

VIRTUAL WORK IS HERE:

A GUIDE FOR
YOUTH



CANADIAN COUNCIL
FOR YOUTH
PROSPERITY

CONSEIL CANADIEN
POUR LA REUSSITE
DES JEUNES



TAMARACK
INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR YOUTH PROSPERITY

The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity is a non-profit organization supporting youth workforce development in Canada. We are a cross-sector, collaborative table of highly-skilled community and corporate leaders improving the sector through engagement, coordinated activities, research, and advocacy.

ABOUT THE TAMARACK INSTITUTE

The Tamarack Institute develops and supports collaborative strategies that engage citizens and institutions to solve major community issues. When we are effective in strengthening community capacity to engage citizens, lead collaboratively, deepen community and reduce poverty, our work contributes to the building of peace and a more equitable society.



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VIRTUAL WORK IS HERE: A GUIDE FOR YOUTH

2020

In March 2020, the youth unemployment rate in Canada soared to **16.8 per cent**—the highest it's been this century. With fewer physical job opportunities for youth, and an opportunity for employers to tap into a virtual workforce currently and in the future, the **Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity** and the **Tamarack Institute** have partnered to produce the **Virtual Work is Here: A Guide for Youth**.

The **Virtual Work is Here: A Guide for Youth** defines virtual work as work done outside a primary physical and formal worksite, either from home, in a coffee shop, a co-working space, or elsewhere. The guide aims to provide resources for **youth (ages 15 to 29)** who are currently working virtually, will be in the near future, or those interested in exploring virtual work due to recent changes in the work opportunities available to them. It also provides resources for **employers** who are hiring for virtual positions and manage teams virtually, and **employment service professionals** who are helping youth navigate virtual work positions.

In the guide, youth will find advice about securing and succeeding in virtual positions, including tips from youth who are new or experienced virtual workers, and who were interviewed for the guide. This guide aims to provide support for every step of a virtual career, including:

GUIDE OVERVIEW

Why adjusting to virtual work is important

This section outlines why youth should consider virtual work positions including considerations like more flexibility and freedom.

Tips for hunting for virtual work

Advice that covers everything from tapping into existing networks, to preparing for interviews, to red flags to watch for when considering virtual work opportunities.

Understanding virtual HR practices

How to effectively negotiate employment contracts, what to expect from virtual onboarding, and advice around understanding tax obligations and labour rights.

Tips for first virtual jobs

This section will help youth build a routine that separates their work from their personal life, determine their working style, communicate more effectively, and advocate for themselves.

Creating a Virtual Workspace

Tips and advice for creating a virtual workspace and navigating technical considerations.

Finding Virtual Support

How to find a mentor while working virtually, ask for feedback, and progress in your virtual career.

Resources

A list of virtual work tools, books, podcasts, posts, newsletters, and more aimed at making the transition to virtual work easier.

For Employers

Virtual Work is Here: A Guide for Youth also provides valuable support to employers. Throughout the guide, employers who are considering hiring virtual positions or transitioning to a virtual workforce will find tips about effectively managing employees who are working virtually. Employer advice covers:



**HOW TO
EFFECTIVELY
ONBOARD
VIRTUALLY**



**HOW TO SET
EXPECTATIONS
WITH VIRTUAL
WORK
EMPLOYEES**



**HOW TO
FOSTER
POSITIVE
RELATIONSHIPS
IN VIRTUAL
WORK SETTINGS**



**HOW TO GIVE
VIRTUAL
FEEDBACK TO
YOUTH
EMPLOYEES,
AND MORE**

Virtual Work is Here: A Guide for Youth includes interviews with employers who are new to and some that are experienced in managing a virtual workforce. These interviews will better equip employers new to remote work with the tools they need.

