HOW TO LEARN ONLINE*

*Adapted from How to Learn Online course by edX.org

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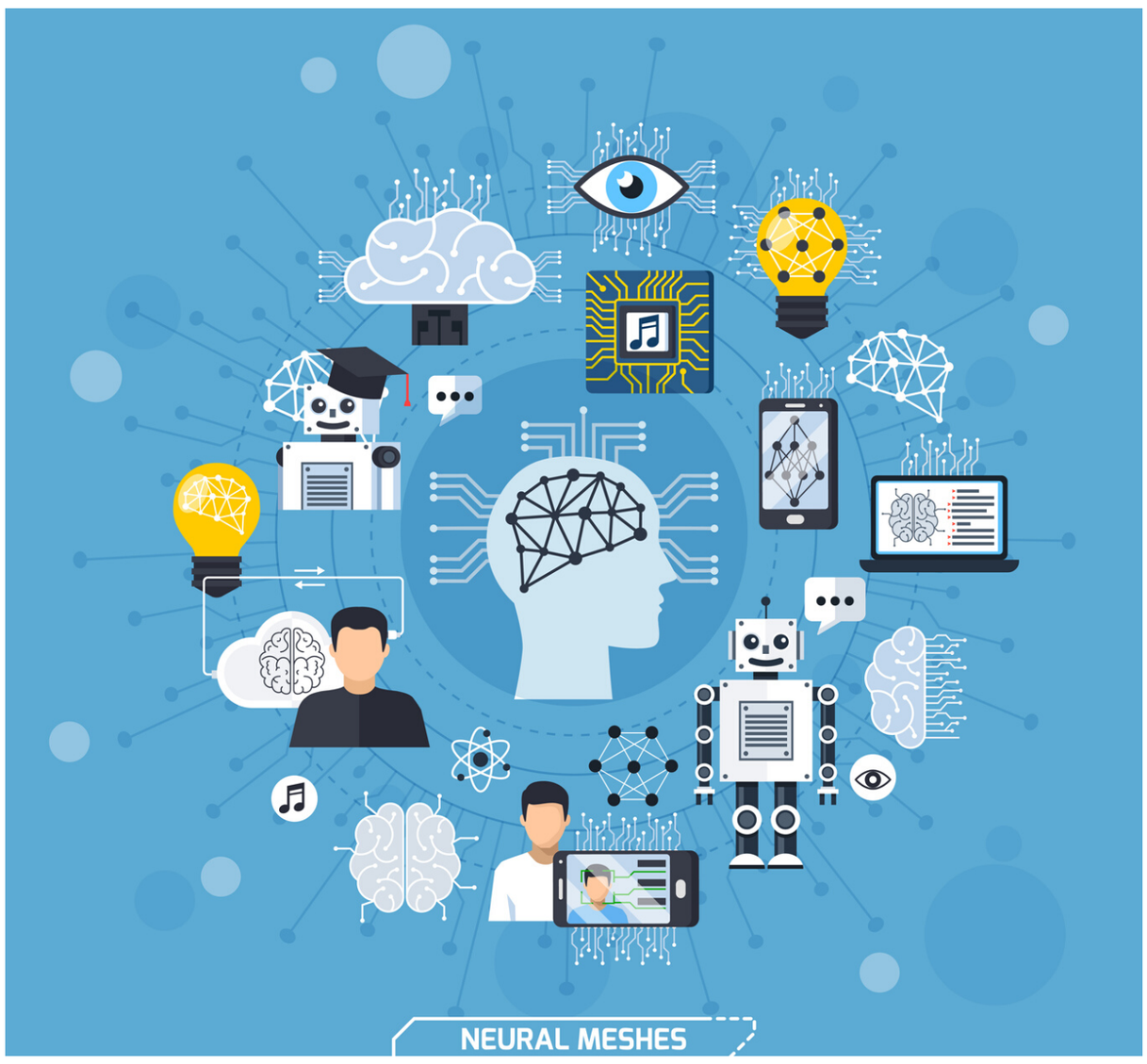
SELF-CARE FOR LEARNING



The Role of Memory in Learning

Learning and memory are two sides of the same coin. Learning refers to the process of acquiring new skills or knowledge. Memory is the expression of what you have learned.For example, consider the effort it takes for a child to learn how to tie their shoe. They need to watch the movement and listen to instruction from someone who knows how to tie a shoe. The child must also practice many times, going through each step, feeling the movement of the laces and coordinations of their fingers. This effort is learning. Eventually, the child can recall the steps without being shown or told, and finally tie their shoe quickly from memory.

Sleep and Memory

An active and awake brain is necessary for encoding new memories, such as learning new concepts and skills. But during sleep our brain is also actively consolidating our memories. According to the book, Learning and Memory: A Comprehensive Reference, memory consolidation is the process by which recently learned experiences are transformed into long-term memory. During sleep, our brain takes advantage of less awake-time activity to make the structural and chemical changes in the nervous system needed for long-term memory.

What is your sleep number?

While everyone's sleep number - the hours of sleep you need each night - can vary, according to the US National Sleep Foundation, adults between the ages of 18 and 64 should get between 7 and 9 hours of uninterrupted sleep.

