



# Maximizing your Academic Productivity when Traveling

*You've got assignments coming due and exams around the corner, but this weekend your team/group/family is traveling. **What can you do to maximize the time you allot for academic work?***

Not only are the spaces you are working in potentially difficult in which to be productive (planes, trains, buses, airports, hotels, venues, etc.), there are significant logistical and other issues that can get in the way of studying, doing p-sets, writing papers, and effectively completing other academic work.

Here's some **advice from student-athlete learning consultants\*** for students who need to be productive during the times they are traveling both in transit and once they arrive at their destination. With some realistic planning and proactive preparation, you can get the most out of the time you have for academic work and yet be fully engaged in the activity that was the reason for your travel in the first place.

## **PLANNING:**

When you are traveling you are out of your element and your routine is interrupted, so **think realistically and strategically** about how you work and how you can optimally break up the things you need to do, then plan when you will do them.

**Set concrete goals** about what you need to accomplish before you return to campus. Try your best to make them achievable, because the purpose of planning is to help you combat stress, not have your goals induce stress. For example, if you have two 12-hour bus rides, and 6 hours of time to work in the hotel, chances are you're not going to get 30 hours of work done. Recognize where and when you might be optimally productive, how much slower you work on a bus while distracted, etc. and set your goals accordingly.

Perhaps the most important thing for managing work on road trips is deciding which **assignment types** that are realistic to complete while traveling. If you can identify even one or two assignment types that you feel comfortable undertaking in transit, you can spend the few days before and after the road trip completing all of the *other* assignment types. One learning consultant, for example, put it this way, "I need a lot of time and space to plan out writing papers, so it isn't realistic to make progress on a bus. However, I feel pretty comfortable finishing my coding assignments for computer science classes in a tight space like a bus seat (I need less materials/paper/space for this). For that reason, I will prioritize the paper during my time before the road trip and leave the COS assignment for the bus. Even if the paper is due after the coding assignment, I know that I *can't* save it for travel time, so I have to get it out of the way. As far as preparing for an exam, I would probably not feel comfortable taking a practice exam on the bus, but I would feel comfortable pushing up the practice exam to the day before, then using the time on the bus to go through the answers and compare with my lecture notes, textbook, etc."

Prior to leaving, **break your assignments into pieces that you know you can accomplish in the time windows you have**, and plan when you will do what. You may, ultimately, need to adapt your plan, but if you have a plan you can adjust it, and it will make your work feel doable. For example, if you know you have a 6 hour train ride, break that into 5 one hour activities with 20 minute breaks in between (don't forget breaks!). If you know you will only have 30 minutes of free time on a given day, save a short reading for that slot.

## **PREPARATION:**

Once you've set goals, prep the assignments you want to do, even start them a bit, so that you can easily get into them when you are in a less comfortable environment (bus, event, hotel, etc.). This means downloading and perhaps printing everything that is online including p-sets, gathering relevant materials and books, creating documents on your computer where assignments can be written--all the simple steps that get you one step closer to getting projects rolling. Don't count on wi-fi or access to power. **Charge your phone and computer** up in advance. This also prepares you for when you don't have wi-fi. (In the event you don't have wi-fi and you are desperate to download something, you can temporarily make your phone a hotspot (or ask someone with unlimited data to do it) so that you can quickly download what you need.)

**Pack earphones and download helpful, motivating music.** Part of what makes it difficult to work on buses and at tournaments, etc. is the noise and inability to focus in and put your stresses from your event aside. Music can make this simpler. If you don't like listening to music, just put your earbuds in with nothing on. It sends a message to other people that you don't want to be disturbed.

**EN ROUTE:** After planning and preparing, create conditions conducive to being productive.

- **Do you get motion sickness?** If you get motion sickness and cannot do any reading or writing when traveling, combat this by downloading **audiobooks**. You can also study by “talking through” material with a friend in the same class as you. You can even do this with a friend who is not in the same class: you can take turns explaining/teaching concepts to each other, which can help solidify understanding.
- **Wear headphones** to combat noises from the vehicle and people around you talking. If you have trouble doing work with music, try study music (like piano or other instrumental) or even white noise sounds.
- **Don't sit with your best friend;** you can easily get distracted. Try to sit with someone who also has work to do or who is sleeping quietly next to you.

**ON-SITE:**

- Try and **find the quietest/most secluded space** possible so that you limit attractions and distractions. Part of what makes it difficult to work at events, etc. is the noise and inability to focus in and put your stresses from your event aside. Relaxing music can make this simpler.
- **Find other people who need to work** so you can all encourage each other and create a sense of mutual accountability. If your friends or teammates are not working during down time, create a ‘study squad’. One learning consultant recounted, “I find that when I am studying alone in the lobby while the rest of my group/team is watching “The Bachelor” or hanging out some place, I will be sad, unproductive, and have serious FOMO. If I get a little study squad going, I am happy to be working with friends.” Don't feel like you have to work nonstop over the course of your travel: take breaks to rest and relax knowing that it will make you recharged to do work the next morning.

**AT HOTEL/HOME:**

- **Find a study space.** If you have some hotel time, ask if there is a conference room you can use as a study space. If not, sometimes the lobby works too, but it can be noisy. Or walk to a nearby coffee shop and work there.
- **Get up early** to do work if you can, before you are tired from training or competition. It will also be quieter and there will be fewer distractions. Try to get to bed early to facilitate this; you don't want to deprive yourself of sleep in days leading up to a competition or performance.
- If you can do work in the evenings, after training or competition, go for it. Again, don't try to do so in your bed while your roommate is watching TV or talking loudly. **Find a work-conducive space** in the lobby, conference room, etc.
- If your visit, competition or travel lasts several days, try to **create a routine for yourself**. One student said, “During my team's training trip in Tampa over intersession, I went to the Tampa public library every day after lunch for 2 hours to thesis. This was **reasonable** for me to do between morning and afternoon practice, and I was able to get a nap/down time in before going to the afternoon training session.”

**AT EVENT:**

At some events, once you finish your part there isn't really much of an expectation for you to participate or watch. So, there's a fair amount of unstructured time where you can just find a place to do work. This is, of course, dependent upon having printed something in advance to read, having flashcards to drill, etc. so **be sure to bring these materials to the event**.

*\*Andrew Griffin, Heather Milke, and Madelynn Prendergast contributed to this document.*