

Learning and studying in times of Corona How to successfully master your online semester

Dear students,

The current situation is a huge challenge for all of us. In addition to the many concerns we have had about our health, the economic situation and future developments, you are also uncertain about how your studies will proceed. Your instructors work hard to convert their course content to online formats so that your courses can take place. However, online learning is certainly different than what you are used to.

We distinguish between synchronous and asynchronous online courses. **Synchronous online teaching** takes place jointly and simultaneously, for example via live stream or in a live chat. With **asynchronous online teaching**, learning takes place independently, i.e. you can choose when to watch teaching videos or participate in a discussion forum, for example.

Anyone who has ever attended an online course knows that there are some challenges that need to be overcome compared to face-to-face teaching. That is why we have developed this handbook for you. We would like to give you some tips for online and remote learning so that you can hopefully master your studies a bit more relaxed:

- ★ If you are in a hurry: our most important tips in a short and concise way.
- ★ How can I organize my workplace?
- ★ How can I motivate myself to learn online?
- ★ How can I structure my day efficiently?
- ★ How can I prepare my online courses and avoid technical difficulties?
- ★ How can I study effectively in online courses?
- ★ How can I exchange with my fellow students?
- ★ How can I clarify my questions?

We hope to be able to give you at least some basic **help** with this and would kindly ask for your **understanding**: Some things are unfamiliar and new and do not work smoothly immediately. But: Please be patient with yourself and your instructors. We are all in the same boat and we all want your studies to continue as regularly as possible. The transition to online teaching and exams is challenging and requires patience and flexibility on all sides.



Some important information on data protection and copyright

Data protection: Your instructors will try to use mainly applications licensed by TUM for their courses or applications for which TUM has signed so-called framework agreements. Especially with licensed applications it is ensured that your data is safe and not redirected via servers in other countries. For applications with framework agreements please make sure that you enter into a user agreement and that you comply with it. In addition, make sure that you adhere to netiquette in chats (even in private chat mode as part of a course). The chat administrators may be able to view all chat histories, including private chats via the respective applications.

Copyright: Please note that material made available to you for educational purposes is copyrighted work. You may only use these materials for the purposes of your studies, i.e. in particular it is not permitted to record and share them with third parties, nor may they be reproduced in public or used for commercial purposes.

If you are unsure about data protection and copyright, it is best to contact your instructors directly with your questions.

We would also like to make you aware that you should be careful with your own and other data and that you should be aware of the privacy policy if you use digital tools and apps privately e.g. in the context of time and self-management or in exchange with your fellow students.

If you have any questions about "Learning and studying in times of Corona", please get in touch with us at <u>lernkompetenz@prolehre.tum.de</u>.

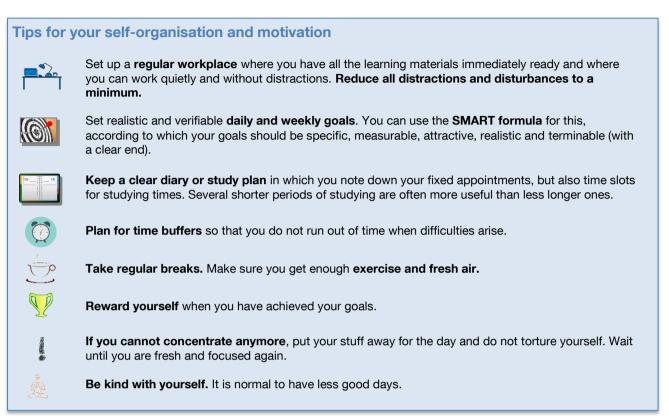
We wish you all the best for the upcoming term - hang in there!

Your Study Skills-Team: Ellen, Christine, Nadja and Simone



If you are in a hurry...

here you can find our most important tips in a short and concise way.



Tips for your online courses



Before your online course starts, make sure you have a **stable internet connection and your equipment works** (webcam, microphone, headphones etc.).



Check your moodle courses regularly to make sure you don't miss anything.



Prepare and revise your courses: Use the learning material provided to you to prepare for your class: Get an **overview, mark important points, note down questions**. Follow up your online courses by working through and **regularly repeating the material**.



Use the possibility to **ask questions in live classes** (e.g. in a chat) if something is unclear to you. If questions remain unanswered, contact your lecturer - in **video or telephone consultation hours, chat** forums or via email.