- Keep regular bedtimes and wake up times, even on the weekends.
- Plan time to wind down before bedtime. Minimize exposure to blue light from devices like your phone or laptop.
- Your sleep environment should be cool, free from disturbing noises, and any light. You might want to use things like blackout curtains, an eye mask, ear plugs, and a white noise machine (or another appliance like a fan or humidifier to mask noise).
- Avoid caffeine, and heavy meals in the evening.
- Anything related to work and entertainment (computers, TVs, etc) should be removed from the bedroom

Take a Short Nap

If your energy and ability to concentrate starts to wane, why not take a nap? Much like sleep, brief naps not only aid with memory consolidation, but can also be restorative. Sleep research has demonstrated that cognitive function - critical for learning - is improved after a nap. Napping also helps with problem solving, short-term memory, and alertness.The ideal nap time is 10 to 20 minutes. Anything less than 10 minutes does not provide the restorative effects to your brain, and longer than 25 minutes can make you feel drowsy and cloud your ability to think clearly.

Healthy Routines

In order for you to be fully available to your family and friends , you need to put your well-being first. This means maintaining healthy habits like getting enough sleep, staying hydrated and eating well, getting regular physical exercise, and taking breaks. You might explore wellness apps that can help you create and manage healthy habits.It can be difficult to give ourselves the timeout we need as the pace and demands of the day push us forward. To help you take a moment for yourself, consider scheduling your breaks. Add breaks directly to your study schedule and honor that time as you would an appointment with a doctor or meeting with a friend.

Ideas for Quick Breaks

- Sunlight and fresh air. This can go hand-in-hand with getting some exercise or walking your dog.
- Meditation, yoga, and breathing exercises.
- Connecting with friends and family.What do you do for a quick break? In the discussion below, share your favorite ideas for taking a quick break with your peers.

What do you do for a quick break? Below, share your favorite ideas for taking a quick break

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PLANNING FOR LIFE LEARNING ONLINE

- Location,Location,Location
- Keeping on Task Pomodoro Techniques
- Gather Your Accounts

PLANNING FOR LEARNING ONLINE

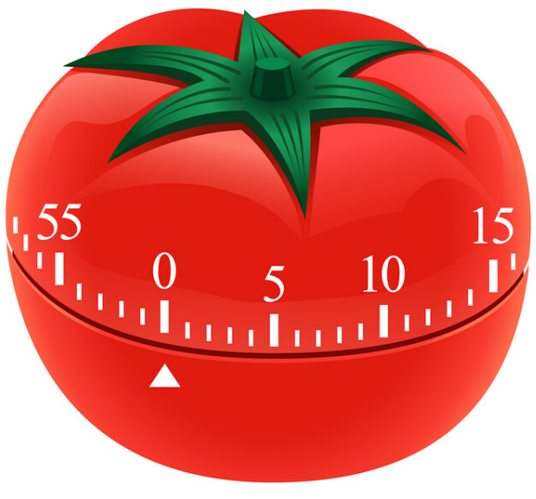
Location, Location, Location

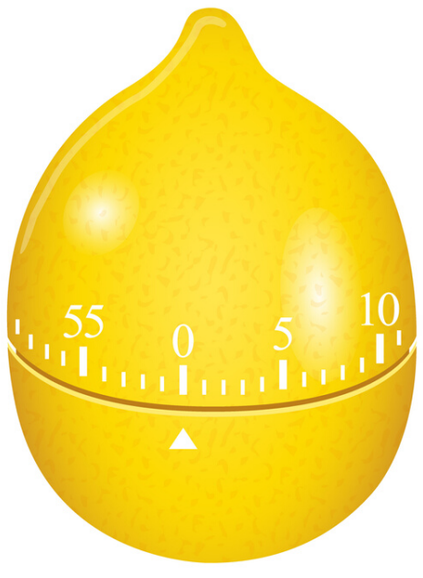
Try to find a location for learning that is as free from distractions as you can manage. In your home, identify a distinct space for learning that is not used for other activities, such as sleeping or watching television. As best you can, the space should be for study only. In small living spaces or where you may share space with family members or roommates, this can be difficult. If your choices are limited and you must set up your learning space in a common area, such as a kitchen, try to arrange a schedule with others so that you are able to use the space uninterrupted during your learning time.

When you are learning, keep water handy to stay hydrated, have healthy snacks nearby, and be sure to get up to stretch as often as you need. Work in an area that has good lighting. If you are working on a computer or tablet, give your eyes a break. Use the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and focus your eyes on something at least 20 feet away.

Minimize distractions in both your physical environment and your digital environment. Close web browser windows not relevant to your learning, turn off notifications from your phone such as email and social media, and keep the TV off.

- **Create your learning space.** Identify a distinct space for learning. Avoid areas used for sleeping or common, high-traffic areas.
- **Take regular breaks.** Stand up to stretch. Rest your eyes every 20 minutes.
- **Minimize distractions.** Close browser tabs and windows not relevant to your learning. Turn off all phone notifications.





