Self-Regulation and Online Learning

Self-regulation is the thinking, emotion and behaviour that a learner uses to achieve their personal goals. It includes strategies such as planning, effort regulation, time management, metacognition, elaboration, critical thinking, help seeking, concentration and reflection (Burns, 2020). Different self-regulation strategies are used before, during and after each learning event (Zimmerman, 2002).

On campus we have a range of structures that help students to be motivated to self-regulate their learning. For example, we have fixed times for lectures and tutorials etc., when students are expected to front up and engage with the content and with the teaching team. Also, there are peer associations on campus, in and out of the classroom, where students can observe and discuss what others are doing in the course, indirectly helping them to stay on track with their learning.

Figure based on Zimmerman, 2002, Figure 1, p67

16 July 2020
When learning moves online, several of these self-regulation structures are missing and this may be why students can flounder when studying online. If students can self-regulate when studying online or in blended environments, this improves their achievement and success (Broadbent 2017).

So, what can we do in course websites to help students self-regulate their learning? There are several design strategies and learnonline tools that can be used to help students develop a mental picture of what is required to be successful in a course and motivate themselves to engage with these within the appropriate timeframes. However, it can sometimes be a challenge for teachers to start thinking about student self-regulation as their headsets are focused on what they need to do as a teacher, rather than what students need to do as learners.

**Checklists**

Checklists are one of the simplest strategies that can be implemented to support student self-regulation **before, during and after the learning process**. One of the tools available within UniSA Online courses, that is not yet included in learnonline courses, is the **learning planner**, which generates weekly checklists for students of what they need to know and need to do. Each element on these lists is additionally linked to the course objective that is being developed. The ‘Need to know’ and ‘Need to do’ checklist example that follows is from Week 3 of the course, *UO Business and Society*. As the students complete each component, they can check it off and the system will remember their progress.

Although the learning planner is not yet in learnonline, you are able to develop something similar using word or excel that students can print and tick off as they complete each activity. A good example of an excel-created checklist, which also includes time predictions, is available in Burns (2020; Figure 3).
Completion Progress Block

A self-regulation tool that is available in learnonline, but not in UniSA Online, is the time-management tool called the Completion progress block. This tool visually shows which activities the student needs to engage with and has a colour coding system showing where they are up to, so it supports self-regulation **before, during and after the learning**. As a bonus, there is also an Overview function for teachers that displays the progress of all students on one screen.

This is an example of the student and staff view of the progress block taken from the short course Engaging Learners Online. As you move your mouse over the coloured boxes, the activity associated with each box (e.g. peer review of staff home page), appears, as well as its status with respect to completion.

By selecting the Overview button, the teacher can review everyone’s progress.
To use the Completion progress block, you must first have Activity completion functionality turned on (Course website > Edit settings > Activity Completion > On) and then define which activities need to be completed, and to what extent. Once Activity completion is set up, you then need to add the Completion progress block to your website and use the Block settings to select which activities the block will monitor, as shown below:

- Moodle docs – Activity completion
- Moodle docs – Completion Progress Blocks

Assessment exemplars and rubrics
Assessment is often the focus of students’ learning behaviour. Assessment exemplars provide models of desired performance before the learning activity
while well-developed rubrics with clear criteria and detailed performance levels, promote self-regulation \textbf{before, during and after} the learning process.

- TIU – \textbf{Assessment}
- OT&L guide – \textbf{Reduce marking time with online rubrics}

**Time budget**

Another strategy that is used in several programs to support online students’ self-regulation is the time budget. Time budgets are a visual map of all the student needs to do, week by week through the study period (\textit{Quinn and Wedding, 2012}). Below is an example of a time budget from the OUA course Sustainable Engineering Practice ENR 112.

![Time Budget](image)

Time budgets are useful for students to self-regulate \textbf{before they start} studying to help plan what they need to do, but time budgets are also good \textbf{during the learning process}. For example, if students are finding that they are taking more time on an activity than what was allocated in the time budget, they can be advised to change their study approach and switch to \textbf{help-seeking behaviours}. In an ideal world, students should be preparing their own time budgets using a study planner, but with the new-found freedom and flexibility of online study, it is good to set clear and high expectations for students of
what is involved in being successful learner in a course using tools such as the time budget.

- Resource – Time budget template
- Examples – ENR 112 time budget
- Student resource - Study planners

Supporting Help-seeking

The next strategy to help students self-regulate when studying online is to ensure that help-seeking behaviours are supported. Help seeking is an important self-regulation behaviour during the learning process. In addition to your lecture or tutorial Zoom sessions, you can create a regular Zoom consultation time (Drop-in session) where the agenda is open and students can ask any questions they have. You can also add a dedicated Question and Answer Forum in your website for this purpose which all students can benefit from, and at a time that suits them. Another strategy is to use the Dialogue tool to initiate one-on-one conversations with each student in the course. The bonus of using a tool such as Dialogue (instead of email) is that it keeps communication about the course within the course.

- Learnonline help - Forum
- Learnonline help - Dialogue

Self-testing

Another strategy that is useful for supporting student self-regulation during the learning process is self-testing using formative assessment. If students can test themselves on how well they understand concepts and receive fast feedback, then they are able to adjust their approach to learning as a result. By using Quizzes and feedback-rich H5P interactive content, you can improve the frequency and timeliness of feedback on performance and support students to self-regulate their learning.

- OT&L guide – Fast feedback for online learners

Teaching strategies

The teaching strategies can have an impact on how students regulate their learning. For example, if you incorporate group work as a part of the student
learning experience, you bring peers back into the learning space which will support students’ self-regulation during the learning process. There are many tools to support online group work that we have covered in an earlier Guide.

- OT&L Guide – Supporting Group Work Online

Another teaching strategy that is useful for supporting self-regulation is the use of regular reflection on learning strategies. This can be done in a forum or an individual wiki can be used as an online journaling tool to support reflection. As a teacher you can visit and review student’s journals if you need to.

- Learnonline help - Forum
- Learnonline help - Wiki

Conclusion

Developing students’ self-regulation skills will support their success when studying online. Making the shift to thinking about what the student does to learn something, rather than what the teacher needs to do to teach something, is a key first step in the process. For this reason, creating the checklists or a time budget is a good place to start improving the support you provide students for self-regulation when studying online.

If you would like to ask online teaching and learning questions related to your course, you can look through our FAQs, write to TIU@unisa.edu.au, have an online consultation with a member of the TIU or complete the online modules as part of Introduction to Engaging Learners Online.

References

