10 TIPS

For International Students Studying Online at GW

These tips were developed primarily for international students who are learning online during the COVID-19 crisis, but much of the information would also apply to any student taking online classes.

10 TIPS

1. **Set up your GW access**
   Set yourself up for success by making sure you can access your GW email and our learning management system, Blackboard. If you are a newly admitted student, follow these steps to claim your NetID and get your GW email address. GW uses two-step authentication to log in to GW email accounts, but you can set it up to use a phone app rather than a text message (*see below for more information). Remember that you can use the GW virtual private network (VPN) if you are having trouble accessing your email or Blackboard, but if your country's government discourages or bans the use of VPNs, notify your professor and make another arrangement for communicating with them and accessing course materials. As a GW student, you also have access to software to support your learning. It is highly recommended that you download Microsoft Office 365 for online submission of your writing assignments and presentation slides.

2. **Get ready**
   Log onto Blackboard to see if your professor has made the course available yet; if it is available, click on the course and familiarize yourself with the syllabus, the course outline, and any other guidance or materials your professor has posted. Check to see if you need to purchase any textbooks or other course materials and order them so that you are ready on the first day of class. There may also be software your professor wants you to use for the class, so it is a good idea to review instructions or watch tutorials so that you know how to use this software before the class begins. Finally, be sure to check your GW email to see if your professor has sent you any information about the class.

3. **Establish good habits**
   To be successful in an online class, you need to be very self-sufficient and manage your time well. This is especially true during the summer session when a 14-week class is compressed into six weeks. Understanding the course expectations early and planning ahead will help you be more successful. It is

Updated: 6/1/2020

also helpful to block out certain times on your calendar so that you have enough time to learn the course material and complete your assignments. When you mark due dates for assignments on your calendar, keep in mind time zone differences. GW is in the Eastern Standard Time Zone (EST).

4. **"Participate" virtually in class activities and assignments**

Participating in an online class is not the same as participating in a face-to-face class. In an online class, most professors will be thoughtful in creating opportunities for you to apply what you have learned and discuss your ideas, and your job is to actively engage in this learning and participate in class activities. For example, in a Blackboard discussion forum or VoiceThread presentation, take the time to review the materials and instructions and read/listen and comment on your classmates' posts. If your professor uses synchronous Blackboard Collaborate sessions, use the video, audio, and chat function to share your ideas and ask questions. If you feel self-conscious sharing your question with the class, you can send a private chat comment to your professor.

5. **Communicate with your professor**

In U.S. academic contexts, it is common for students to ask their professors questions, meet with them during office hours, and develop positive and collegial relationships with them. Because you are in an online class, you will need to do these things virtually. Take advantage of online office hours and/or ask your professor to schedule a virtual meeting with you at a time that works for both of you. Many professors will also add a "questions" area to Blackboard where you can post questions for them to answer. Don't hesitate to email your professor with questions or concerns, but make sure you know what your professor prefers to be called; for example, some may prefer to be called "Professor _____" followed by their family (or "last") name while others prefer their given (or "first") name. Here are some tips about etiquette when emailing an American professor.

6. **Make clear any constraints or technical issues you might have**

Let your professor know right away if:
   a. Your time zone prevents you from participating in some activity or lecture
   b. You cannot use certain websites (for example, professors may not know that Youtube is banned in China.)
   c. Your internet connection is unreliable
   d. Your home country's culture or laws influence your ability to write or speak about certain topics

Visit GW's information technology office for guidance on tech issues, and don't hesitate to contact that office directly if you need help.

7. **Develop relationships with your classmates**

It's not as easy to make friends or feel like you are part of a community in an online class, so we recommend that you join actively in class activities that involve your peers, such as online class discussions, team or group activities or projects, or peer review of writing assignments. In addition to making connections through coursework, take the initiative to develop social relationships with your classmates outside of class through social media or regular video chats. Be sure that you connect in person with your online friends once you arrive on campus.

8. **Learn about GW's resources**

GW has a lot of resources for international students, and below is a quick list that you might find helpful:
   - GW Library and research guide for international students
     - You can access articles and books for research
   - GW Writing Center
     - You can make a virtual appointment to get help with writing assignments
   - International Services Office (ISO)
     - You can ask questions about visas and learn about events
   - GW resources for international students

- You can explore GW's resources that focus on international student support and engagement
  - GW Colonial Health Center
    - You can find help with your stress before it causes problems in class. The Colonial Health Center offers Counseling and Psychological Services, and the first step is to set up a free, brief and confidential consultation with a member of their counseling team.

9. **Get to know the GW community virtually**
   Even though you are not on campus yet, you can explore GW and Washington, DC virtually. You can learn a lot from your school or program's web page and social media accounts, and student services representatives and/or academic advisors can be excellent sources of support and information. You can even interact with other GW students, for example, the GW International Student Community Ambassadors (ISCA) is a very active student group with virtual advising hours and social events. Check their Facebook page for more information. You can also check out student organizations to see if there are opportunities for virtual participation.

10. **Surround yourself with English**
    When studying on campus at GW, you have many opportunities to use English, but this is not as easy when you are living in your home country and taking online classes. Find ways to immerse yourself in English as much as possible. For example, if you are playing video games in your free time, change your settings to English; or you can watch television shows, movies, or TED Talks in English. Podcasts are also great for practicing your listening skills. Find a way to do a hobby that you already love in English. For help with academic English outside of class, check out the resources that have been compiled by GW's EAP program.

2 STEP AUTHENTICATION TIP

*Sign into your GW email without a text for identity authentication

1. Go to myapps.gwu.edu
2. Go to the top-right icon and press on profile
3. Go to "additional security verification"
4. Click on "notify through app" if using Authenticator, which only requires wifi and can be downloaded in the app store. Once downloaded on your phone, press "school or work account" and allow camera access. On the computer, press "set up authenticator" and take a photo of the QR code. Verify and save changes.
5. Email ithelp@gwu.edu if these steps don't work.