

Study Tips – Pandemic Special

General Tips

- check the university's [Knowledge Base on Digital Studying](#) as well as the dedicated [Digital Learning page](#) – here you find a number of tips and tricks that will help you get organized and stay motivated during the digital semester
- the pandemic has got you down and work is a real drag? establish writing / reading groups via Zoom that meet regularly with your friends and classmates to get some of that productive library energy – be social *after* you get in your two hours of work
- you can borrow laptops for online exams from the General Students' Committee (AStA) via tech-rent@astaup.de
- If you do not have the funds to buy a proper laptop, you can also contact one of your professors in the department. Currently, there is limited special funding for the technical support of students in need, and professors can apply for this funding at the dean's office in special cases. If funding is approved, a laptop can be bought and inventoried by the department (via the respective professor) and officially lent to you for a semester.

Workplace Layout

Most of us have entered into a symbiotic relationship with our office chairs since we now live and work in the same place. To remedy this, the [Knowledge Base on Digital Studying](#) holds some tips on how to mentally separate work and leisure even if they happen in the same place. The increased amount of time we are spending at our desks makes it important to also design our work environments in such a way as to lend us the support we need. To ensure this,

- your desk should have a height of about 72 cm,
- your chair should be adjusted so that desk and elbows are at the same height,
- the upper edge of the screen should be at the same height as your eyes,
- you, ideally, arrange your light sources off-center above you – this reduces glare on the screen and prevents your body from blocking the light when leaning in, as well as, and
- you position your desk perpendicular to a window to make best use of the sunlight.

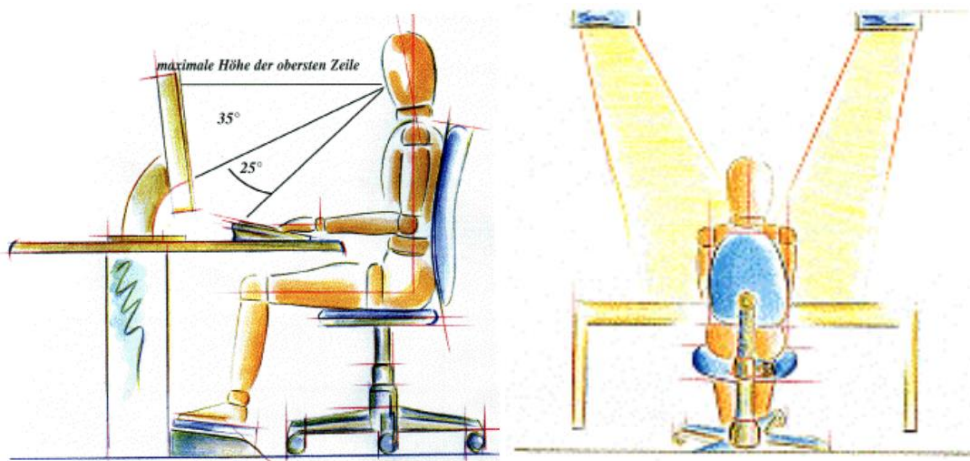


Figure 1: from Presentation “Homeoffice und Telearbeit” by BSO, University of Potsdam

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Quick Fixes for Zoom

- have you tried turning it off and on again?
- updating your drivers as well as Zoom itself is always a good idea
- headsets and earphones reduce feedback and improve our discussions' audio quality
- You don't have a webcam or yours isn't great? If you have a smartphone on hand, you can make it act as both webcam and microphone for your computer using [DroidCam](#) (for both Android and iOS in combination with Windows / Linux)
 - if you don't want to install any software, you can also log in to Zoom sessions with two devices, e.g. with your smartphone acting as the camera and your laptop as the screen that allows you to properly see presentations and participants
- it is difficult for instructors to keep an overview during Zoom sessions so what you can do is:
 - use the chat function to indicate that you would like to speak, e.g. by sending an exclamation or question mark, which helps maintain proper chronology
 - feel free to write comments and questions into the chat if your microphone is not working or there is too much background noise
- deactivate your webcam to conserve bandwidth if you are experiencing connection problems
- deactivate any downloads such as auto-updates to conserve bandwidth during Zoom meetings

Advanced Fixes for Performance Problems

- if you have performance issues with your computer, check whether they are related to your device rather than your internet connection by checking CPU and RAM utilization (via task manager / activity monitor) – with a processor stuck at 100% workload when running only Zoom, try shutting down processes that draw capacity
- clean your laptop regularly to keep it at maximum cooling efficiency – your nearest bicycle repair shop will assist you by shooting some compressed air through its heat spreaders and fans to blow out all the dust that has accumulated over the years
- check your computer's power plan – this is especially relevant for laptops that tend to not work at maximum performance even when connected to a power supply
 - make sure your device's power plan / Energiesparplan is set to "maximum performance" instead of "balanced" to avoid your system being throttled
- wifi can be a tricky thing especially in apartment buildings where there are a lot of wifi networks that broadcast at the same time and interfere with one another
 - to identify your wifi as the problem, you can connect your device via cable. In any case, **cable connection is preferable to wireless**
 - restarting the router has proven a miracle cure in many past cases
 - use your router function to [select the best wifi channel for you](#)
 - switch to 5 GHz network rather than the standard 2,4 GHz, if possible

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- where you set up your router makes all the difference: it is easier for the signal to penetrate doors than massive walls so changing its position might help
- if you manage to find an old router on the cheap, you can [turn it into a wifi access point / range extender](#)
- if you are experiencing disconnections regularly, check the error log of your router and contact your internet service provider – the problem might be more systemic and lie beyond your own four walls!

Free Software

- [Open Broadcaster Software](#) (OBS) is a free tool that allows you to not only record your screen and voice but also add your webcam feed to the mix, which comes in handy for streaming and in-class presentations alike
- [Davinci Resolve](#) is a free program for video editing that is great for those of us who do not want to restart taping their 20-minute presentation all over again just because of one blooper
- [Microsoft Office 365](#) is available to students for free via the university. Once you register with your university email address, you gain access to essential programs such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. If you want to share presentations digitally, you can use PowerPoint to add voice-over to slides and even export it in video format.