:00 am, your focus could be replying to emails. Unless there is another more urgent matter that requires attention, refrain from doing anything other than what you set out to do in your blocked time.

Make a to-do list - A classic organization method is to create to-do lists. This will help you prioritize what tasks require attention and remind you what needs to be done.

3. Be Accountable

Share your schedule and to-do list - Let your team and manager know what your schedule is, and what tasks you plan to work on. If other people know what your schedule and tasks are, it can keep you accountable on ensuring you complete your work.

4. Remember Your Health

Work is important and so is your health. Make sure to take breaks throughout your day. Schedule a few in so there is a guarantee you will take one. When you do have your break, leave your desk and walk around your place. Include stretches to loosen up and do not forget to eat healthy food.

Communication Skills

The way you interact and communicate with your colleagues in the office will be slightly different when you are communicating remotely. Here are some ways to project your business professionalism while working from home:

1. Meetings

Preparation - When you are attending any virtual meeting or phone call, make sure you are prepared. This means making sure that your video and audio equipment are working properly prior to your meeting. Download and install the program that is needed for your meeting. If you are using a laptop, double check that it is fully charged or plugged in.

Look and sound good on camera - You should setup your equipment to optimally allow you team or clients see and hear you². Consider the following:

Angle - Have your webcam at roughly eye level. Angle it to point down rather than up under your chin or nose. The most appropriate distance is to have a head-and-shoulders view of yourself.

Brightness – Adjust the lighting in your room so that the light source comes from behind the webcam to shine on your face.

Clothing – Depending on who you are speaking to, dress accordingly. If you are speaking with a client, wear something that is “one-level up” more professional than your work environment. Use your best judgement on professional clothing choices.

Etiquette – Similar to a real meeting, have your full attention on whoever is speaking. Avoid checking your phone, emails, or websites during a video meeting. Take notes on a note pad if possible, this shows you are focused on the content the person is speaking about and that you value their contribution. Remember to be patient and allow one person to speak at a time. This will be especially important for video meetings, as multiple people speaking at once can create audio confusion.

2. Visibility

Without the easy accessibility of someone walking up to you in person to see if you are occupied, it will be very important to show you are online and available.

Availability Status – One way to show you are present is to set your status to “Available”. Depending on what program you are using, there may be a function to allow your team to see if you are free. For example, Microsoft Teams includes a colour coded function for changing your status to what your situation is, such as green for available or red for do not disturb.

Share your schedule with your team and manager to let them know what you have going on. Be responsive to their messages and emails. Although you may be busy and do not need to answer them in that instant, it is a good way to show them that you are ready to respond when you have time.

Regular Check-ins – Update your team and manager regularly on projects or tasks that you are working on. This can be done at the start of the day or during a scheduled meeting. Keeping others in the loop will allow for fluid communication and shows you are active. This also gives you a chance to ask for help if you need assistance with anything or vice versa if your workload is on the lighter side.

² <https://www.bcitsa.ca/careerservices/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2020/03/Interview-Formats-mar9.pdf>

Using Technology Successfully

Your employer or company will likely have specific programs or apps needed for remote working. Depending on what function you need, the technology you use will address your needs. Training company *Workplaceless* provided a list of suggested programs to use when remote working in a March 2020 [blog](#)³:

- Communication: Slack, Zoom, Whereby
- Collaboration: Klaxoon, MURAL
- Productivity and planning: Toggl, ClickUp
- Engagement: Elin.ai, Donut, Wulu

Regardless of what technology use, be sure to familiarize yourself with how to use them.

1. Online Presentations

There may be a chance that you will need to conduct an online presentation and skills such as keeping everyone's attention or facilitating engagement may be necessary. Kevin Daum, entrepreneur and best-selling author at [Inc.com](#), suggests the following 10 tips for giving great online presentations⁴:

1. *Start with the right tool* – Choose a software program that allows you to monitor who's online and allows for communication
2. *Help everyone be on time* – Use an online tool that has calendaring features to send reminders
3. *Keep your slides simple* – Avoid lots of text and use three or four bullet points
4. *Be clear and efficient* – Make your presentation simple, straight to the point, and easy to understand
5. *Make the presentation entertaining* – Add a little bit of casualness to the presentation by using stories and humour to make it fun
6. *Use visual examples* – Use pictures and short videos to supplement your content
7. *Encourage conversation* – Have slides that allow for engagement and collaboration so that everyone has a chance to get involved
8. *Set action steps* – Plan out what you hope your audience will take away from your presentation and include a slide that emphasizes objectives at the beginning
9. *Leave time for questions* – At the end of your presentation, give your audience an opportunity to discuss and ask questions about your presentation

³ <https://www.workplaceless.com/blog/emergency-remote-work>

⁴ <https://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/10-tips-for-giving-great-online-presentations.html>

10. *End on time* – Respect everyone’s time by following the schedule, however inform them that they can reach out to you for further questions later

2. Best practices for sharing work documents

Working at home remotely does not mean you will necessarily be working alone. Your projects or tasks may be shared with other team members. Popular file sharing options include Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive and Dropbox. Whatever option you choose to share your work with, there are several best standard practices to follow. File sharing company, [TitanFile](#), provides the following practices to follow⁵:

1. *Protect your information* – Make sure whatever sharing option you use that it is safe
2. *Limit your recipients* – Provide access to only those who need it
3. *Keep it simple* – When sharing with clients, consider using a simple sharing method
4. *Think before you send* – Consider whoever you plan to share a document with if it is necessary for them to see it
5. *Share the most recent version* – Share the most up-to-date version to prevent misinformation or
6. *Guarantee compliance* – Make sure everyone you share the document follows the same safety standards
7. *Choose the best method* – Consider different sharing options/programs depending on what you plan to share (for example, a large file)
8. *Manage devices* – Avoid using USB drives if possible; the information stored is restricted to a physical external drive that may not be accessible to others, does not provide most recent updated documents, and could be a security risk if stolen
9. *Audit regularly* – Have a system in place for tracking who has access to shared files
10. *Revise often* – Speak with your manager and team on whether the sharing system in place is useful/effective for everyone

⁵ <https://www.titanfile.com/blog/online-file-sharing-best-practices/>

Sources

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