Keeping on Task–Pomodoro Techniques

For keeping on task, try the pomodoro technique. This time management technique is especially useful if you find yourself easily distracted. The technique was created by Francesco Cirillo when he was a university student. Pomodoro sets aside time for focusing on a specific task and rewards you with small chunks of time to be used for short breaks. There are six steps in the original technique:

1-Decide on the task to be done.
2-Set a timer for 25 minutes.
3-Work on the task.
4-End work when the timer rings and put a checkmark on a piece of paper.
5-If you have fewer than four checkmarks, take a short break (3–5 minutes), then go to step 2.
6-After four pomodoros, take a longer break (15–30 minutes), reset your checkmark count to zero, then go to step 1.

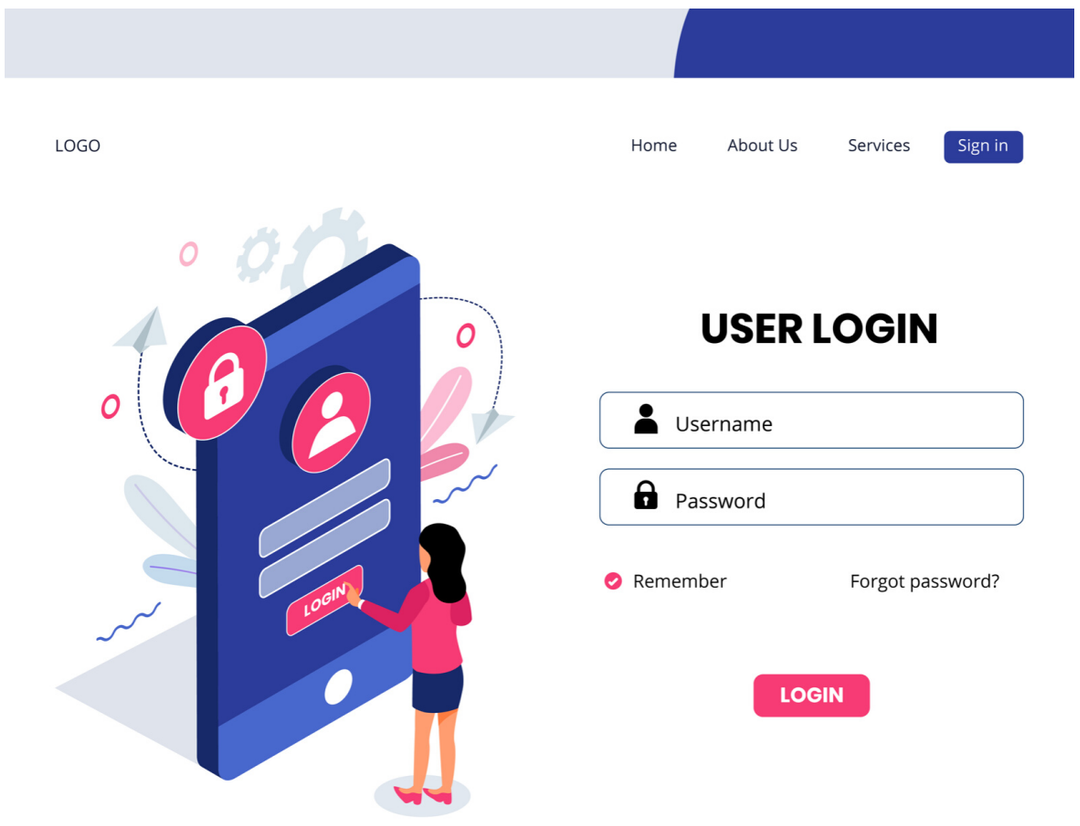
Gather Your Accounts

This information should be provided to you in the course syllabus or other materials provided by the instructor or institution where you are learning.

Accounts and Applications. You may need to download and install video conferencing software for live lectures, such as Zoom, Webex, BlueJeans or Shindig. Do this well before the first lecture so you have enough time to create an account (if necessary) and test the software. Course assignments may need to be uploaded to a cloud service, such as Google Drive, Dropbox or Microsoft OneDrive. Make sure you have the required account details (username and password) or access information in advance of an assignment deadline. Your university or employer may also use a learning management system (LMS) for delivering online learning, such as Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, or Sakai. Make sure you have the required account details (username and password) and that you are enrolled in the correct title and section of the course or courses.

Hardware. Collect and keep handy any power cords, USB cables and extra devices like a computer mouse, keyboard you may need. If possible, store these items in the same place you have designating for studying.

WiFi vs Wired. If possible, minimize your reliance on wifi by using an ethernet cable. It is also good practice to download course materials to work on assignments offline in case you lose your internet connection or have limited bandwidth. Many online courses and platforms work on mobile (i.e. phone, tablet), too, but others do not. Have a plan for Internet access.