Even with recorded videos, **take regular breaks**, e.g. to take notes or to recharge your batteries to be able to concentrate better.



Keep in touch with your fellow students (e.g. via the discussion forums in Moodle or self-organised chats/forums). **Discuss** open questions, the learning material or simply have a **virtual remote coffee** together.



You will find more detailed information on all tips in this guide.



How can I organize my workplace?

Establish a regular learning space at home to develop a routine in starting work for your studies and learning effectively throughout the semester. The workplace should be **structured**, **quiet**, **free of distractions** and always available to you. **Your workplace is very important for the success of your self-study**, **so you should design it individually so that you feel comfortable and motivated to work there.** Make sure there is enough daylight and regular ventilation, e.g. during breaks. Pay attention to your sitting position and sufficient movement.

Having your own workplace also helps you to stay organised in your daily learning routine. **Collect all your learning materials in this place** so that you can quickly access books, tasks, files, etc. without having to search for them for a long time. The same goes for your computer: Clean up your desktop regularly by removing old files and organizing projects into folders.

Try to **minimize any distractions and disturbances**. Ask yourself: What distracts me personally and dulls my concentration? If necessary, turn off your mobile phone and log out of all social media channels, as this can cause unnecessary interruptions. Please also ask your friends and family to respect your study times.

If you feel that your workspace is becoming too monotonous, it may help to change it. Sometimes it is enough to sit down at a different position at your desk or you change places for specific learning activities (e.g. repeating lessons) - this could be the kitchen table, the sofa or the balcony. Always take into account what feels and works best for you.

The technical equipment of your workplace is also important. In the chapter <u>How can I prepare</u> <u>my online course and avoid technical difficulties?</u> we provide you with some useful tips.



How can I motivate myself to learn online?

Learning online on your own requires a high degree of self-discipline and self-motivation. But especially now it is important to take part in online courses and to learn the contents taught online in self-study. On the one hand, this allows you to **maintain a relatively structured everyday life**. Especially during the weeks with curfew, you might get the feeling that days just ripple away. On the other hand, you can also **keep in touch with your fellow students** while learning online. There will be group chats and forums in which you can exchange ideas so that you don't have to go through these uncertain times alone. And finally, online learning should prevent you from losing a whole semester. It is planned that you will also be able to earn **ECTS points** via online courses, so that your study progress would be assured.

Nevertheless, it can be difficult for many students to develop a productive working attitude, to start learning and to keep the ball rolling throughout the semester. Therefore, here is some advice to make it easier for you to motivate yourself to learn online.

Plan fixed learning periods!

It doesn't matter whether your courses are synchronous or asynchronous, i.e. whether your lectures take place live or you can freely allocate your time: **Always note down time slots for studying times in your diary.** This helps you to create a daily structure and to keep fixed appointments - just like in a normal everyday life of a student.

By learning time, by the way, we consider all activities related to the learning material (e.g. preparation or follow-up of a course, online meeting with the learning group, etc.).

If you can arrange your learning times yourself, this also

has a decisive advantage: **You can work according to your individual learning cycle**. Try to observe yourself and find out at what time of day you can learn most effectively. If you are more of an early riser, plan your self-study times for mornings. However, if you know for sure that 8 o'clock lectures have never been your thing, you can postpone your learning until the afternoon. This way you can use your concentration and motivation optimally and have more time for your favourite activities. You can benefit from the fact that you now have the freedom to develop your very own learning rhythm.

What you need to pay attention to when creating a study plan is explained in the section <u>*How can*</u> <u>*I structure my day well?*</u>.

Set realistic daily and weekly goals!

Many Moodle courses are structured so that the learning content for one week is summarised in one section. You should therefore set your goals so that you distribute the content evenly over the days of the week. It makes more sense to go through short sections more often than to put all the content of the week into one afternoon. In any case, the general principle is: Distributed learning is better than overloaded learning. The more realistic you set your daily goals, the better you will achieve them, which will give you additional motivation. Try to formulate your goals clearly so that



they are comprehensible, measurable and scheduled, and so that they are easy for you to control and check off.

We will show you how to set goals with the **SMART formula** in the section <u>*How can I structure*</u> <u>*my day well*</u>?.

Set up a place to study!

