

# An expert in forming habits reveals how to work from home

27 March 2020, by Wendy Wood



Carrying office habits home can help promote productivity while working away from the regular workplace. Credit: iStock

Many of us aren't used to working at home, especially under the current circumstances. It can feel like you are your own worst enemy, trying to control all of the interruptions and distractions.

Take heart. You already have the habits you need to work from [home](#) with minimal [distraction](#). Once you realize how to transfer them from your office to your home, you will find it doesn't involve struggling with temptations and distractions. Instead, simply transport your work office habits to your new home workplace.

But to do this, you need a home workplace.

You have probably heard this advice already, but there's good science behind the recommendation. The more your home context is like your office, the more your surroundings will activate your regular work activities. Students who transferred to a new university were able to keep up their old habits to the extent that the contexts were similar. Different contexts disrupted old habits.

So take some time to prepare your home office.

Find an undisturbed area to set up your computer, headphones, phone or whatever you typically use in the office. Keep to the same office hours as usual, starting work when you would usually get to the office. Schedule lunch and breaks just like you would if you were there.

You may also want to dress for work. It feels more like a real workday when you prepare as usual.

If your work is done mostly on the computer, consider customizing the toolbar on your internet browser so that you have a virtual work office that you shut at the end of your day. That way, you won't have distractions pop up from social media.

You won't be able to completely replicate your office at home. In the first couple of days, you will probably have to exert some [self-control](#) and inhibit those distractions. But the more you repeat your work habits at home, the more automatic it will become.

Students who practiced studying in the same way each day reported increasingly greater automaticity—they didn't have to make decisions about what to do, they just started work at their usual time. And more importantly, as [study habits](#) strengthened, they experienced less desire to do something else. Distractions faded, annoyances subsided, and they found it easier to concentrate on studying.

This is the real payoff to [habit](#) formation. Once you automate an action, motivational conflicts wane and you stop thinking about all of the other things you might do. In your new home office, you won't notice the many diversions outside of work. Your habits keep you focused and protect you from disturbances.

To make this work, you will want to keep up your

health habits, too. If your gym is not available, take a walk (in an unpopulated area, of course). You will maintain your fitness if you aim for 15,000 steps per day. To maximize fitness, pick up the pace or try interval training.

Finally, it's worth considering that some of the best ideas have been incubated during forced periods of work at home. In 1665, the University of Cambridge had to temporarily close due to the bubonic plague. Isaac Newton, then a student, returned to his family's farm, which is when he reportedly observed an apple falling from a tree, inspiring his work on gravity. By 1666, Newton had developed his theory about the laws of motion.

Provided by University of Southern California

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