My Account Information

- Gmail
- Classlink
- Edgenuity
- Infinite Campus
- Zoom

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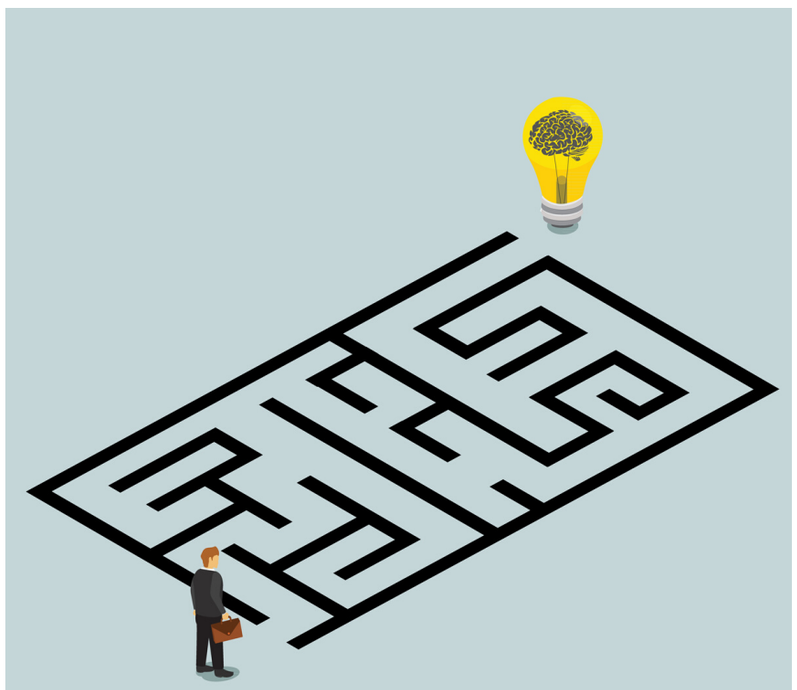
THE LEARNING LANDSCAPE

- MetacognitiveStrategies
- Be SMART
- Effort not ability
- Hardest thingfirst
- Little rewards
- Practice,Application, Reflection
- Effective Reading Comprehension
- Video Comprehension Techniques



Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition is an awareness and understanding of one's own thought process. Applied to learning, it means being aware of and intentional about how you think and learn, and involves planning, monitoring and evaluating your learning progress.

The process starts by assessing what you know and what you don't know, planning for how you are going to do to learn what you don't know, and then evaluating your learning progress and making necessary adjustments.

When you are learning a new topic or skill, ask yourself the following questions. You might consider writing down your answers.
What tasks do I need to complete or topics do I need to cover? (Try: Review the assignment, scan the chapter, read through the quiz before answering.)

- **What do I already know about this topic? (**Try: Write down familiar terms, review a previously completed assignment about the topic.)

- **What is new to me or, based on past experience, what will be difficult for me to learn?** (Try: Formulate questions to answer as you read, plan extra time to spend on difficult topics.)

- **What approach will I use to learn this material?** (Try: Choose a note-taking technique, make flash-cards, draw a mind map.)

- **How will I assess if I have learned the material?** (Try: Teach a friend, take a practice quiz.)

For more ideas about how to stay actively engaged in learning through metacognition strategies, read this blog post from Dr. David Handel "The Power of Metacognition in Everyday Life".

Staying motivated, especially through challenging tasks, is difficult for everyone. But part of building strong self-regulation skills is practicing motivational techniques. Below are several strategies to try to keep yourself motivated and moving forward.

Be SMART

We all know that making goals is a good thing, but we also know that reaching our goals is hard. A common reason why goals are often not achieved is because the goal itself was too vague or too big. A popular technique for making goals we can reach is called SMART, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Based.

- Be as specific as possible when making a goal.
- Have a way to measure your goal so you can track progress.
- Create a goal you can reasonably attain with the resources you have today.
- Keep the goal relevant to your overall values or aligned with the direction you wish to go.
- Set the time or date at which you hope to accomplish your goal.

Effort not ability

We often get in the way of our own progress and success by giving up because we believe we don't have the natural talent or inherent ability to learn a new skill or concept. Stanford University physiologist Dr. Carol Dweck calls this way of thinking a fixed mindset and it is contrary to the reality for most human beings. Success, for even the best athlete, musician or scientist, requires effort and practice. Believing that we can improve through trial and error, through effort and practice is called a growth mindset. When you feel like quitting, put in a few more minutes or a bit more effort and see if you can push past the desire to give up.

Hardest thing first-Little rewards.

When we are rested and have an alert, fresh mind, we are more likely to push through challenging tasks than when we are tired and spent. Given this, it is better to start with a hard task than to save it for last. You have more energy to devote to the thing that needs it most. And when you complete it, you will feel accomplished, perhaps even exhilarated. This good feeling can propel you to keep going on to the next, less difficult, task.