Why you go to the lecture hall is clear: to concentrate on your courses, to listen, to take notes - ok, and of course to meet your fellow students. At home, however, it is more difficult to distinguish between work and everyday life. Everywhere there are temptations like the comfortable sofa, the mobile phone, the fridge... and suddenly you even find that the fridge needs cleaning. In order to be able to learn in a really concentrated way, you should set up a personal workspace. Find a suitable place to study, equipped with all the materials you need for your classes and self-study. If you like, you can add inspiring pictures or quotes - and your learning office is ready. You will see that you can get much more involved in your work and also achieve a better distinction between learning and leisure time. Under *How can I organise my workplace?* we give you even more tips on this topic.

Avoid distractions!

If your workspace is set up, you have already achieved a lot. However, there are still many distractions, e.g. from your laptop and mobile phone. Concentrated learning often also means **putting your mobile phone in another room or switching it off** during this time. And watching YouTube videos or the like is also taboo while studying! If you still cannot do without your mobile phone: There are some **useful apps** like *Forest* that help you to work in a concentrated way. You can also try the **Pomodoro technique**, which helps you to learn more productively. Divide bigger tasks into smaller ones. Then consciously take a break after a 25-minute work phase. This way you can avoid distractions and increase your motivation through partial successes. If you like to learn with apps: There are numerous apps for the Pomodoro technique in the app stores, just have a look at what suits you.

Be mindful with yourself!

Online learning presents you with new challenges. It will not always be easy to keep your motivation up. Accept that there will be good and bad days and think positively! Remember that online courses will bring you closer to your goal of successfully completing your studies. See the benefits of self-study: your own pace, your own time management, your own comfortable workspace, access to healthy snacks at all times, the possibility to take breaks and move around. And make sure you sleep well and take regular breaks. Only then can your body and mind relax and what you have learned can be consolidated. Tip: Try the <u>2-minute break</u>.

Reward yourself!

Have you achieved your learning goals for today? Then reward yourself! Think about what you would like to treat yourself with after you finish studying. Here are some ideas: Go for a walk or a run, have a chocolate or a beer after work. Either way, rewards are important and will keep you motivated in the long run. If you have successfully passed major milestones, the reward may



be a little bigger. But: Keep to your own agreements and their deadlines and use the **reward only** when you have reached your goal.

Keep in touch with your fellow students!

In the courses there will usually be **forums** that allow **group discussions**. Take an active part to clarify your questions, but also to keep in touch with your fellow students. For example, you can also **organize private study groups** and discuss tasks and contents. This way you have an additional "safety net" that supports you in studying and achieving your learning goals.



How can I structure my day efficiently?

Self and time management is the key to successful online learning from home. If you succeed in managing your time well, you will quickly set a chain of positive developments in motion: **The more organised you work, the more time you have available for other activities** such as leisure, housework or part-time jobs. And: You can also tackle existing and new tasks in a more relaxed manner.

For a successful start into your (study) everyday life, it can help to establish routines, e.g. to reflect over coffee in the morning, which learning goals you achieved the day before and what you have planned for today. To make your daily, weekly and semester schedule effective, you should create a **study plan**. Here are some basic tips:

Plan your individual learning times!

The golden rule here is to plan your study times according to your individual "golden hours", i.e. the times of day that you know you can study effectively and with motivation. Of course, this only works for self-study materials, but you should take this opportunity.

Always remember to take breaks - whether in self-study or between online sessions. Take care of yourself: Sufficient sleep and exercise are important for you to be focused and productive. For example, a walk in fresh air will help improve your blood circulation and oxygen supply, so you can stay focused as you study.

Plan ahead!

Set easy-to-verify daily and weekly goals. Make a **to-do list and prioritize your tasks** according to urgency and importance. This allows you to work on a specific task and avoid multitasking. If you need to deliver a piece of work by a deadline, don't start working on it the same day. This will only put you under unnecessary stress. Try to start a few days earlier and divide the work into smaller portions. **Also plan with a time buffer** so that you have a little more time if you run into (unforeseeable) difficulties. If you plan ahead, you will also have the chance to discuss tasks with others and clarify questions.

There is a proven technique for setting goals: the **SMART formula**.

	Description	Negative example	Positive example
Specific	Your objective should describe as precisely as possible what you want to achieve.	I will read some texts today.	I will read and work through chapters 2 and 3.