Employment service professionals who are helping youth navigate this period of economic uncertainty can turn to the guide as a valuable resource for equipping youth with the skills and the tools for working virtually. The guide is written to help youth explore their career options, learn successful job strategies, and provide virtual work-specific advice. **Virtual Work is Here: A Guide for Youth** is a user-friendly resource for youth and those seeking to support them in navigating the new world of work across the country.

With opportunities for virtual work on the rise, and a youth workforce vulnerable to economic shifts, this guide is a resource for youth, employers, and employment service professionals currently transitioning to virtual work, as well as those that may consider it in the future or in the long term. It will outline how to ensure success and productivity, mitigate transitions, and support career development while aiming to start a conversation about how to best work virtually.

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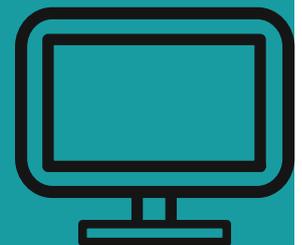
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WHY ADJUSTING TO VIRTUAL WORK IS IMPORTANT TO YOUTH & EMPLOYERS

What is virtual work and what does it mean to work virtually? It could mean working from home, in a cafe, in a shared workspace, or location where you are physically separated from the members of your team. Whereas in the past we might have used conference calls and emails to stay connected when out of the office, today we have access to video conferencing software, instant messaging and a myriad of collaborative tools previously not available - making working virtually easier and more effective. This toolkit seeks to give youth and those that employ them or support them guidance on how to grow within a team, make the best of the skills they build, and navigate a new career with support, all virtually. It also seeks to begin a conversation in the virtual work, mentorship, and career development space.

IF YOU NEED REASONS FOR WHY VIRTUAL WORK SHOULD BE ON YOUR RADAR AS A WORKER AND/OR AN EMPLOYER, HERE ARE SOME TO CONSIDER:

Work-Life Balance:

Eliminating the commute and working with flexible hours could allow many people to apply and take on roles they might not have otherwise. It also allows businesses to better accommodate different working styles. In a survey of 70 young people, conducted by the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity (CCYP), **50% of respondents** said the aspect of virtual work they most look forward to is not having to commute.

Freedom:

Virtual work gives freedom to workers to live where their lifestyles best fit, freedom to collaborate with teams and partners in other locations, and freedom to employers to go beyond their traditional geographical hiring pool.

Adaptability:

More than ever, we are seeing the ingenuity and capacity of businesses and employers to adapt to working virtually. What if this capability was thought out and planned for? Having the ability for a team to work virtually opens up the possibility of operating without the limitations that often come with being confined to a physical shared workspace.

Technology:

For project-based work, the technology is already here. Recent events have demonstrated that many employers have the capacity and the technology to manage employees' work virtually.



Job

TIPS FOR FINDING VIRTUAL WORK

So, you're interested in the world of virtual work. You may be wondering, "Where do I begin?" This section will fill you in on everything you need to know before you start your job hunt.

APPLYING FOR JOBS ONLINE

Job boards are a great place to look as many of them include virtual work opportunities. Many of these websites are updated daily and include job postings from around the world.

Most job boards allow you to attach a resume to your profile, which allows for a quick application process. However, be sure to read the job posting thoroughly as some postings will request you to apply through a specific email and/or include a cover letter for the position.

Consider making a different copy of your resume geared to each type of position you apply to, in order to best communicate the types of skills and experience an employer may be looking for.

If you're interested in seeing what kinds of jobs are out there, check out some of our recommended job boards for virtual work in the guide's **Virtual Work Resources section**.



'RED FLAGS' IN JOB POSTINGS

While the world of virtual work is full of many fulfilling opportunities for employment, there are some 'employers' who take advantage of virtual communication for criminal purposes. We've compiled a list of some of the things that you should be on the lookout for when applying through job boards.

REQUESTS FOR PAYMENT OR PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Occasionally, you may see a posting that says you'll need to pay for your training or equipment upfront. You may also receive requests to provide an employer with your social insurance number or banking details before you've received an official job offer or contract. It is strongly advised that you stay away from any job posting that asks for your personal information or expects any form of payment in order to be considered for a position.