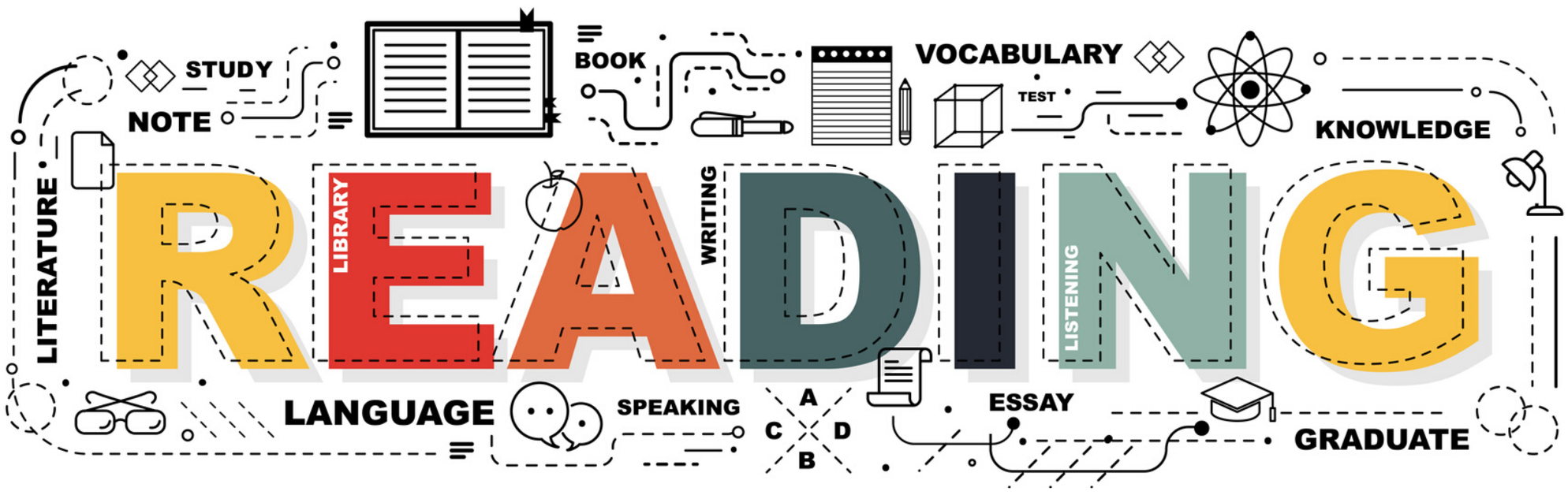
You may recall from the previous modules about self-care and time management, taking breaks is important to staying motivated and energized. Consider sweetening your breaks by treating yourself to something you really enjoy; a small reward for putting in a strong effort. For example, eat a piece of chocolate, turn up the music and sing along to your favorite song, or spend a few minutes on social media (but set a timer so you don't fall down the rabbit hole!).

Practice, Application, Reflection

To ensure that your newly learned knowledge and skills endure, it is important to repeatedly practice new skills, apply knowledge in different contexts, and reflect on what you have learned. A well-designed learning experience will provide you with opportunities to practice, apply, and reflect, but you can reinforce your learning outside of a class by connecting it to your everyday life and work.

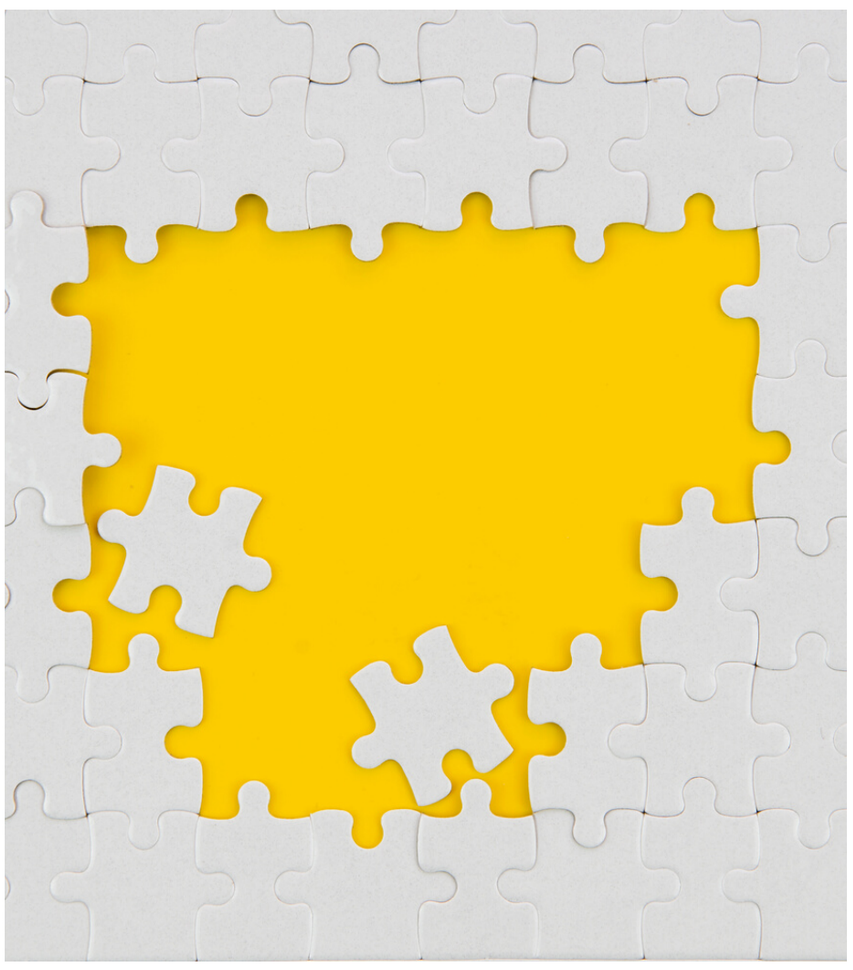
Here's a selection of valuable learning strategies to try:

- **Keep a learning journal.** Regularly reflect on our learning by writing down thoughts and questions that arise. Write daily or weekly summarizing of what you are learning, perhaps like you are writing a letter or text to a friend.
- **Retrieval practice.** Every time you have to remember something, you deepen your memory of that something, which makes it easier and quicker to recall later. This is especially important with new information or knowledge that is early in the encoding process. Create opportunities to recall newly learned concepts or skills. Flashcards are a popular method of retrieval practice.
- **Ask yourself why.** It is common in online learning environments that instructors allow you to try to answer questions multiple times. These practice problems or formative quizzes and knowledge checks are good at providing instant feedback if you are right or wrong. But a lucky guess won't be easily remembered. Even if you get the answer right on the first try, make sure you understand why your answer is correct.
- **Make connections.** Drawing connections between new material you're learning and your prior knowledge or experiences is an effective way to deepen learning. For examples, identify real life examples of concepts from your course; recall related concepts from prior learning materials; review your notes from previous sessions before you learn new material; or summarize main ideas and concepts using examples not provided in the learning materials, but that you imagine.



