

#DAY5LOCKDOWNSA

HOW TO FOCUS ON YOUR STUDIES DURING THE LOCKDOWN:

Guidelines for students

by

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On 15 March President Ramaphosa announced that actions will be taken at a national level to address the corona virus pandemic in accordance with the Disaster Management Act. One day later, on 16 March universities in South Africa were closed. Students returned home to take an earlier and extended period of recess. Since then, a national state of disaster was promulgated by the president and a range of regulations followed as part of the 21 days national lockdown.

While these drastic measures caught many people by surprise, it was clear that government was taking the pandemic very seriously and decided not to risk human lives. Many students are concerned about how this will affect their studies. Moreover, like the rest of the population students also experience increased levels of uncertainty, fear, anxiety and panic. University management is doing everything possible to ensure that the needs of students are addressed, without compromising academic standards in teaching and assessment.

Admittedly, it will be difficult for students to continue with their studies in these challenging times. However, as university students who are serious about your studies, you are still responsible for your success, and the following guidelines are therefore provided to assist you in meeting this goal:

- Continue to practice hygiene and healthy behaviour like washing your hands and using sanitizers where possible. Also clean your desk, laptop and phone every day.
- Keep an eye on any notices from the university about matters and arrangements affecting you. There will be different communications and things will change continuously as the impact of the pandemic will have unforeseen consequences and new developments.
- If you don't feel well, ensure that you get the necessary medical advice or treatment.
- While many people are indeed anxious about the spread of the virus, stay calm and focussed on your studies and life. Now is the time to practice your emotional intelligence, i.e. having a high level of self-awareness and maintaining good relationships with other people.
- Visualise the end of the year and the end of your degree programme. See yourself receiving your degree, then focus on what you need to do to get there.
- Schedule specific times during the day and/or evening for you to study. Be disciplined and stick to your study programme.
- Work on your assignments, do as much reading and writing as possible. Structure your thinking and organise the way in which you do your studying and assignments. Spend sufficient time to proofread your work and make the necessary changes and improvements.
- Reflect on your assignment by asking yourself what you have learned and how you have grown in terms of your learning and personal development. The new insights derived from your studies are making you a better student and future practitioner.

- Manage disruptions and distractions. Now that you are back home, family members may expect too much of your time, therefore set boundaries and remind them of your scheduled study times so that they do not interfere with your programme.
- Share with others what you have studied. This is a good time for your family members to really get to understand what your studies are all about. They can learn from you.
- Show interest in your parents and other family members, this is also a time for you to get to understand them better. We are all unique and this is what makes life so interesting and enriching. Also ensure that they are aware about the corona virus and how to prevent the spread thereof.
- Take regular breaks, you need to rest in between to refocus and re-energise yourself. Just be careful that the breaks are not too long and that you return to your desk as soon as possible.
- Reward yourself for milestones, such as a completed chapter studied or part of an assignment, but taking breaks or enjoying your favourite snack or doing anything else you enjoy at home. Have fun every day. It is important that you also balance humour and fun with the seriousness of the situation.
- Make time for your family and other people staying with you, but also connect with your friends and family that you can now not be in contact with physically. Show them that you care.
- Reach out to one or more of your study friends, such as a class mate or friend and ensure that they provide the necessary support to you, and reciprocate accordingly.
- Try to master your studies with dedication, commitment and perseverance. If you really reach a point where you are stuck, reach out to your lecturer who will be available to guide and support you.
- Don't spend too much time watching the news on television or social media. Update yourself twice a day about what is happening nationally and globally. Keep a balanced perspective. The bad news may distract you. Don't only look at the negative statistics about the number of infections and people who have died. Also look for the recoveries and the number of people tested. The reality is that the majority of people test negative, and there are many more recoveries than deaths.
- Utilise the opportunities of scanning and testing as announced by the President on 30 March.
- Eat healthy food and if possible, get some exercise, provided that you stay at home most of the time. If you go to a shop to buy food, walk as fast as possible to get some good exercise.
- Ensure that you get enough sleep so that you are ready for the next day of studying.
- Stay positive about your studies and your life in general, and do not allow negativity to consume your mind. Use a personal journal or notes on your smartphone and every day write down three things that you are thankful for. Once a week, read the whole list again and celebrate your life. If you engage on social media, it is natural to express fears and anxiety, but see if you can make sure that most of your comments, likes, shares and retweets are positive. There are many good things happening during this crisis. There are people helping others and our health workers and other essential workers are risking their lives for us.
- Realise that the lockdown actually presents you with more time to study. You will not waste time in the traffic or waiting for public transport or lifts to the university.
- Work on your skills in technology, this is the time to really become tech savvy. Imagine returning to university and joining the workplace as a top tech savvy individual. Leverage the opportunity of online learning. Add this achievement to your CV.
- There will be times when you will get stuck, doubt yourself or lack confidence. That is normal. Remind yourself of your past successes and academic achievements at school. Always remember that you were admitted to university because of the good marks you have obtained in the past. Make progress and move on. Every new day is a new opportunity to improve your

knowledge and skills. Make a list of all the competencies you have developed during the first quarter and over the last month.

- After each day, reflect on your day and acknowledge your successes during the day (including the support you provided to your family and friends). Write these positives down.

This is a difficult time for students and indeed all of us. We face increased levels of stress, uncertainty and anxiety. This is unprecedented times for all of us. None of us like to be locked down. For the first time in the history of most universities, graduations have been cancelled, and classes have been postponed and teaching at most universities are now transitioning to online modes of learning. Most of us, including your lecturers are not used to this mode of learning. See the bigger picture: For the first time in history, almost the whole world is locked down, and the reason for this is that we are putting the lives of people first, including your life. People are now at the centre of humanity, and while it will be difficult to recover from a business and economic perspective, it is necessary to prevent health systems and societies from collapsing. But we are all in this together. As President Ramaphosa said: “We shall overcome.”

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