

7 Essential Tips for Working From Home During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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In the midst of the new coronavirus pandemic, many companies are implementing voluntary or mandatory work-from-home policies. That means lots of us are dealing with an unusual challenge: working from home for the first time, full-time.

Even if you've done it before, working from home because of coronavirus might feel like a whole new world: It's probably sudden. It might be for an extended period of time rather than a day here and there (and you're not at all sure how long it'll last). Your

whole company is involved. And you can't necessarily socialize in person outside of work.

These tips will help you make sure that you're successful, both at getting your work done and at maintaining your mental well-being:

1. Get Dressed

It might seem like a simple tip, but it's a crucial one. Before coming to work for The Muse, I spent about eight months working from home when my full-time office job became a remote position with little warning. It was tempting to stay in my pajamas all day, but any day I gave into temptation was much slower to start and less productive overall.

You don't need to dress as formally as you might for work, but the simple act of changing clothes serves as a signal that it's time to wake up and get things done. "Don't underestimate the power of putting on clothes suitable for public viewing. It makes you feel human [and] confident and helps draw the line between being at work and being at home," says [Heather Yurovsky](#), Muse career coach and the founder of [Shatter & Shine](#). "Feeling human" might seem like an odd thing to have to actively think of, but it's especially important at a time like this, when the breakdown of your everyday routines might make you feel cut off from your "normal" life and the "real" world.

Getting dressed also applies to other appearance-based tasks: Take a shower, brush your hair, even put on makeup if that's what you'd usually do. You don't need to go as all out as you would for the office if you don't want to, but waking up and taking care of your appearance can go a long way toward helping you feel like you're taking care of yourself.

Besides, just because you're working from home doesn't mean that no one from work will see you. It's 2020 and we're all about to have a *lot* of video meetings.

2. Designate a Workspace or Home Office

One of the big challenges when it comes to working remotely is [keeping your work and home lives separate](#). “For some people it becomes very blurry,” says Muse career coach [Lynn Berger](#), who [specializes](#) in helping people navigate career transitions. If you never fully disconnect from work, your work productivity will suffer and your home life can take a hit as well.

If you’re used to going into an office each day, the separation between work and home is physical, and you want to try to recreate that as much as possible with a designated physical workspace at home. You may scoff at the idea of a separate room for a home office if, like me, you live in a small apartment. I’m writing this in the room that is my office, kitchen, living room, and dining room all in one. Your workspace doesn’t have to be its own room—in my apartment, it’s a corner—but it should feel as separate from the rest of your home as possible.

Try to make your workspace comfortable with a chair you can sit in for eight hours a day and a few decorations. Find an area with good natural lighting if at all possible. Even if you don’t usually spend a lot of time outdoors, losing out on the time you spend outdoors during your commute can start to weigh on you quickly, and it will only happen faster if you don’t have natural light coming in.

Entering your workspace will help you turn “on” at the beginning of the day and get down to work. On the flipside, leaving your workspace will also help you turn “off” at the end of the day and fully disengage. That’s why it’s also important not to spread yourself across your home—while it might seem great to be able to move from desk to couch to bed, if you let your laptop creep into your downtime space, it makes it harder to keep your work separate from your home life.

If you’re working at a table you need to use outside of work or a room you spend a lot of time in, pack up your work each evening to make the end of your day decisive. When I

worked remotely in my last job, I was working on my personal computer, so I'd make sure to close all the tabs and programs related to my job as soon as I was done for the day. The key here is to do whatever you need to do to "leave" your workspace.

3. Keep Clearly Defined Working Hours

Just as you designate and separate your physical workspace, you should be clear about when you're working and when you're not. You'll get your best work done and be most ready to transition back to the office if you stick with your regular hours. Plus, if your role is collaborative, being on the same schedule as your coworkers makes everything much easier.

"The biggest difference between working from home and working in the office is that you are in charge of your environment and have to treat yourself like an employee," Yurovsky says. This means holding yourself accountable, but also recognizing when enough is enough, just as a good manager might. "If you feel yourself extending your work hours because you aren't doing anything in the evening...tell yourself it's time to put work away, recharge, and start tomorrow with a fresh mind. The work will be there in the morning."

If you live with other people, this separation is even more critical. Communicate with the people you live with to establish boundaries so you can cut down on distractions during the workday—and then disconnect and give the people you care about your full attention. Having a separate time and space to work will allow you to be more present in your home life.

4. Build Transitions Into (and Out of) Work

Your morning commute not only gets you to work—from one physical location to another—but it also gives your brain time to *prepare* for work. Just because you're not

traveling doesn't mean you shouldn't carve out equivalent routines to help you ease into your workday.

