Supporting Students’ Self-Regulated and Self-Directed Learning in the Remote Environment

The goal of this document is to describe self-regulated learning, discuss why self-regulated learning is beneficial yet more challenging in remote learning environments, and outline strategies that instructors can implement to support student self-regulation and, in turn, their learning in remote courses.

What is Self-Regulated Learning?
- **Metacognitive processes:** thinking about, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of one’s learning strategies, self-evaluating progress and outcomes, adjusting strategies when needed
- **Motivational processes:** goal setting, initiating and sustaining goal-directed learning activities
- **Behavioural processes:** seeking help from instructor or peers, making a schedule to manage time, modifying one’s environment to avoid distractions, keeping a study log, regulating the amount of effort expended on various learning tasks

Self-regulated learning is related to increased academic performance among university students in both traditional (Nota, Soresi, & Zimmerman, 2004) and online courses (Broadbent & Poon, 2015).

Self-Regulated Learning in Remote Environments
In the transition to remote learning, students are learning how to learn again. Self-regulation strategies are of greater importance in online and remote learning environments due to their more autonomous nature (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004), but students may be unfamiliar with the self-regulation strategies required to be successful in this environment (Azevedo & Hadwin, 2005). The self-regulation strategies they used in face-to-face courses may not be as effective in the remote environment. Students may also experience barriers to their self-regulated learning in remote courses, including (see Kohan et al., 2017):
- being overwhelmed with more content and information in the LMS environment (e.g., videos, readings, links to external resources)
- experiencing a heavier workload due to more lower-stakes assignments
- experiencing more mind wandering and distraction due to learning on their devices and at home
- less clarity regarding expectations for assignments and confusion about the weighting of assessments (some students will exert the same effort on a 2% quiz as a 15% assignment because the online environment may make these assessments seem equally important)
- fewer informal and formal opportunities for interaction and support from instructors and peers
- ambiguity and change in the roles of instructors and students, including expectations for communication, guidance, presence, and independent learning

Students’ self-regulation strategies are not likely to improve from increased exposure to or experience with online courses (Barnard-Brak, Paton, & Lan, 2010). If we want students to meet our learning outcomes and succeed in our courses, research suggests that instructors should consider implementing strategies to support students’ self-regulated learning (Azevedo & Hadwin, 2005; Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004; Ferla et al., 2010; Wandler & Imbriale, 2017; Zheng, 2016).
Strategies to Support Students’ Self-Regulated Learning

The following course design and instructional strategies can support students’ learning and their skills as self-regulated learners in remote courses:

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<th>Strategy</th>
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| Provide resources around self-regulated learning | - Share UofG resources: [Library resources and workshops for students](https://library.uoguelph.ca) and [resources for remote learning during COVID-19](https://library.uoguelph.ca/coronavirus), OpenEd’s [Tips for Success](https://www.opened.co.uk/tips-for-success).
  - Share and model strategies that worked for you when learning this content (e.g., note taking strategies, study strategies, time management techniques).
  - Ask learners to assess their self-regulation skills (e.g., using the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory or the Self-Regulated Online Learning Questionnaire).
  - Share resources on learning and metacognition, such as these [videos on How to Study](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkxL2z9z7W8) and this [Learning Scientists post on How to Improve your Metacognition](https://www.learning-scientists.org/2020/09/how-to-improve-your-metacognition/). |
| Have a well-defined course organization and navigation | - Help students prioritize information available on your course site by clearly identifying what is required and what is optional (videos, readings, links).
  - Use timed or conditional release of content in CourseLink to avoid overwhelming students with content.
  - Provide a consistent and predictable course structure and routine (see the [Planning the Structure of your Remote Course guide](https://www.crdi.uoguelph.ca/remote-course-design-and-development/structure) on our [CRDI website](https://www.crdi.uoguelph.ca/)), especially if you have many smaller, low-stakes activities (discussion posts, reflections, quizzes).
| Prompt students to manage their time and effort | - Provide weekly checklists or announcements with readings, tasks, office hours, synchronous activities, asynchronous activities, assignments, and deadlines.
  - Provide estimates of how long activities will take to complete and remind students of their weighting to help students allocate their time and effort.
  - Encourage learners to make a study/learning plan (examples here and here) to help with organization and time management, including setting their own goals.
  - Encourage learners to minimize distractions by blocking distracting websites. |
| Prompt students to monitor and reflect on their learning | - Provide short-term goals to help students monitor their learning (“By the end of this week, you should be able to answer these questions, define these concepts, etc.”).
  - Have students reflect on the effectiveness of their learning/studying strategies, their performance, and how to adjust their strategies in the future (e.g., using exam wrappers, assignment wrappers).
  - Provide constructive feedback that prompts reflective and actionable revision.
  - Ask students to self-evaluate their work using the grading rubric/checklist before submitting assignments.
  - Seek feedback from students about how the course is going, how much time they are spending on content and assessments, and how they are helping and hindering their own learning. |
| Scaffold assessments and clarify expectations | - Provide clear, easy-to-find instructions for assignments (see the Assessment Outline in the [Adapting your Assessments guide](https://www.crdi.uoguelph.ca/remote-course-design-and-development/assessments) on our [CRDI website](https://www.crdi.uoguelph.ca/)).
  - Break down assignments into smaller parts to help students’ time management.
  - Provide clear grading criteria.
  - Provide samples/models of desired performance. |
| Encourage help seeking | - Hold virtual office hours, check-in meetings with student groups.
  - Reach out to students who have been quiet or have not submitted assessments.
  - Foster peer assistance through opportunities for students to connect synchronously (e.g., breakout rooms, permanent groups) and asynchronously (e.g., students share what self-regulation strategies are working for them in a discussion forum or poll). |
For more strategies, see:
- Teaching Metacognitive Skills, University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence
- Metacognition, Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching
- Tips for Fostering Students’ Self-Regulated Learning in Asynchronous Online Learning Environments, Rachel Ebner (2020), Faculty Focus
- Promoting College Student Self-Regulation in Online Learning Environments, Wandler & Imbriale (2017), Online Learning Journal
- Promoting Student Metacognition, Tanner (2017), CBE-Life Sciences Education

References


