

How to make your at-home study more effective

According to the survey conducted in late April, 2020, majority of the NU students seem to be struggling with the at-home study environment due to the counteractions to COVID-19. Here I would like to place some general information about motivation and ways to make your at-home study effective. I will start with one important aspect about motivation.

Motivation comes **AFTER** action, **NOT BEFORE**

Many have a common misconception about motivation. Many think that motivation is an inspiration or a gift which would come upon you when the time is met and would trigger the flow of your activity, such as studying. However, the order of motivation and action is actually the opposite. Motivation comes *after* action and motivation *not before*. Motivation is not a cause of a certain behavior but a result of it.

This is why waiting to get motivated is often a waste of time. It would simply lead to procrastination and would result in doing your task at the last minute. To avoid this, though it may seem paradoxical, it is best to start before getting motivated and to put effort on the ways to make the start easier.

Schedule yourself, create a study-friendly habit

Now that you have understood how motivation works, it is time you simply get yourself started. Still, there may be obstacles to make yourself started in the first place. The key to make yourself started is to schedule yourself and to create a study-friendly habit. I will cite a study which brings out evidence how important scheduling is.

A set of participants were randomly divided into 3 groups. The main output of this study was to build better exercise habits than before. Group I was the control group and they were only asked to track how often they exercised. Group II was the “Motivation” group which received explanatory material about how exercise can contribute to better health such as reducing rates of cardiovascular events. Group III was the “Motivation and Schedule”

group which received the same material as Group II and was asked to schedule themselves the date, time and place to take exercise. After 2 weeks the researcher collected data whether they took exercise at least once a week. Among group I and II, 38% and 35% took exercise, respectively. In group III, 91% took exercise. This result shows that only knowing the efficacy and importance of exercise does not lead to behavioral change but to have a concrete schedule of when and where to take action is the key.

Before the COVID-19 counteractions, the class timetable set by the university had been acting as a forced schedule to keep you studying. However, now that the classes are held online and most of them are PowerPoint resources which you can access anytime you prefer, it is essential to create a schedule of your own to keep you studying. Some may claim that they have already tried to schedule themselves but it was just difficult to follow it. This difficulty may be due to the fact that the schedule was too demanding. Creating a study habit is difficult especially when the schedule is too hard of a work. Start by creating a schedule that is easy and simple enough to be sustainable. Once you have established a sustainable study habit of your own, it would not be difficult to put some additional tasks onto your habit. Another tip to create a better habit is to have some daily ritual to get started. Beethoven, for instance, counted 60 coffee beans in the morning to start his day with a cup of coffee. Anything easy and simple to get you started could be the daily ritual for you.

Zone your room and create a study-friendly environment

In the field of infectious disease medicine, zoning is one of the most important infection preventive measures. At a hospital setting, they would distinguish the area into clean area and unclean area, and when a health care provider is inside the unclean area, they would have to wear personal preventive equipment (PPE) to avoid infection. On the other hand, when they re-enter the clean area from the unclean area, they have to take off all the PPE to avoid bringing viruses into the clean area.

To create a study-friendly environment, the concept of zoning is useful as well. I do understand that most Japanese housings are as small as a

mustard seed, but still there are some measures we could undertake. Referring to the zoning concept, it would be effective to zone your room into “study area” and “relaxing/entertainment area”. Devices that are used for relaxing or entertainment such as smartphones should not be brought into the study area. If smartphones are too tempting to avoid, place it in the kitchen or in the restroom during your scheduled study time. Things only related to your study should be within your reach in the study area. You may claim that you have to use your laptop for your study but the laptop itself is full of attractive entertainment which you cannot displace. Even though, you could try hiding the attractive applications from the desktop, such as the youtube app or the web browsers. By zoning your laptop, you would have to click several times more to reach and this small step could be an obstacle to distraction.

The spread of COVID-19 has changed many aspects of our daily lives. We still do not know how long these changes would last and some changes may even be permanent not temporal. In this difficult situation, gradually adapting yourself to the changes is required. I hope we could all conquer this situation and make the best of it.

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