Maybe you usually read or listen to music on your commute. You can do that at home. Or maybe you can spend some time with a pet or loved one. You can even add in a workout (preferably at home because of the new coronavirus, but see what is being recommended where you live) or spend some time on a hobby (again, make sure it's appropriate given the health recommendations where you are).

At the other end of the day, the evening commute does the reverse. "Commuters often take for granted the time they have in the car or on the train to wind down from a hectic workday and mentally prepare themselves for their evening routine," Yurovsky says. Generally, you're not going from getting a huge presentation done right to making dinner or doing chores. If you try to jump directly, "your brain doesn't have time to hit the reset button, which can make you less present as you transition back into your personal life."

Give yourself something that will signal the end of work and serve as a buffer. When I worked from home, I made it a habit to take my dog for a long walk as soon as I was done for the day. It helped me decompress with something physical and fun, and the habit was self-enforcing since my dog would lie in front of the door when it was time to go or would come looking for me if I was taking too long.

5. Don't Get Too Sucked in by the News—or Anything Else

Distraction is one of the big challenges facing people who work from home—especially people who aren't used to it. "Your home is right in front of you," Berger says. That means that whatever you're usually thinking about getting home to after work is now with you. It's human to get distracted. But you need to be wary of how *much* you let yourself get distracted.

You probably already take a few breaks throughout the day at the office, and that's fine to do at home, too. Using that time to throw in a load of laundry is OK, but try not to look at your new work arrangement as an opportunity to finally clean out that closet or anything else that takes a lot of sustained focus.

Right now, one of the biggest distractions is the news. And if you're working remotely because of the new coronavirus, checking in on COVID-19 updates is going to be at the front of your mind. It's good to stay informed, of course, but it's also easy to scroll yourself into an anxious mess.

I suggest setting timers for any breaks you take. You don't want to get too immersed and forget that you're at work altogether. If you're someone who's susceptible to getting distracted every time you get a news alert, turn your notifications off during the workday, too. The news will still be there after 5 PM.

6. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

If you don't usually work from home, chances are there will be some bumps in the road if you have to suddenly go fully remote. The key to steering through these bumps is communication—especially with your manager and direct reports. Either before you make the switch or as soon as you know it's happening, come up with a plan that lays out expectations for how often you should check in and how you'll convey any changes or new assignments to one another. Do the same with anyone you usually work collaboratively with throughout the day.

This plan is likely to change as you go. And that's OK. This is a new situation for everyone. So make sure to circle back and change the plan if problems come up. You'll also encounter unique challenges as you try to do your job remotely, which can vary greatly depending on the type of work you do. Don't hesitate to reach out to the same

people you would usually turn to for help—even if you’re not in the same building as them.

And you don’t have to stick with only text-based communication. “Do not default to email if you would have spoken to a coworker face-to-face while at the office,” Yurovsky says. You might find it’s best to check in with your boss and coworkers over the phone or through video chat. This will cut down on miscommunication and break up some of the social isolation that can come from working from home.

Looking for more tech tips that will make remote work easier? Check out [this list](#).

7. Don’t Forget to Socialize

When the whole office suddenly starts working from home, you’re cutting off a lot of the casual social interactions you’re used to having throughout the day that help you feel less lonely and break up the monotony of work. “People forget they need to be around others because it’s the small talk and random fire alarms that keep your days feeling unique and prevent that hamster-wheel feeling. When you work from home, you don’t have that,” Yurovsky says.

Combat this by talking with your coworkers throughout the day through Slack, calls, text, Zoom, or however your company communicates. If you usually ask your coworkers about their weekends, keep that up. If you’d usually comment to them about a specific topic, reach out. These little interactions go a long way.

Berger also suggests setting aside time to talk to or catch up one-on-one with a coworker. When she’s working remotely she often “gets lunch” with colleagues and friends by setting a time to chat while they eat. (And you should definitely still take a lunch and step away from your work. These breaks are vital even if you’re not leaving your home.)

You can also schedule morning video call kickoffs with your whole team so you make space for that first-getting-into-work small talk, or carve out time for other check-ins throughout the day.

While you're at it, don't just check in with coworkers about this project or that TV show you both like—really *check in*, Berger suggests. Lots of us are feeling anxious and uncertain right now, and suddenly being isolated at home can amplify these feelings. Don't hesitate to reach out to a coworker just to ask how they're doing.

All this doesn't just apply to the workday and people you work with. You may not be able to meet up with friends for dinner after work, but you can organize a group of people to discuss a book or TV show or just to catch up over Google Hangouts. You don't even need to plan that much: My best friend and I live in different parts of the country but stream TV shows simultaneously so we can text about them in real time. And Facetime your mom, will you? When the world is freaking out, it's more important than ever that we reach out, connect, and take care of one another.

<https://www.themuse.com/advice/coronavirus-work-from-home-tips>