Effective Reading Comprehension

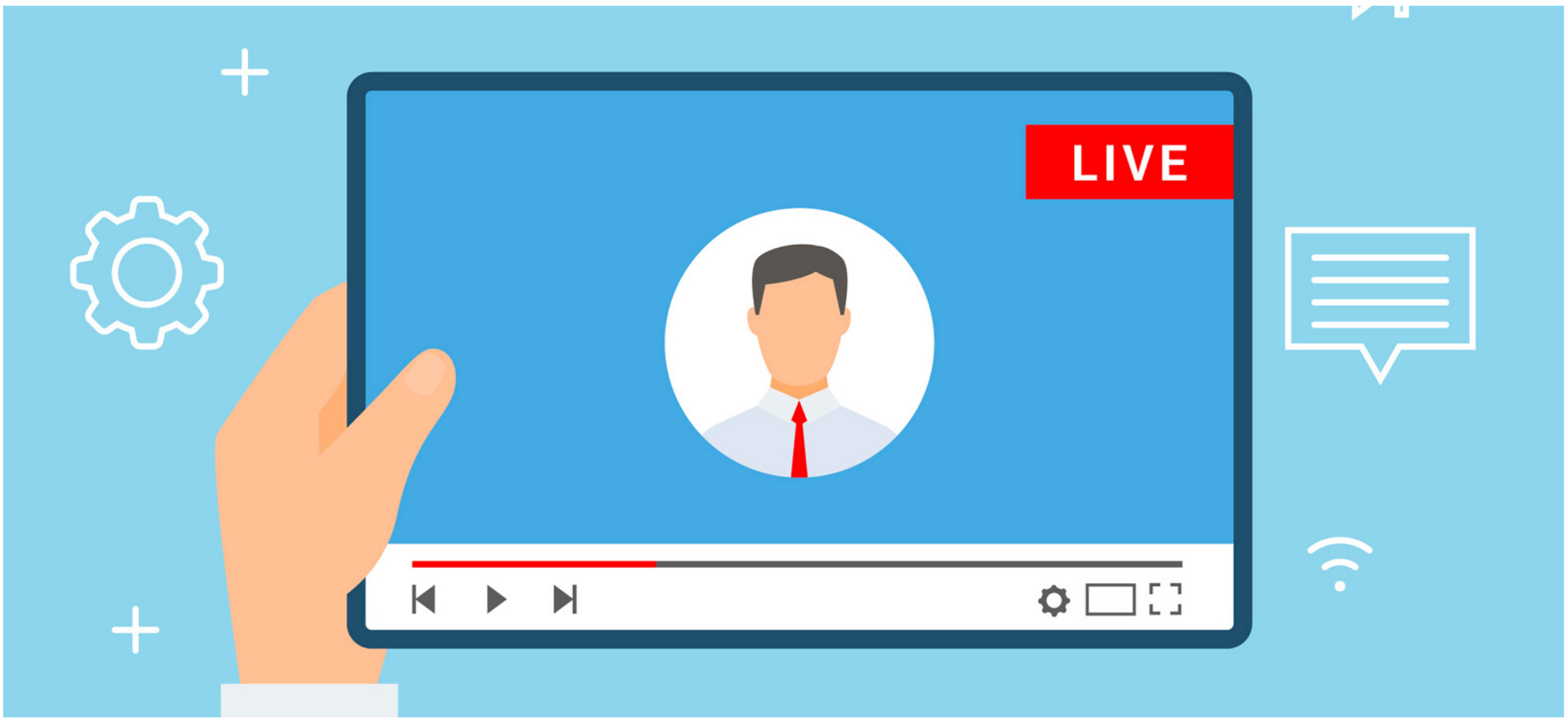
Have you ever read a paragraph or few pages and thought, "what did I just read." Your eyes passed over the words, but you don't remember a thing. Now you need to re-read the passage, which is 10 more minutes of studying that you don't have to spare.The act of reading does not guarantee successful comprehension or knowledge retention. But fear not! Even if you first learned how to read decades ago, you can still become a better, more efficient and effective reader.One enduring technique developed by Francis P. Robinson, an American education philosopher in his 1946 book Effective Study, is call SQ3R. This acronym stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall, and Review. It may require practice to use effectively, but it is well worth the effort. The steps for SQ3R are as follows:



1. First, **skim** or **survey** through your material to get a high level idea of the content.
2. List out several **questions** you have about the content.
3. Go back and **read** thoroughly, but this time try to answer the questions you listed.
4. Next, **recall** from your memory what you just learned. Pretend you are telling someone about what you have just read.
5. **Review** the material with a closer focus. Were you able to answer your questions? Did new questions arise? If so, repeat the process to try answering your new questions.