THE JOB POSTING IS VAGUE OR FILLED WITH ERRORS:

This one can be a bit hard to determine, as we're all prone to making spelling mistakes. But if the job posting seems sloppy or is missing important information, the job posting is likely fake. Legitimate companies take care in how the business is represented online and want to provide detailed information about a job opening in order to find the best fit for the position.

NO ONLINE PRESENCE:

If the job posting seems fishy, you can verify its legitimacy by searching the company's name. Real companies will typically have websites that display its products or services and contact information. You can usually determine if the company is real by locating a company address on Google Maps and finding it in the Better Business Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce. If the results come up short, it's more than likely you're dealing with a scammer.

FIND COMPANY REVIEWS:

Similar to finding a company's online presence, you should also be able to find online company reviews written by former employees. Take a look on **Glassdoor** or **Indeed** to see how employees rate the company and note what they have to say about it. If the reviews are mostly negative, it could be a warning sign that the company is poorly managed or employee morale is low.

Tapping into your networks

Up to **85 per cent** of all jobs are filled via networking. This is because most people tend to conduct business with people they know, like, and trust.

Traditionally, networking takes place during in-person events or one-on-one coffee chats. With virtual work, networking can be done from anywhere in the world. Consider following [shiftworkplace.com](https://www.shiftworkplace.com)'s guide on virtual networking for a job.

QUICK TIPS:

ENTREPRENEURS AND VIRTUAL WORK

When you initially enter the virtual workplace you might not find a full-time position immediately. Starting your own business or selling your services as an independent contractor can provide you with ample work experience and an income source.

Preparing for the Interview

Regardless of how you learn of a virtual opportunity, the next step is to research the company that's offering the role.

When it comes time for your interview, the hiring manager(s) will likely be interested in hearing about why you want to work with them. Review [Indeed.com's tip sheet](#) about what else to do before your interview

QUICK TIPS:

HOW TO DO AN INTERVIEW VIRTUALLY

Make sure you have a quiet space to take the phone or video call. If you don't live alone, let your household members know that you'll need their help to create a calm and distraction-free environment while you complete the interview.

Dress up for the interview as though you were going to meet the interviewer in person. This can help you feel more professional and motivated to represent yourself as best as you can.



Feel free to keep your notes close. Don't be too reliant on these, but do take a glance at them from time to time to make sure you haven't forgotten any key points you want to bring up.

If you're doing the interview over video, make sure you have an appropriate background behind you. Consider having your back to a wall if possible.

UNDERSTANDING

Virtual HUMAN RESOURCE Practices



You've done it! You've secured your first virtual role. Whether this is your first job or not, beginning a virtual job or contract can be significantly different from an in-person job. Here are some tips that can help you begin onboarding:

NEGOTIATING YOUR CONTRACT

When you finally get that long-awaited job offer, it's tempting to sign a contract immediately, without giving it much thought. It's important to recognize that an employment contract doesn't just outline your salary and vacation days—it's a document that will guide your relationship with your employer. Read it thoroughly and ask any questions you have.

Just because you might be new to your career path, doesn't mean you can't negotiate for more money. Don't take on roles you feel are underpaying just for the sake of having work. Chances are, you'll end up regretting taking on the project and will feel like you've undervalued yourself. It's also important to pay attention to probationary clauses and get accommodation commitments in writing.

VIRTUAL ONBOARDING FOR EMPLOYEES

When you're hired for a new job or contract, your first day will typically consist of onboarding—getting familiar with the processes and policies within a company, the logistics required to perform your role, and the in's and out's of navigating your workplace. Getting your bearings in a virtual workplace might take longer or feel different from working in a physical setting. Have patience with yourself and your colleagues, and don't hesitate to ask for clarification, more information, or support that will help you do your job confidently and effectively.

