Making the most of your equipment and connection for learning remotely

Gena Burke - 2020-03-31 - Comments (0) - Desktop Computing and Printing

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This guide helps you make the most of your available hardware and internet connection when learning remotely. We also have a number of additional resources for distance learners in our Remote Learning Preparedness Checklist, and we have help for joining a virtual class with Zoom.

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What will you need?

- Internet connection. Review our tips in the next section to make the most of low-performance connections.
- Up-to-date Internet browser supported by Canvas.
- Webcam (internal on most laptops, external on most desktops) or smartphone.

- Some kind of microphone and speakers.
- A webcam has a built-in room mic, and you can use any available speakers
- Any earbuds/headphones with a mic are also fine, and wired gaming headsets are great.
- If you don't have these, you can use Zoom's 'Call me' feature to use Zoom audio on any landline or cell phone. We recommend using speakerphone if you have it.
- If you have a noisy space or no microphone to use, you can use Zoom chat to send text questions or responses to your class.
- Software to save and open Microsoft Office formats (Word .doc/.docx, Excel .xls/xlsx, and PowerPoint .ppt/.pptx). Brown students have free access to install Microsoft Office 365.
- Courses can also be accessed on tablets and mobile devices, no computer required. If you need to, just about everything in Zoom can work from only a smartphone on a cell connection, including camera, mic, audio, chat, features like 'raise hand' and polls, and watching shared screens. Pinch to 'zoom the Zoom' to see better!

What should I do if my internet connection is slow or unstable?

- 'Have you tried turning it off and on again?' Seriously, it can really help! Work your way from your device to your networking equipment, then back again to your device. Follow this order:
    1. Shut down your computer, tablet, and/or phone
    2. Turn off/remove power from your wifi router
    3. If you have a cable/fiber modem that's separate from your wifi router, turn off/remove power from it.
    4. Wait about 10 seconds for a full shutdown of everything. Sing half of 'Happy Birthday'.
    5. Plug in/turn on your cable/fiber modem, give it a full minute to boot
    6. Plug in/turn on your wifi router if separate, give that another minute to boot

7. Turn on your computer, tablet, and/or smartphone

- Move physically closer to your wifi router if you can. Try to minimize the amount of solid walls and floors between you and your router.

- Don't connect to the Brown VPN unless you need to. Hint: You probably don't. Zoom and RemoteApps, in particular, work best if you don't.

- Quit any unneeded running apps that use the internet (other browsers, remote desktops, etc.)

- Stop network hogs. Think of video streaming on computers or TVs, or online game consoles. This includes your siblings or housemates, unless of course they're also learning or working.

What should I do if I don't have an internet connection at home?

- Set up your phone to be a wireless hotspot. Many providers are relaxing their policies and offering lower cost options to help people stay connected. The Graduate School has created an additional guide for consumer services that is helpful.

- If you are having technical issues that you want to run by an IT Pro, reach out to the Service Center. We may have even more options for you based on your circumstances.

- If you have choppy audio in Zoom from your computer, you can 'Leave Audio' and then use 'Call Me' to switch your audio to any smartphone, feature phone, or landline.

- You can conserve bandwidth in Zoom by turning off your camera.

- Check your internet speeds on Google and make sure that they're close to what your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is selling you. Contact your ISP if necessary.

How can I get my computer running better?

- Apply any operating system updates (macOS and Windows).

- Update any other software. Check our Software Catalog for new versions, and run any built-in updating tools in the software itself.

- Close any unneeded browser tabs, they hog memory. We like the browser extension

OneTab to help control your tabs.

- Refer to our Field Medic's Guide to Fixing your Own Computer for maximum performance, no matter how new or old it is.

Maybe it's my Brown account that is the problem?

- If you are having issues with logging in to a Brown website, test your credentials at myaccount.brown.edu. If you are unable to login in there, try accessing the application in an incognito/private browser window or resetting your password.

- Can't seem to figure out how to reset or just want to verify that it isn't a known issue? Contact the IT Service Center.

Could the problem be an outage at Brown?

- If your computer seems fine but the Brown applications you are using (like Canvas, RemoteApp or VPN) aren't working, then it might be us, not you.

- Check for known outages by visiting Brown's Alerts page.

- Contact us if you need to report any problems.

What about VPN?
You probably don't need VPN! But you can learn more from these guides to make the most of it.

- Get Started with Brown's VPN (Virtual Private Network)

- Troubleshoot VPN Connectivity Issues

What should I do if my laptop breaks?

- If you have access to one, you can use an iPad, tablet or smartphone temporarily until a replacement or a loaner can be secured.

- If you're feeling technically fearless (you can do it!), refer to our Field Medic's Guide to Fixing your Own Computer

- If only need to use Canvas, Banner, Zoom, Office365 online, and other web apps, a

ChromeBook can be an affordable, effective device for remote learning.
ChromeBooks can be found at low cost from a number of manufacturers.

Is there any help available if I'm still on campus?

- Please email cis-loaners@brown.edu and tell us what sort of problem you're having with your equipment. Include any steps you have taken to troubleshoot to determine that it’s broken. We'll see what we can do.