Another method for boosting comprehension and knowledge retention is to make annotations to the learning material while reading. Add notes, mark down thoughts and comments, list out questions, and make connections as you are reading. Using this technique will help you make sense of complicated materials, but will also organize your notes for reviewing later.

1. Read the material once through and mark unfamiliar concepts or words, and identify the key ideas. Pose questions.
2. Read the material again, making more detailed notes this time. Mark ideas you agree and disagree with.
3. Make connections to other things you have read, studied or experienced. Highlight key phrases and ideas and rewrite them in your own words. Add personal comments.



Video Comprehension Techniques

The reading comprehension and retention techniques we just reviewed can also apply to recorded video lectures, which you can rewatch, slow down or speed up as you take notes. Below are additional tips for getting the most out of online learning videos.

Recorded Video Lectures

For recorded video, pause and write a brief summary of what you have heard every few minutes. You can pause the video or review as many times as you want. If the instructor has provided PowerPoint slides along with the video, consider downloading or printing them out, and take notes directly on the slides.

It may be helpful to turn video captions on, to read along and help with your note taking. (And if you're listening to an audio only recording, follow along with the transcript.) Both captions and a transcript will help provide details that may be missed with just watching or listening.

Live Video Lectures

For live video lectures delivered in video conferencing software like Zoom, avoid taking notes. Pay attention to what you are hearing and participate in the live discussion to help keep your focus. Raise your virtual hand or ask a question in the chat. Ask if the video lecture is being recorded so you can review and take detailed notes later.

Take advantage of video conference break-out groups, if offered. These live, small group discussions will give you a chance to hear other perspectives or review challenging material as a group.

SOCIAL LEARNING

- Finding Learning Peers
- Communication
- Collaboration

Finding Learning Peers

Your experiences may vary with synchronous or asynchronous instruction in your courses, but in any context, online learning can be incredibly vibrant when learners connect with one another. Ways to connect will depend on the structure and technology used in the course, but a few common methods for connection include:

- introducing yourself in the discussion boards, like we asked you to do for this course
- providing constructive comments on peer and group assignments
- participating in live lectures and discussions via video conferencing applications (e.g. Zoom, Google Hangouts)

There are also many opportunities to connect beyond the learning management system (LMS) used for your course. See if your instructor has created a private group on social media sites like Facebook or LinkedIn. Perhaps there is a Twitter hashtag for continued conversation outside of the course. You might also consider finding a study buddy or a study group to help build connections and community in your course. This will not only alleviate isolation, but also promote collaborative learning. In the discussion forum below, share ideas for connecting to your learning peers and the tools, apps and technology you like to use for connecting online.