Not all organizations or work opportunities have defined onboarding procedures. If you find yourself in a position that doesn't have much of an onboarding process, be proactive. Communicate your needs on your first day, figure out who you can turn to with questions that will support the success of your work, and ensure you have the logistical tools required to perform your job.

EMPLOYER'S CORNER



Effective virtual onboarding can help shape employees' short- and long-term success. When managing a virtual workforce, it may take a little longer to onboard your new employees. Consider the logistical requirements like the physical equipment your employee needs, whether you must grant access to virtual working tools like company intranet, and what company documents you need to provide to ensure your new virtual worker has the information they need. Depending on the size of your organization, consider assigning a buddy or company mentor to new hires and ensure supervisors are in regular contact with new employees during their first few days or weeks on the job.

PROGRESS....



"I think you can only onboard one person at a time. It has to be very structured. In the past, if someone comes to the office, they can get up-to-speed a bit more informally. You can't do that. I think you need to have, especially for the first week, structured one-on-one sessions and team sessions. You just can't leave people alone. If you're onboarding, you have to give people every resource and structure some sort of social time so they get to know you as a person, which is going to let them relax and be able to be their full self."

- HELEN WALSH, PRESIDENT & FOUNDER,
DIASPORA DIALOGUES



UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND OBLIGATIONS

When working in a virtual setting, you're responsible for understanding, organizing, and managing your needs. It's important to be aware of the following



TRAVEL AND EXPENSES

Determine your company's policy and process on reimbursement or stipends for work-related expenses or travel if your role requires you to pay out-of-pocket expenses to complete a task.



LEARN YOUR LABOUR RIGHTS

The Government of Canada has implemented a number of legislative acts to ensure the rights of employees working within federal jurisdiction in this country including The Canadian Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination and includes The Duty to Accommodate; The Employment Equity Act, which provides equal opportunities to women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and visible minorities; and The Canadian Labour Code, which governs workplace health and safety, employment standards, and industrial relations. Each province has its employment standards, so be sure to familiarize yourself with your rights as an employee and where to go if you need help.



LEARN YOUR TAX OBLIGATIONS

Your tax obligations will vary based on whether you're an employee, a contract worker, or a business owner, so be sure you're clear on them. Consider turning to colleagues, friends in your network who have similar positions, accounts, or online resources to determine your obligations.

Self Employed?

Your filing obligations will require you to catalogue everything from office to marketing to training expenses. Ensure you're familiar with what you can deduct in a calendar year and keep organized to keep filing easier on yourself. For more information, visit the [Government of Canada's guidelines for business expenses](#).

"I buy those cheap collapsible file folders to categorize and store expenses. Most importantly, for entrepreneurs, is to track your time somehow. Even if you pay yourself \$15 an hour, you'll probably run at a loss for a while. Storing that loss can offset income for the years when you are making money."