Measureable	Set a goal that makes it easy for you to verify its achievement.	I will continue to work through the book today.	I will create a mind map for chapters 2 and 3.
Attractive	Formulate goals that you would like to achieve.	I will finish all problem sets today.	I would like to finish all problem sets so that I pass the exam with 2.7 or better.
Reasonable	Objectives should always be within your means.	I will summarize the entire book today.	Today I will read chapters 2 and 3 and write out the most important aspects.
Time bound	Set a timeframe for reaching your goal.	I will repeat all problem sets.	One week before the exam I will have created a mindmap for chapters 2 and 3.

If you follow the SMART formula when setting your goals, you should find it easier to formulate motivating and helpful daily and weekly goals.

Use a calendar!

Also, use an effective calendar system and enter all fixed dates and deadlines for tasks so that you don't forget anything. **Always emphasize clarity.** Whether you use your smartphone, your PC or a wall calendar is up to you. The main thing is that you get along with it.

Set time limits!

Before you start learning, **try to estimate how long you need for a task and stick to your time limit**. If you notice that you need much more time than planned, e.g. to read a chapter in a book, try to find out why. Was the content more complex than you thought? Then adapt your schedule. You can't concentrate anymore? Then move on to another task or put things away for today. It is usually better to stop and wait until you are fresh and concentrated again, instead of torturing yourself with material. Sometimes it can also be helpful if you write down what is on your mind and banish it from your mind. This way you can also be sure that you don't forget your most important thoughts while you are taking a break.

Keep the ball running!

Online learning requires a lot of self-discipline. Procrastination is one of the biggest difficulties for that. Stay organized and make sure you stick to your study plan. The material is piling up from week to week – you won't do yourself a favor accumulating learning gaps along the way.



How can I prepare my online courses and avoid technical difficulties?

Technology is particularly important in online learning. If possible, **connect to the Internet via Ethernet cable or ensure a stable WiFi connection**. In order to be well prepared for online learning, you should get the necessary equipment and test it beforehand. Do your webcam and microphone work? Are your headphones ready for use? You should also remember the following important points: Do you have all the necessary passwords at hand? Do you have the necessary account information for Moodle/TUMonline, your private email account and whatever else you need? Keep relevant information easily accessible. Store important phone numbers, email addresses and links in one place for quick access.

Here are a few more basic tips: For example, if you need to upload a work assignment, do it early enough so that you can eliminate any potential sources of error. You should always download work materials and assignments so that you can work on them offline if necessary. It's also a good idea to make regular backups of your work progress, either on your PC or in a cloud.

Before you start your online course, **take a look at your new learning environment and familiarise yourself with the technology**. For each course there will be a Moodle course that you will either be enrolled in automatically or you will have to enrol yourself.

Every course has a **start page** where important information such as rules and conditions or current news can be found. The course content is structured in **sections**, often chronologically according to the individual semester weeks. In each section you will find the corresponding content such as teaching videos, links, texts, tasks or discussion forums. In this way you can estimate how much work you can expect to do per week in a course. Instructors can decide for themselves how much content their students can see. Some will make all materials available immediately for the whole semester, others will release new sections every week. You will receive more detailed information from the lecturers at the beginning of the courses. However, you should check your Moodle courses regularly to make sure you don't miss any new materials or tips.

If you have attended a Moodle course before, you will be familiar with the many features. **If you are new to Moodle, try out everything you can.** If you are having trouble with something, you can try the Help function at the top left of the Moodle page. If you can't find a solution to your problem there, ask your fellow students for advice. If that doesn't help either, you can of course contact your instructor. And if nothing else helps, the <u>Moodle support</u> can help you with questions about Moodle, and the <u>TUM IT support</u> can help you with questions about central IT services and applications.

How you can effectively prepare and follow up on online courses and be proactive during them is explained in detail under <u>How can I study effectively in online courses?</u>.



How can I study effectively in online courses?

Self-study requires a much higher degree of self-discipline than face-to-face learning: You are responsible for starting to learn, keep the ball running and thereby achieving your learning goals. Online learning also differs from traditional courses in that a large part of the communicative support taking place in the non-verbal area is omitted. Gestures and facial expressions are often not as pronounced in videos as in direct contact, which is why it is sometimes more difficult to distinguish important information from unimportant ones. You should therefore orient yourself to the learning objectives of the individual lessons in your Moodle courses and set corresponding priorities in the preparation and follow-up of the units. We hope the following tips make it easier for you to use your online courses effectively.