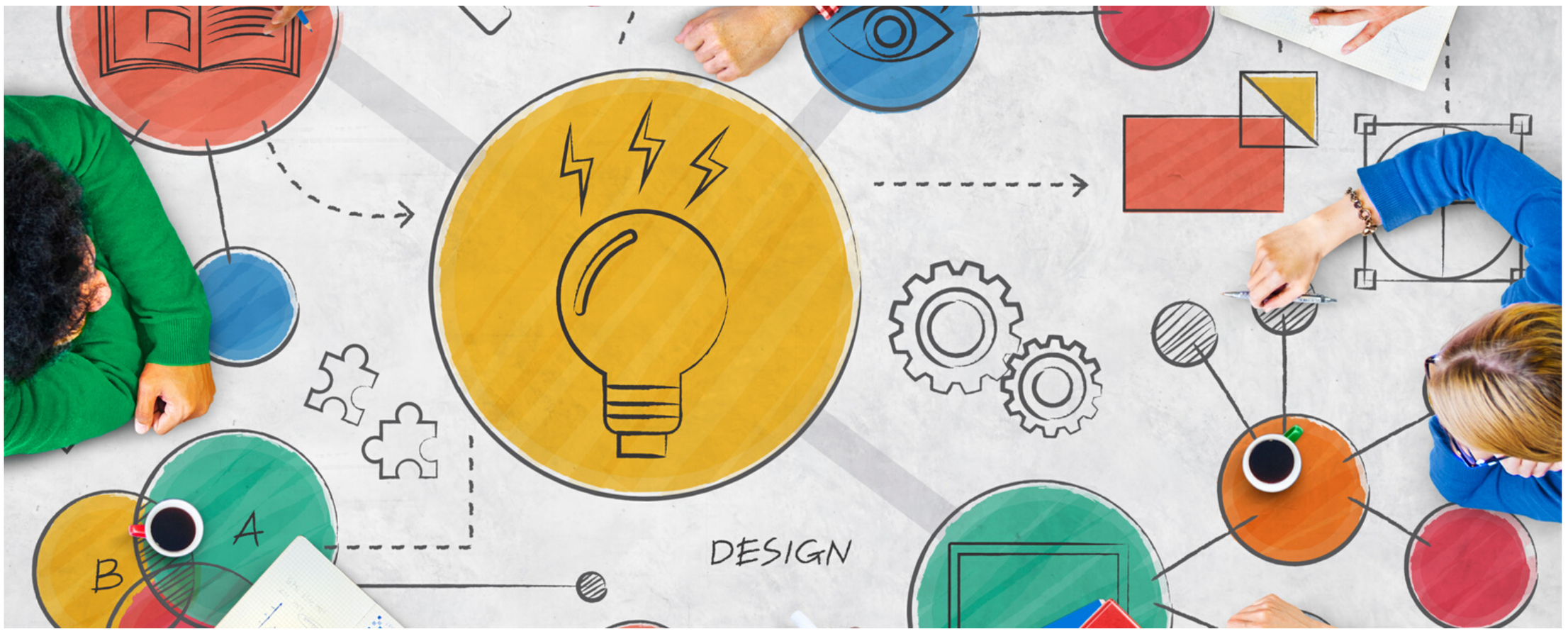
Communication

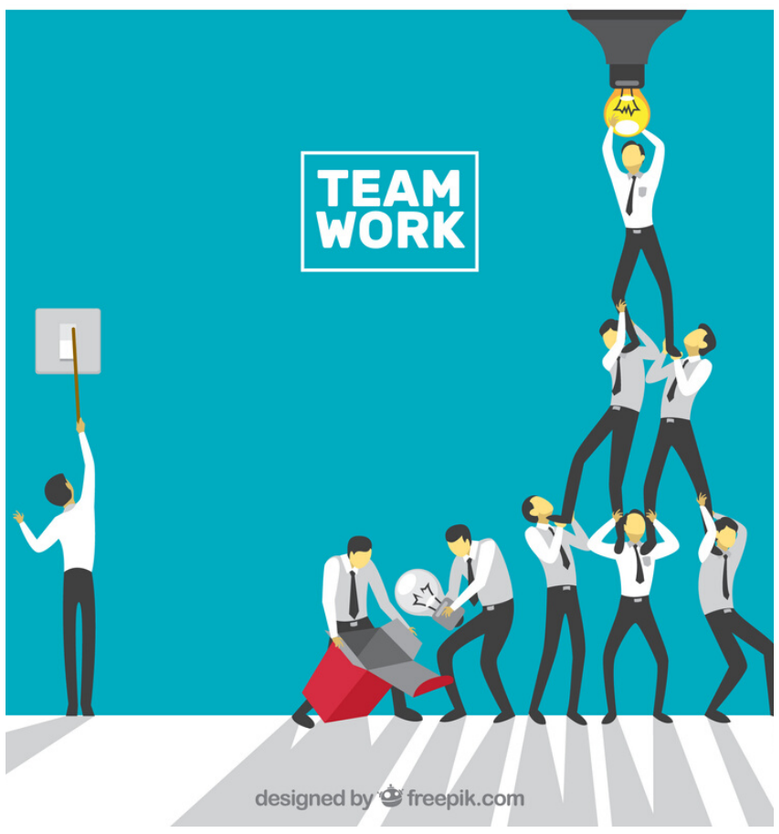
When learning online, particularly in an asynchronous course that does not include regular, live interaction with your instructor or peers, it is a good practice to over communicate. This may mean regular email checkins with your instructor, reading and responding to discussion forum posts, or text chatting with study buddies. No matter how you communicate, it is important to be kind and patient to yourself and others. Give and expect respect, especially during asynchronous communication like discussion boards and email since it can be easy to misconstrue someone's meaning. Like you, your peers are real people. Do your part to foster a respectful, supportive community.

Tips for Keeping in Touch:

- **Keep your instructor informed.** Self-advocate by asking your instructor for help when you need it. Let them know if you are ill, unable to log on, need an extension on an assignment, etc.
- **Reflect and chat with peers.** Share your learning goals, study tips, additional resources relevant to the course, something that makes you laugh, music you love, etc.
- **Assume good intent.** Everyone is trying their best. Emails and text-based discussions do not have the verbal and visual cues you're used to seeing to inform your reaction and interpretation.

SOCIAL LEARNING





Collaboration

Collaboration and group work in an online learning environment can be a very rewarding experience. Working together helps you improve communication skills and strengthen your knowledge of a topic by incorporating others' points of view. Learning to manage tasks as a group and collaborate efficiently and effectively are also important workplace skills.

Getting Started. If group work assignments are a component of your course, start by carefully reviewing the assignment details to make note of major tasks and requirements. Take time to get acquainted with your teammates, whether your team is determined by your instructor or you are tasked with finding a team. Discuss the project with your team and make sure everyone in the group understands the assignment fully.

Planning. As with anything, have a solid plan.

- List out the tasks required and the steps to achieve those tasks.
- Assign roles and tasks. Decide upon a leader to keep the group members on schedule and accountable to deadlines.
- Create a schedule. Work backwards from the project due date to determine realistic deadlines for milestones and associated tasks.
- Choose technology for collaboration. You and your team should choose technology and tools that allow easy communication and collaboration for all team members. Be sensitive to the limitations team members might have, including Internet access, video and audio capabilities, cloud services that may require a subscription fee, and privacy concerns. There are a range of free or paid options. Your instructor may have suggestions or requirements as to what you and your team should use.

Communicating. Practice active listening and supportive communication with your teammates. Offer constructive and actionable feedback, not just criticism and negative comments. Make suggestions to group members that may need help, but resist doing their tasks for them. Address issues within the group early, and communicate any issues that can't be resolved by the group to your instructor.