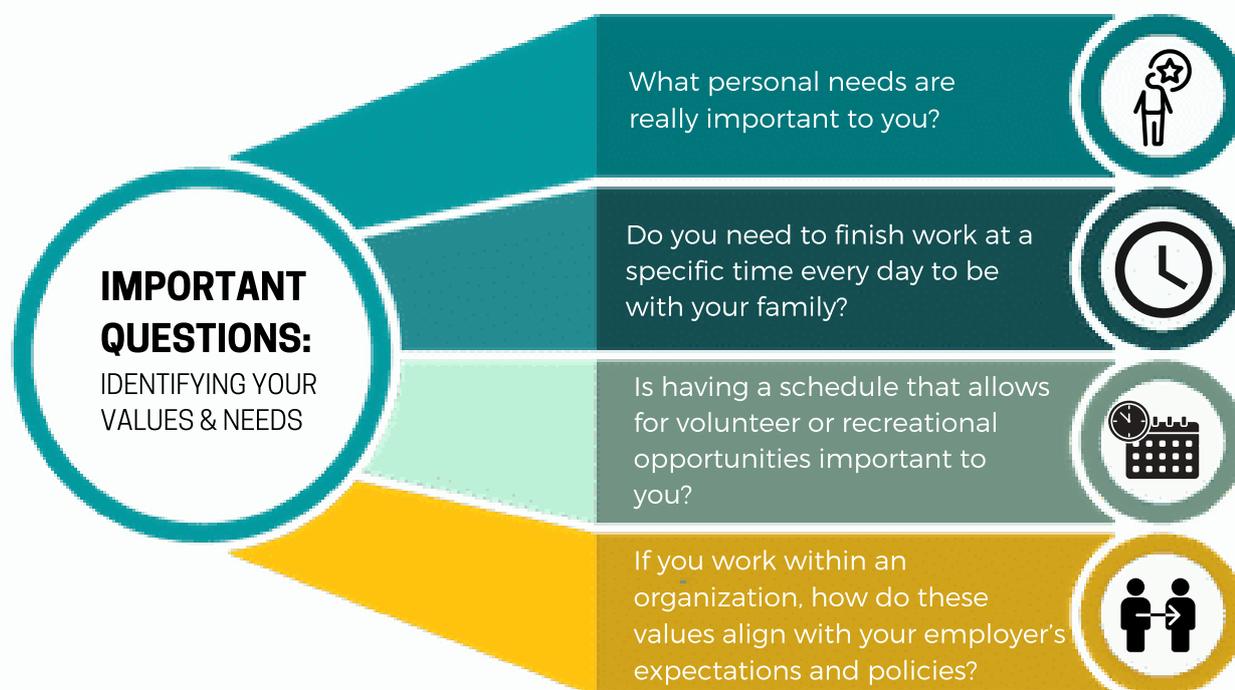
- Rob Inglis, Partner, Bootstrap Design

TIPS FOR YOUR FIRST VIRTUAL JOB

Now that you're comfortable with the onboarding and HR processes of virtual work, it's time to focus on how you can excel in this new job opportunity. Here are some aspects you should consider along with proven strategies to succeed in your first virtual job, provided by virtual workers and employers.

COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

At the start of your career, you might be so focused on making a good impression or giving all of yourself to your job or contract that you end up overlooking or ignoring your personal boundaries. In a survey conducted by the CCYP, over **60 per cent** of youth respondents were concerned about maintaining boundaries. However, it's vital to identify and clearly communicate boundaries with bosses and supervisors. This is even more important when working virtually because the boundaries between work and home have a greater potential for overlap.



Once you've identified your values and needs, you can clearly communicate your virtual work day limits by presenting them in a way beneficial to both you and your role within the organization.

QUICK TIPS: COMMUNICATING YOUR BOUNDARIES

1. NEGOTIATE

If you need more flexible hours, position your request in a way that shows your employer how this boundary will help you be a more efficient employee. Don't be discouraged if you don't get everything you want right away when advocating for yourself, and set a specific date in the future when you can revisit the issue with your employer.

