

Learning at home: The importance of self-regulation and how to promote it



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Remote Learning

One of the consequences of school closures is that students will suddenly have a lot more responsibility for their learning. They will need to maintain concentration and manage and organise their work without the usual support from their teacher. Helping students to develop self-regulation is an important part of a school's distance learning approach. Here are some key considerations.

1. Consolidate your own understanding of self-regulation

This is an important first step in applying the concept in practice. While there are several competing definitions in the academic literature, [self-regulation](#) can be broadly understood in terms of three key components: forethought, performance and reflection.

- **Forethought** involves defining tasks, setting goals and making plans. This will look different for students of different ages and year levels, but focusing on essential learning and ensuring learning intentions are simple and clear will be important during the period of distance learning. It will also involve setting up a work space and preparing to manage their own time.
- **Performance** involves choosing effective learning strategies, monitoring progress and staying motivated. Students need to know how to determine which strategies are effective for a particular learning task, how to tell if their work is accurate and on target, and if they are working at an appropriate pace. They will also need to hold a growth mindset about their ability to complete their work to stay motivated without the usual levels of feedback from teachers and peers.
- **Reflection** involves evaluating learning and progress. This will require students to be able to determine whether or not they have fulfilled the learning intentions of the activity, and to evaluate how well their study habits and learning strategies help them to complete their work to a high standard.

2. Design a learning programme that supports student self-regulation

It is possible that some students may struggle to use their new independence productively at first. Start by lessening the demands on students' self-regulation to make it easy for them to concentrate on learning:

- Ensure that **explicit instructions, guided tasks and progress checks** are built into learning tasks
- Consider using **shorter, sharper activities**, especially in the earlier stages of the school closure. Think about how to organise teaching into tightly focused bursts, with regular breaks and opportunities for play and socialising. It will be easier for students to maintain concentration over shorter periods of work, with plenty of breaks.
- Think carefully about the **amount of time** you expect students to spend working independently on formal schoolwork. This will vary with age as children develop self-regulation as they get older.
- Create **clear and consistent routines** for a day's programme of learning. It will not be possible to replicate the typical school day, so think about how you can break down routines into small steps that are easy to understand, especially for younger children.

3. Explicitly teach students the components of self-regulation

Developing self-regulation is a complex and demanding process that will benefit from explicit support from a teacher. As students become more capable you can gradually withdraw this support and give them greater responsibility. Addressing the following key strategies with your students will help them to develop a broad range of self-regulatory habits and behaviours:

- **Creating a suitable learning environment.** Encourage your students to create a calm and organised working environment at home, bearing in mind that not all students will have access to a quiet space or even a desk to work at.
- **Time management.** Provide a template for a study routine and prompt students to adapt it to suit their own needs by thinking about things like the best time to tackle their most challenging tasks and when to take a break.
- **Setting specific and realistic goals.** Support students to think about what kinds of goals will be realistic while they are working at home, as they will differ from the kinds of goals they set in class.
- **Developing powerful learning strategies.** Support students to use effective learning strategies that are appropriate to the content and learning intentions of the task.
- **Monitoring performance.** Build check points or monitoring questions into the learning task so that students can ensure that they understand what the task requires them to do and whether or not they are on the right track. Consider whether they might do this by checking in online or by phone with a classmate.
- **Knowing when to seek additional support or information.** When setting an activity, provide some suggestions for resources that students can use to get additional information, and ask them for their thoughts on what they might need. Make sure that your students know the best way to get in touch with you or a classmate for help.
- **Self-evaluation.** Prompt students to consider their strengths and areas for improvement. Ask: 'what worked well for you?' and 'what would you do differently next time?'

For more on self-regulation, see The Education Hub's [series of guides](#).

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