Preparation for an online course:

Before you start, you should **take a look at the study material provided for you**. If a lecture is held synchronously, it would be useful to have the script printed out and get an overview of each lecture before it starts. For this purpose, it is best to highlight important keywords and sections and write down questions that you want to clarify with your instructors or fellow students - during or after the lecture. Even if you are preparing for asynchronous events, it helps to first look at what is coming up in your next study unit and to recollect what you already know about it. This way you can always **activate your previous knowledge** - no matter whether the course is synchronous or asynchronous - and orientate yourself more easily later on.

You should also keep a close eye on whether and when live events such as a group chat or a video call take place so that you can add them to your schedule.

During online courses:

No matter if synchronous or asynchronous: Just like in the lecture hall you should actively take notes. If there is a script, you can use it and make your own annotations. Always try to keep your notes short and concentrate on the important key points instead of taking notes verbatim. You can use certain abbreviations and/or icons, e.g. a "?" if you did not understand something, a "!" for important definitions. You can also code your annotations via different colours, e.g. mark all definitions in red, all important summaries in blue, etc. It is important that you work consistently and thoroughly.

When watching asynchronous lectures, e.g. longer instructional videos, **take a break every few minutes and summarize the most important points**. You can try to **give your notes a rough structure**, e.g. by using headlines and paragraphs. Many recordings will also contain jump labels and topic overviews so that you can better orientate yourself in the video, take breaks or review a certain section. You will also find in-video-questions in some instructional videos: As you watch the video, questions may pop up from time to time. The video will pause until you have answered the question, then it will continue. Most of the time, the understanding of the previous video content is checked.

Alternatively, with live videos, it often makes more sense to just **listen and ask your questions in the chat** to stay with it and clarify any ambiguities. Many of these live sessions are recorded so



that you can watch the lecture again and take notes. Whether a lecture is being recorded is important information that you should obtain in advance.

To stay motivated and focused, **take regular breaks** between online events. Short, intensive learning units are more effective than hours of learning in a row. Also avoid multi-tasking. Concentrate on one thing!

Follow-up of online courses:

In order to deepen your understanding of the material, you will be offered various additional exercise formats, which you should do in addition to the actual online lecture:

• Working on accompanying exercises: In order to achieve the learning objectives, accompanying tasks are provided to deepen the knowledge, e.g. in the form of quizzes, exercise sheets, discussions or the preparation of sketches, summaries, etc. Make sure to check whether the execution of these tasks is purely voluntary or must be completed by a certain deadline! You can prioritize and schedule the tasks accordingly. But optional tasks are certainly also relevant for your exam preparation.

• Collaborative creation of learning material: Using Moodle, students can work together on texts, create summaries or infographics, and upload videos. You may be divided into groups or you may have to form groups yourself. Don't forget to check when and how your performance has to be delivered! Feedback on tasks can be given by the lecturers alone, but also peer-to-peer, i.e. you have the task of checking the answers of fellow students and correcting them if necessary.

• Additional learning materials: Lecturers can upload texts in Moodle, provide links and much more. Use the provided material to deepen your knowledge! This will not only please your teachers, who often put a lot of effort into acquiring and providing materials, but will also help you to deepen your understanding of the topic at hand.

You should ensure your learning outcomes - just as you would during normal attendance. How to do this effectively? Through **regular repetition**. Take breaks at regular intervals. Go through your notes and check them. Ask yourself questions and try to answer them. Develop possible exam questions and their sample solutions in study groups, etc.

Do you miss the conversations with your fellow students? Then use the forum and ask your questions there, **arrange small group meetings with fellow students and take an active part in chats and discussions**. This way you will get new input and you can also ask and clarify your questions.



How can I exchange with my fellow students?

Especially now, when we cannot make face-to-face appointments, it is very important to keep in touch with others. This also applies to your fellow students. In the Moodle courses there will be forums for discussion and exchange. If a course does not have such a forum, please ask the instructor to set one up for the course. Through chats and discussion forums you may also be able to find **learning partners or study groups** if you wish. Regular online meetings to clarify questions with each other, e.g. with Zoom or Meet, promote a feeling of togetherness, **help you to assess your learning progress and clarify questions**.

