

UChicago Remote Work Guidelines & Best Practices

Although The University of Chicago has moved to distance learning for Spring Quarter, the Hyde Park campus will remain open and will continue the activities central to research, education, and patient care. To help prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19, the University encourages remote work as appropriate. With the approval of managers and unit directors, staff members may work remotely where possible and should put plans in place to do so as soon as possible.

Here are guidelines, best practices, and resources to help you adapt to working remotely.

WORK ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

- **Establish a remote work environment that is as conducive to work as possible.** Factors to consider include: demands of other household members, appropriate lighting, seating, and other basic conditions. Set expectations as best you can with others in your home regarding your interactions and availability.
 - **Ensure you have connectivity.** Staff members are required to have their own internet and phone access when working from home. Make sure your manager and colleagues have your mobile and/or home phone number. Service (internet, phone, systems) may be interrupted due to weather or system demand. Discuss with your manager what work you should do if your internet service goes down.
 - **Know the guidelines around using your own equipment.** In order to work remotely, staff members may need to use personal equipment. If the only option is to use a personally owned computer, laptop, or other device, the staff member is still responsible for following all University practices and policies to maintain security on their device. While it can be a challenge, try to avoid using devices shared with others for remote work unless completely necessary. Always ensure others work under separate accounts from your own. Personally owned devices are not insured by the University of Chicago. No additional reimbursement or payment is anticipated for use of personal equipment or space. If you are considering purchasing any equipment, see what special offers are available through the University.
 - **Use a secure, password-protected wired or wireless network.** Criminals can compromise public Wi-Fi to steal data, so avoid using public Wi-Fi when possible. If you must use public Wi-Fi, use the University's virtual private network (VPN). See [VPN](#) and [Wi-Fi Security](#) for more information.
 - **Keep your data and devices secure.** Whenever possible, save and edit all data using cloud storage services ([Google Drive](#), [UChicago Box](#), or [Microsoft OneDrive](#)) rather than on a local computer or external storage device. Sensitive data requires the highest level of security and privacy protection, and must be stored in accordance with the University's [Data Classification Guidelines](#). If you are uncertain about where you can safely store and share sensitive data, please see the [UChicago Data Usage Guide](#). [Symantec Endpoint Protection \(SEP\)](#) is the University's supported antivirus software available to students, faculty, and staff. Ensure that your device has a screen timeout or lock if left unused. A good guideline is 20 minutes for a desktop, and five to 15 minutes for a laptop. Make sure that a strong password or PIN is required to unlock your device. See the [Baseline Protection of End-User Devices](#) for more information.
 - **Review ITS information about working remotely.** Guidelines about computer equipment, connectivity, security, and more are listed [here](#).
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PLANNING & CONDUCTING YOUR WORK

- **Prioritize your time and projects.** Evaluate your responsibilities and priorities, considering the impact and feasibility of completing some or all of it remotely (with or without adjustments). Share your thoughts with your manager to ensure you are aligned on how to prioritize your work.
- **Be realistic about how much work you can reasonably conduct remotely.** Consider the nature of your work or limitations you may face as a result of your home environment (e.g., you have children present who need care), and talk to your manager about these factors. Consider what hours make the most sense for your work and whether you need to propose working non-traditional hours, such as early mornings, evenings, and/or weekends.
- **Stay accessible for meetings and/or status updates during agreed-upon work hours.** Notify your manager of any extended interruptions to your availability.
- **Regularly update your manager.** Share your work plans and a summary of progress through an agreed-to method and schedule.
- **Share updates on your work early and often.** By sharing drafts, outlines, or project plans early, you can ensure you and your manager and/or colleagues are aligned and avoid re-doing any work due to differing expectations.
- **Let your manager know if you need additional assignments to fill work hours.** Be proactive in suggesting project ideas. If you find yourself with unfilled time, consider projects you have put off, such as organizing electronic files and folders or creating or updating documentation regarding job responsibilities, processes, etc.
- **Consider online learning.** With your manager's approval you may also participate in [LinkedIn Learning](#) or Online Skillbuilders available via [Perspectives Ltd.](#), the University's Staff and Faculty Assistance Program (SFAP). Keep track of online training you complete and share with your manager.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

- **Take advantage of collaboration and communication technology.** Information about tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, and more can be found [here](#).
- **Ensure you and your manager and colleagues are aligned on communication expectations.** Ask your manager about their expectations for communication, including the frequency and methods. When in doubt, overcommunicate with your manager and colleagues.
- **Add a Zoom option to all meetings proactively.** There is a plugin to add Zoom to Outlook calendar invites. Details are available [here](#).
- **Use your webcam when possible to increase interpersonal communication and support those who rely on lipreading.** If you expect distractions, limit your use of video. If your background isn't something you want people to see during a video conference, you can use [Zoom's feature to choose a standard photo to use as your background](#) instead. Notify other meeting participants in advance if you plan to use video so they can prepare accordingly.
- **Log in early to calls.** Test your audio/video settings before the call starts.
- **Use the "mute" option to reduce background noise on calls when you are not speaking.** The host(s) can also mute participants.

WELLNESS

- **Stay as consistent as you can with your eating, sleeping, and exercise routine.**
- **Build physical movement into your day.** You may find you are moving much less than you do when going to your office without the walk to/from public transportation or parking and meetings. Take short breaks to stretch, do a few minutes of exercise, or walk around the block.
- **If possible, work near natural light and get some fresh air every day.**
- **Seek opportunities to connect virtually with your colleagues and others as much as possible.** Just as you would schedule coffee or lunch with colleagues, schedule time to connect virtually. During online meetings or calls, take a few minutes to catch up socially or informally.
- **Consider the ergonomics of your workspace.** Make adjustments to have adequate lower back support and to sit high enough to type comfortably. Aim to get the top of your screen to eye level. You may need to stack books or boxes. Tips for an ideal setup can be found [here](#).
- **Take regular breaks to look away from your screen.** You can find ideas for preventing eye strain [here](#).
- **Maintain boundaries around your work time.** Take mental and physical steps away from the computer at the end of the workday. Limit distractions of household chores. Create a routine and schedule that works for you. Establish times when you will focus only on work and breaks when you can allow or accommodate home distractions.
- **Prepare yourself, household members, and your home for health and other emergencies.** The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers this guidance at [Get Your Home Ready for COVID-19](#).
- **Know the University's Staff and Faculty Assistance Program is available.** This is a stressful time for everyone, and the isolation caused by social distancing can impact mental health. [Perspectives Ltd.](#), the University's Staff and Faculty Assistance Program, offers a variety of resources you may find valuable.
- **Remain flexible.** This may be a new way of working for many of us. Continually look for ways to make things better. Check to make sure that the routines you establish at the start lead to the outcomes you intended.