



Best Practices for Working Remotely





The coronavirus has forced millions of Americans out of their offices, which means many are adjusting to working from home for the foreseeable future. It's a big change—here's actionable advice for making a smooth transition to remote work.

Establish a Morning Routine

- Your morning routine is essential for setting up your day. Contrary to common assumptions, structure actually allows for freedom and creativity—rather than inhibiting it. Without a structured morning, our mind starts trying to figure out what to do. We are mostly influenced by fear and desire, so without taking control of our day right away, these things are likely to take over. When we wake up and jump into the news, email or social media, it kicks our brain into a defensive mindset, which becomes the background for all that we do all day.
- Start your day early. The workday may begin at 9:00, but your body and brain need time to transition from sleep to critical and creative thinking. Set your alarm for 5:00 or 6:00 to get a jump on the day. Your mind will want to keep you in bed, but here's a great mind hack: count backwards from five out loud, then stand up and get going.
- Resist the urge to check your phone until after you've gotten ready for the day. It's a simple trick that can keep you in control of your day and prevent you from going down a rabbit hole of emails.
- Don't jump right into work. Instead, hydrate your body with a tall glass of water to kickstart your brain. Then get your blood flowing with some movement. If you're confined to your home during this time and unable to get outside for a walk, light stretching or a yoga sequence will do the trick.
- Stimulate your brain with something creative or educational. Spend 30 minutes quietly reading something that inspires you, or listen to a podcast or an audio book. What's critical here is that you set the context for how your mind will engage the day. When you begin with positive stimulus, your brain starts looking for opportunities. Conversely, when you feed your brain all the worry in the news and games of envy and comparison on social media, you set yourself up for an unproductive path. Don't worry... the news and emails aren't going anywhere. There will be plenty of time to deal with them—let's just set your mind up to deal with them powerfully.
- Lastly, take five to twenty minutes to check in with yourself before pouring into work. Whether it's meditation, prayer or just a quiet cup of coffee, take the time to notice what thoughts and concerns are present. What emotions and physical sensations are coming up for you? Give this the attention it deserves—ignored inner



experiences wind up getting expressed in our behaviors and impacting our ability to communicate effectively.

Write Down Your 3 Most Important Objectives for the Day

- Turn your mind to your long-term and short-term personal and professional goals, then ask yourself, “What are the three most important things to accomplish today to keep me on the path to success?” Now write them down.
- Zoom in on action items that are specific to the day’s work ahead. What work tasks absolutely have to get done today? Prioritize these above all else and jot them down.
- For everything else, grant yourself permission to be flexible. Pressing matters may come up throughout the workday that demand your attention and send your to-do list sideways. As long as you have a plan for the day’s most

important tasks, it’s ok. This comes down to identifying what’s actually important and/or urgent. Our [Daily Priority Planner](#) is complete with an urgency and importance matrix. It’s a simple tool that can breathe new life into your time management routine.

Designate a Primary Workspace

- When it comes to getting to work, a quote from writer Frances Mayer comes to mind: “Pick one room and make it yours.” This may be a challenge if you’re limited on space and have kids home from school right now. Do your best to carve out one area of your home that’s dedicated to work—whether it’s a separate room or a makeshift home office.
- Set up your supplies, and if you can position yourself near some natural light, all the better. [Northwestern University](#) research suggests that natural light helps workers feel good, keep more active, and experience better sleep.



- Don't forget about your acoustic setting. While some work best with music, others find it distracting and prefer silence. Find what works best for you, whether that's a calm playlist, upbeat music, [ambient office sounds](#) or [background murmur](#) that makes you feel like you're working in a coffeeshop.

Stay Connected with Your Team

- Due to COVID-19, many employees now find themselves working solo—without their coworkers in the same space. Maintaining strong and consistent communication isn't just vital for doing the best work; it's also important for keeping your team feeling connected with one another. Curb feelings of loneliness by creating frequent opportunities for authentic communication in small groups and one on one.
- Loneliness and social isolation are real. In fact, [science has shown](#) that they may even change the circuitry of the brain and cause

high blood pressure and inflammation. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and check in with members of your team and clients. Communicating verbally allows for personal interaction you can't get through email.

Remember Email Best Practices

- With that said, email will likely remain your primary communication tool throughout the day. Remember best practices to make each one count.
- Make subject lines descriptive so they're more search-friendly. Be sure to include clear labels, such as "FYI" or "approval needed."
- Be direct on requests, next steps, and calls to action. Putting essential information in bullet points makes it easier for people to scan and digest these points quickly.
- CC others as little as possible—it serves as a massive distraction for nonessential people who are included.



Limit Distractions

- Speaking of distractions, be intentional about keeping them at bay. According to [UC Irvine](#) researchers, it takes an average of 23 minutes to get back on task after being interrupted.
- Turn off notifications for things like WhatsApp, Slack, Microsoft Teams and the like. The same goes for social media platforms. Staying focused can feel tough when you're continually hearing pings and dings throughout the workday. Instead, check your messages on these platforms at designated times throughout the day.

Feed Your Brain (Literally)

- Working from home requires you to create your own routines. Hitting your favorite lunchtime spot with coworkers isn't possible right now, but try to avoid the habit of eating meals in front of your computer.

In addition to giving your eyes a rest from the screen, breaking for meals also creates the opportunity to step away from work for a few minutes and give your mind some time to be idle—and this is a good thing. [Research](#) suggests that taking brief diversions from work can significantly improve your ability to focus.

- Cognitive performance is also best when you're eating right. What's more, hurried, distracted eating has been linked to [weight gain](#). Take a break, make healthy food choices, and eat in a calm environment.

Keep Active

- There's a reason Steve Jobs regularly held walking meetings. [Stanford](#) researchers found that walking gives creativity a real boost—and indoor walking is just as effective as doing it outdoors.
- If quarantine means you can't get out for a



quick jog or walk around the neighborhood, consider a yoga sequence, lifting weights, running in place, or some other form of exercise to get your blood pumping.

Check In on Your Mindset

- Be sure to stimulate your brain with creative thinking. Growth and expansion are basic needs, but we often need some intentional thinking and an outside stimulus to get going. Take breaks throughout the workday to read a great book, check an inspiring blog, or tune in to a podcast that gets you thinking.
- Part of maintaining a positive mindset is standing guard against negative influences on your brain, like naysayers and the media. The latter is especially important these days. Checking in and getting your daily news update is one thing—binging on the 24-hour news cycle is another.

Draw a Line Between Work Life and Home Life

- When working from home, it's easy for the line between your personal life and professional life to become blurred. Keeping it clear takes intention on your part. When you're working, refrain from doing personal things like checking your bank statements, chatting with your spouse, or doing a quick load of laundry. These things, when piled one atop another, have the power to eat up chunks of valuable work time.
- On the flip side, make your personal life count. Be present for meals and quality time with your family. When video chatting with friends and loved ones during these times of social distancing, give it your full attention and resist the urge to simultaneously attend to work tasks. In other words, go all in on whatever you're currently focusing on.



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