2. CHAMPION

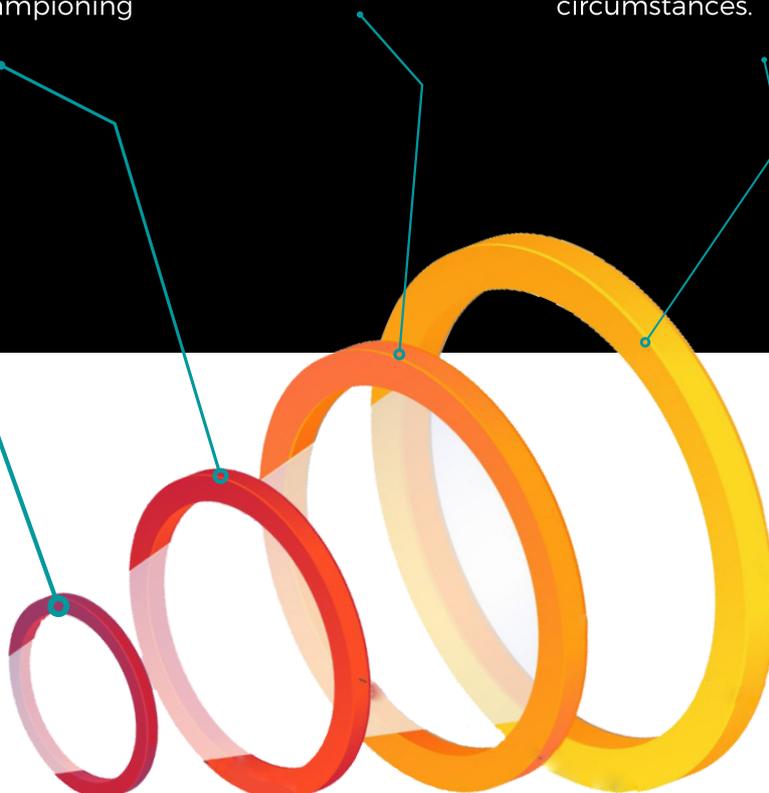
The most important thing to remember when setting boundaries, is that you teach others how to treat you. If you're not happy with how you're being treated in a professional setting, you have the power to change it. We're the only ones who know and are going to look out for our best interests, so we're the ones who have to take the reins when it comes to championing our needs.

3. AFFIRM

Just because you set a boundary doesn't mean it'll always be respected. If you're in a position where you consistently find your boundaries being challenged, communicate your concerns to your direct supervisor in a way that shows them how you'll be a more effective worker when your boundaries are respected.

4. REMEMBER

It might feel difficult to advocate for yourself during COVID-19, when the future seems unclear for both organizations and individuals, but it's just as important to advocate for yourself during stressful and uncertain times. Don't be afraid to ask for things that are going to make you a stronger and more effective worker, or help you cope with anxiety around unusual circumstances.



Ask your employer questions around professional expectations of the position and of working virtually, particularly if you're unclear on any aspects of your responsibilities. Determine the standard around expected response time within your organization, how to best approach someone if you require something immediately, and the preferred tools for communication. Be respectful of existing lines of communication that are set up for a more effective virtual work environment. For example, if your team uses status updates to communicate when they're available, don't expect responses when they're unavailable.



Be proactive and let your colleagues and boss know your optimal communication style, how you prefer to receive feedback, and how you best work.



Given you will not be working in the same physical location as your supervisor, it is important for you to create opportunities for regular check-ins. Consider sending a weekly email to your supervisor to let them know what tasks you've finished, any goals you've accomplished, and what you're on track to complete in the weeks ahead.



You will be building many relationships with people through emails. Check out [Onlinewritingtraining.com](https://www.onlinewritingtraining.com) on using appropriate tone. You may want to consider using **Grammarly's** free tone detector when corresponding as well.



RESOLVING CONFLICT VIRTUALLY

CONFLICT

Let's say a colleague on your virtual work team has been consistently sending you urgent emails at the end of the work day asking for help on their tasks. While you're happy to help, you don't appreciate being asked when you're about to clock out because you feel compelled to stay on.

You've decided that it needs to be addressed.

RESOLUTION

Rather than handling this over email, where meaning and tone can be misconstrued, reach out to schedule a video or phone call with them. Let them know that you're happy to help them (you're on the same team after all!) but you're not able to give them the help they need when the request always comes in at the last minute. Also mention how the issue affects your work hours and the boundaries you have set.

TAKEAWAY

Showing your colleague how this issue affects both of you is a great way to show that you are approaching this resolution with empathy and teamwork in mind. Now you can collaborate on a way to settle this problem in a manner that works for both of you. Whatever the solution is, coming up with it together over an informal call can relieve tension and improve your working relationship.