Of course, these meetings do not need to be purely study-related! Also, you might want to make regular appointments with your fellow students for online lunch and coffee breaks to exchange information. This helps you to stay positive in these trying times. Try out different online formats! By the way, there are a few things to keep in mind when using video conferencing. You can find out what these are in this article.

Here are some basic tips for (virtual) learning in groups:

• **Preparation:** Discuss beforehand which topics you want to discuss during your study group meeting. Maybe you can also collect questions so that everyone can already think about them in advance. Since online meetings are often more strenuous than face-to-face contact, a pre-set agenda will help you to avoid unproductive initial discussions and work together in a structured way.

• **Finding a date:** Try to find a date that suits everyone and stick to it regularly, maybe once or twice a week. This way you establish a sense of connection and it is easier for you to get to work.

• **Workplace:** Even when learning in groups, prepare your workplace so that you have easy access to everything you need. If you don't have to constantly look for something or get something to drink, you can concentrate on your tasks.

• **Commitment:** Each of you contributes something to the study group. Whether you have to work on a common exercise in the classroom or voluntarily study together, participate actively and try to contribute your share of the work as much as possible.

As with your courses, be well prepared and try to avoid technical difficulties, on this topic also see *How can I prepare my online courses and avoid technical difficulties?*.



How can I clarify my questions?

You have a question during a lecture? Nothing easier than that: You raise your hand and your instructor answers. Often it doesn't happen that fast with online learning, unless the lecture is live. In this case, **there is often a chat where you can ask questions** which the lecturer then collects and answers. In asynchronous courses, it can take a little longer before you get answers, but even then it is possible to resolve ambiguities. There are several possibilities for this:

- **Question and discussion forums**, e.g. in Moodle courses: There you can ask your questions. These are answered either by fellow students, student assistants or the teachers themselves.
- FAQs: Often questions are collected first and then answered via an FAQ page.
- Group chat consultation: Some lecturers also offer live chat sessions, e.g. via RocketChat.
- Video and telephone consultation: If the instructors offer these, you can make an appointment and ask your questions directly and live, just like in a regular office hour.
- **Email:** You may need to be a little more patient here, but asking instructors questions by email is always an option. Maybe there is even an email address set up just for your course, which is supervised by different people.

In general, try to clarify your questions with the help of your fellow students, maybe in private study groups. You would probably also do this during the normal course of the university and it would relieve your instructors. Also pay attention to whether the instructors require you to ask only certain questions by email or whether some questions are answered in FAQs. You should also make sure that you **ask your questions as clearly, briefly and concisely as possible** so that the instructors can answer them with little effort and without further questions. Furthermore, the same applies to personal contact with instructors and professors: Be friendly and respectful, formulate whole sentences and avoid a tone too causal.



A few final words

Although this always holds true, we would like to pass something very important on to you - especially in challenging times like these:

Please be patient with yourself!

If learning at home doesn't work out the way you want it to from the very beginning, if you have difficulties structuring your day, if a technique doesn't work properly or if you're still in your pyjamas at 4 pm: all of this is ok. It's also okay not to feel great and temporary sluggish. Please always remember that the situation is not easy and that you perform very well when you try to cope with it as best you can.

We hope that we have been able to give you a little more clarity about the semester ahead of you.

If you have any questions, we can recommend the following addresses:

If you have any questions about **learning and studying, please contact us - we are always happy to help**. You can reach us by e-mail at <u>lernkompetenz@prolehre.tum.de</u> and up-to-date information is always available at <u>www.prolehre.tum.de/lernkompetenz</u>.

You can find **current information about your studies, semester times or examinations** on this page: <u>https://www.tum.de/die-tum/aktuelles/coronavirus/studium/</u>.

If you need **information or help from the social and psychosocial sector**, you will find helpful contacts at <u>https://www.tum.de/studium/beratung/</u>.

For first semester students: On <u>https://www.tum.de/en/studies/during-your-studies/welcome/</u> you will find a lot of important information and links concerning your first semester.

We are convinced that - at the latest in retrospect - we can all take something positive with us from the current situation. For example, you probably will be even better able to **plan and regulate your own learning** afterwards - and you will know that you have successfully completed your semester despite everything.

Stay healthy and take care!

Your Study Skills-Team: Ellen, Christine, Nadja and Simone