Managing Internet Distractions

The Internet can be a valuable resource for study. It allows us to easily access academic information like journal articles, listen to lectures via Moodle as well as to stay connected with academics and fellow students. Unfortunately, the Internet also allows us to access other types of material that may distract us from, and cause issues with, our studies. Below are some tips to help us use the Internet adaptively and to limit the negative impact it may have on our study.

General Tips:

Plan your study and Internet time

One of the simplest and most effective ways to manage your study and Internet use is to plan for both. Plan to work for a certain amount of time (e.g. 45 minutes) and then have time set aside to browse the Web (e.g. 15 minutes). This helps you to monitor your progress, alleviate any sense that your study seems relentless and curb the amount of time that you may spend browsing the web if un-checked. Be aware that some sites can hook you in by suggesting other things you may be interested in, such as other news stories, videos or products, so you'll need to plan for this and be aware of the temptation to keep browsing. Notifications that tell you that freshly downloaded content is ready or that there are new games to be played may impede your ability to stick to your time targets. Make sure you consider these factors when you plan your time and consider disabling such notifications so your attention is not pulled away from study.

Disconnect

One of the hardest things about limiting internet use is that distraction is only ever one click away. Many of us think that having numerous windows open at a time is a form of efficient multi-tasking in which we can simultaneously study, keep in touch with friends, watch videos of dancing cats and shop. For some this is achievable. For the rest of us, this type of multi-tasking may be incompatible with the sustained focus required for study. A more extreme solution to managing internet distraction is therefore to simply un-plug your connection or switch off your Wi-Fi. If connecting is more difficult than simply clicking on a search icon, then you may find yourself thinking twice before doing it. Some people find it helpful to even have a day set aside each week when they unplug and use this day to focus on their academic work in order to more effectively concentrate.

Managing Specific Types of Internet Use:

Our use of the Internet can be as individual as we are. Knowing what we want out of the Internet may help us to think of other ways to meet our needs that don't affect our studies. Below are some common reasons to use the Internet and some suggestions for how to directly target these.

The support you need to succeed

Shopping

The Internet can seem like one enormous shopping mall with millions of products just waiting to tempt us. Be aware of the functional distinction between shopping and browsing, however. Shopping allows us to purchase a product that will service our needs. Browsing may serve to occupy our attention in a more pleasant manner than study. Browsing may also trick us into thinking that what we're doing is just as important as our studies. Researching which site sells a product at the cheapest price is not the same as the research you need to do for your assignment. It may allow you to feel productive in the short term, but this feeling will evaporate as the deadline for your assignment approaches. Consider working out what your resources are each week – both in terms of money and time and make sure you don't exceed what you can afford.

Pornography

Our sex drive constitutes a powerful urge and the Internet can offer us a place to satisfy that urge. Depending on your personal beliefs, there may be nothing intrinsically wrong with looking at pornography and it may be a safe and risk-free outlet for your sexuality. Despite this, over-use of pornography may result in being unable to complete your university commitments on time and may have serious consequences for your personal and romantic relationships. Consider setting a limit on viewing time or else working in a public setting where viewing pornography is inappropriate. If you feel that your use of pornography is becoming a serious problem and you would like help with this, then consider contacting a counsellor or psychologist. There may also be some online support groups or groups in your local area. Remember, the over-use of Internet pornography is becoming increasingly common and you shouldn't let a sense of embarrassment or shame stop you from accessing the support you need.

Gambling

Like pornography, there may be nothing intrinsically wrong with online gambling and in moderation it may serve as an exciting activity. Just as with other types of gambling however, online gambling can lead to issues of addiction and financial distress. Be strict with yourself about the amount of time and money you allow yourself to spend. One of the difficulties with online gambling is that it is easy to lose track of how much you spend and often the activity is solitary so you may not have a friend with you who can suggest you stop. Some sites will let you set a daily limit and this may help. If you're studying from home and worried that you may gamble, consider giving your credit cards to your partner or a housemate for safe keeping. If you suspect that your gambling may be problematic then you should consider speaking to a psychologist or counsellor. There's also a lot of help available online in the form of informational websites, support groups and even apps that can help you stick to your limits.

The support you need to succeed.

Social Media

Social media allows us to connect with our friends and family. It also helps to meet our needs to feel connected, liked and supported. Unfortunately social media can also elicit feelings of envy and anger and these may be disruptive to the emotional state you need to be in to engage with your studies. Consider whether having social media permanently open is an issue for your studies and whether logging out of social media while you work may be beneficial. For a more in-depth look at the issues raised by the use of social media, please see our tip sheet called Getting the Most out of Social Media.

Online Gaming

Online gaming is a pleasurable activity for many. The danger is that like other types of internet activities it may be so pleasurable that it leads us to put off our studies. Be aware of the time that you spend playing online gaming and how long a commitment each game may take before you start. Consider making time to play games after you've finished work for the day as this may provide an incentive to work efficiently and diligently. You may also wish to consider setting a goal, such as reaching a certain level or completing a certain mission and commit to stop playing after this point. Evidence suggests that neural processes that occur when gaming are similar to those for other types of addictive behaviours and this may explain why some experience their gaming as being akin to an addiction.

Fantasy Planning

Is it useful to know what car we would drive if we won $200,000? Or what house we'd select if we had $20,000,000? If your answer is yes to either of these then you may be using the Internet to indulge your fantasies of wealth or success. Gently bring yourself back to the here and now and remind yourself that successfully completing university may be a more realistic path to financial success. You may also wish to engage in some activities that bolster your sense of self in the short-term. These might be positive affirmations or involvement with others who can make you feel good about yourself.

"Research"

As we said, the Internet is a wonderful resource for our studies. Unfortunately it may also allow us to procrastinate and prevent us from beginning a task because we're spending too long gathering background material. Our advice would be to spend a set period of time searching for resources and then spend time reading these resources. If, after you've read all the material, you still feel you need more, then you can always search again. This strategy will hopefully prevent you from spending too long gathering material that you will end up not using and from delaying starting your assignment. Remember that most subjects will require you to research to a reasonable but not exhaustive degree. Also be aware of how long you will need to write the assignment and make sure that you leave yourself enough time to complete the assignment in a manner that can hopefully reduce stress and enable you to produce good work. This plan should also allow you time to review your work and to do a thorough proof read of your assignment prior to submission.

Remember the Internet can help as well as hinder

The Internet can also be a great resource to help you manage your time more efficiently. There's Apps to help you plan your time, schedule your day, maintain your budget. There are also resources (like this very Tip Sheet) and other information from non-profit organisations to give you some information on ways to overcome difficulties and get the most out of studies. Spend some time browsing the web (just not too much!) to get a better sense of the plethora of resources available to help you get the most out of your life and studies.

If you would like to speak to a UNE Counsellor about any of the issues covered in this tip sheet, please call UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) on:
02 6773 2897
and arrange a face-to-face
or telephone appointment.

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