

Guide to managing time online

Toolkit for Universities

Creating safer online environments



This guide provides advice on how to manage your time online — to balance work, research, study and social life.

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It is unsurprising that learning and collaborating online is increasingly common. Already, our work and social lives are conducted online — including time streaming content, on social media services and online gaming. Being online supports our social connections, work and study and it is very easy to find ourselves spending most of the day in front of a screen. To avoid the negative impacts of too much time online it's important that we keep a balance between time online, and off.

How much is too much?

The amount of time spent online that could be considered 'too much' will vary from person to person. When assessing your screen time, think through both the length of time online, as well as how it affects your friendships, family, health, work or study. Consider also the quality of any content or activities you engage with online — it's not all the same.

If the amount of time you spend online is negatively impacting your wellbeing, relationships or responsibilities, it is likely that you need to cut back.

Symptoms of spending too much time online

The following signs may indicate that you are spending too much time online:

- ongoing headaches, eye strain and sleep disturbance
- neck, back or hand pain
- online activities interfering with your health, wellbeing or relationships
- regularly checking your device while trying to complete other tasks
- constantly talking about things you have seen on social media
- withdrawing from offline friends and activities
- attributing more importance to your online activities and contacts than anything else
- a decline in performance at work or university.

Ways to improve online habits

Sometimes a little information is all you need to kickstart a change in your online habits.

Strategies for study

- **Turn off notifications** for social media or messaging apps on [Apple](#) and [Android](#) devices. You can also set 'do not disturb' periods to pause notifications.
- **Monitor or limit your phone use** if you are constantly

distracted. Many phones have settings that allow you to track time spent on apps and allow you to set daily usage limits. Activate these and look out for other apps that help you become more aware of how you use screen time.

- **Set routine breaks** — if you are online for an hour or more, make sure you take a short break. This could include stretching or a short walk.
- **Set study objectives** — use screen time to reward yourself for completing your study goals.

Strategies for work

- **Turn off notifications** for social media or messaging apps on [Apple](#) and [Android](#) devices.
- **Make a plan** — set daily tasks you would like to achieve at work. This may help you to maintain focus and prevent the distraction of looking at your phone/ browsing social media.
- **Have a 'no device' policy** when eating — or try to have lunch with a colleague/friend.
- **Set routine breaks** — if you are online for an hour or more, make sure you take a short break away from the technology. Set a work routine, including regular breaks.
- **Implement strategies** to minimise work-related stressors, for example don't send or check emails outside of regular business hours.



Strategies for socialising

- **Have a 'no device' policy** when you are exercising or catching up with friends.
- **Check your gaming** — if you spend too much time playing online games, read eSafety's [gaming advice](#) for tips on how to handle it.
- **Make a plan** to spend more time offline with friends or engaging in your favourite sports and other activities you enjoy.

Strategies at home

- **Turn off notifications** for your apps on [Apple](#) and [Android](#) devices.
- **Turn your devices** off or put them on airplane/sleep mode at least an hour before bedtime to ensure you have the best quality sleep.
- **Have a 'no device' policy** at mealtimes.

- **Have a device-free zone** within your home.
- **Set routine breaks** — if you are online for an hour or more, make sure you take a short break away from the technology. This could include stretching or a short walk.
- **Make a plan** to spend more time offline with friends or engaging in your favourite sports and other activities you enjoy.
- **Monitor or limit your phone use** if you are constantly distracted. Many phones have settings that allow you to track time spent on apps and allow you to set daily usage limits. Activate these and look out for other apps that help you become more aware of how you use screen time.

Support

If you think you need help managing the amount of time you spend online and its impact on your wellbeing, there are a range of supports:

- Your university's wellbeing and support services
- [Google's Digital Wellbeing](#) website
- [Beyond Blue's Staff Wellbeing](#) resources
- [Beyond Blue's Am I Normal? Phone fixation](#)
- eSafety's list of [counselling and support services](#), such as [Headspace](#) — mental health support for young people.