Working from Home? 4 Tips for Staying Productive

COVID-19 has led many companies to recommend that employees work from home. For many, remote work is a new reality and one that takes some getting used to. Below are a few tips for working remotely from Google's Primer team to help you make the most out of the situation.

Whether it's done by choice or by necessity, working from home has its benefits, like avoiding your daily commute. But it also means it's up to you to motivate yourself and get as much out of your time as you would in an office setting.

To help, here are four tips to keep yourself accountable, collaborative, and productive as you work from home.

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Tip 1: Create "work" triggers for your brain

When you work in an office, the daily routine of getting ready and commuting helps your brain get ready for the day. When you're working remotely, you can create "start the day" triggers that get your head ready for work in a similar way, like exercising, reading the news, or making coffee.

A workspace may also be key. If you can sit down and be productive anywhere, that's great. If you need more structure, establishing a designated workspace — whether it's a separate room, a fully stocked desk, or just a clean part of your kitchen table — can help tell your brain you're in the place where you do work productively and without distraction.

About distractions: They're one of the biggest challenges of working remotely. To keep your brain in the right mode, avoid doing nonwork tasks during your work time. For example, schedule a separate time to do laundry instead of tackling it while you're finishing a work presentation.

Tip 2: Stay motivated with a list

A simple to-do list can do wonders for keeping you both organized, motivated, and productive as you work from home. As you create your list, think about big, long-term goals, like finishing a project, as well as small goals, like completing tasks that lead to that big goal. Checking off those smaller goals lets you know you're making progress, which gives you positive reinforcement throughout your day. And work feels much more doable when it's not all one giant task.

Write or type out your list instead of just having it in your head. You won't have to devote headspace to constantly remembering what you have to do, and the pleasure of crossing tasks off your list can help you stay motivated.

Tip 3: Make a schedule for everything

Remote work requires a schedule much like a typical office job, except you're the only one holding yourself accountable. That doesn't mean your entire day has to be work only (it's actually important to take regular breaks to refresh yourself mentally, physically, and emotionally), just that any nonwork activities also need to be scheduled.

When creating your schedule, take into account the other commitments in your life and find a routine that lets you take care of those as well. If you have a child, build their care into your schedule, like blocking out school pickup and drop-off. If you play sports or volunteer, schedule time to get work done before or after these activities.

Once you've set your schedule, make it visible to your co-workers with a shared calendar. This way, they'll know when you're free to meet and when you've blocked out work and personal times. It's also a good idea to make sure friends and family understand your schedule and respect it. Set boundaries and expectations by letting them know that working remotely doesn't mean you're free all the time.

Tip 4: Create a process for collaboration

Working from home might seem like a solo experience, but it usually still involves interacting with others, whether it's meeting with your team, getting assignments, making decisions, or giving and receiving feedback. So, it's important to set up methods for collaboration while you work remotely.

Talking face to face can help collaboration, so consider videoconferencing for these moments.

While email can be effective for making an official decision or passing on information, people's inboxes can get clogged up quickly. If you need to ask a quick question or send a fast update to your team, chat apps like Google Hangouts or Slack are a good alternative to email.

Brainstorming or detailed discussions usually require an official meeting. Talking face to face can often help collaboration, so you might consider video conferencing for this. Video conferencing is also a great way of having regular check-ins with your team. This can help you stay abreast of what others are doing, and also help everyone keep up a rapport that might otherwise go neglected from not sharing a workplace.

There are many inexpensive and free options available, some we have found useful are:

- Microsoft Teams
- GoToMeeting
- Zoom
- Amazon Chime