EMPLOYERS' CORNER:



SETTING EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES



Let your employees know how your team communicates in a virtual work environment and how often to expect messages. Make sure to communicate your expectations for correspondence early on, and ensure your employees are on the same page.



Be patient. Starting a new job is an adjustment under normal circumstances, and doing so virtually can be an even bigger challenge. Once you've clearly communicated your expectations, give your employees some time to learn how to meet them.



Be intentional about setting up regular check in meetings with your employees and let them know when they have met your expectations. This will eliminate guesswork on the employee's part and help them know what standard of work they should strive to meet.



TIPS FOR **SELF-CARE AND VIRTUAL WORK**

ISOLATION

A common concern among those who work virtually is loneliness and isolation. In fact, in the survey conducted by CCYP, this fear of isolation was cited as one of the top concerns for those who work virtually. It makes a lot of sense—you don't always have the same opportunities for connection, it's harder to create friendships within a virtual workforce, and, if you live alone, it's easy to go for days without talking to another human about anything but work. Not interacting with colleagues is the number one concern youth have when it comes to virtual work, according to a survey conducted by the CCYP — with effort, you can mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation.



Engage with your colleagues digitally. Take a little time at the start of each virtual meeting to have small talk to help you feel more connected to your workplace and colleagues, or book a meeting with a colleague to catch up informally about topics outside of work.

Join an online virtual work community. These groups can have members from all over the world who are experienced with virtual work in your industry and are ready and willing to help other community members. These groups may also have social activities and productivity calls to help you feel like a part of a community of like-minded workers.



Rely on your personal network of friends and family members for emotional support during periods of increased anxiety and uncertainty. Take time to maintain your work/life balance and your relationships.

Once social distancing measures ease, you'll be able to meet face-to-face with colleagues and employers (depending on geographic barriers) and find sources of spontaneous engagement, like the social interactions we find in coffee shops or during in-person meetings. There's also the option to transition to co-working spaces, libraries, or campus facilities.



EMPLOYERS' CORNER: SETTING EXPECTATIONS WITH YOUR EMPLOYEE

In virtual work settings, find ways to incorporate casual chit-chat into virtual meetings. Open meetings with icebreakers that allow your employees to connect with each other before getting down to business. Many team-building exercises also lend themselves to virtual spaces such as staff trivia nights, cocktail hours, or even karaoke. As physical work spaces reopen, be mindful of keeping virtual workers in the fold, as their opportunities for connection could diminish.



POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Positive relationships are important for effective virtual collaboration. To promote positive relationships in a virtual workspace, communication is key.

Get to know people on your team or people you work with often and don't limit your interactions to email or text - set up calls or video conferencing as well.

Check in with people on your team when you know they have just finished a project as a way to acknowledge their work.

Practice empathy regularly and treat others how you want to be treated. For example, you wouldn't like it if someone was inconsiderate of your time, so respect others' time.

Keep an open mind and be receptive to feedback while engaging in two-way communication. Don't take negative feedback personally, and instead treat it as an opportunity to get better at your job.

If you don't understand something, get clarification, so you know how to proceed effectively and productively.

Look for opportunities to learn, as learning helps promote professional and personal growth. Share professional responsibilities equitably among your colleagues, but also take responsibility if something isn't working well for you or your team.

Accept that you're going to make mistakes on the job, and when you do, acknowledge your mistakes and learn from them.

DISTRACTIONS, PRODUCTIVITY & MOTIVATION

Let's face it:

there are a lot of distractions to be found at home that can keep you away from work (television, chores, pets, kids, etc). Recreational distractions are the number one concern youth face when it comes to maintaining productivity, according to the survey conducted by the CCYP. When we're in a physical workspace, and we see others working, our brain is more likely to cue us to work as well. Our home environment, on the other hand, is often designed to help us shut off after a long day, which can cause a bit of an internal conflict.



"If you have five minutes to practice some deep breathing, meditation, whatever you want to phrase it, think that is really helpful for having a productive day. If you have nothing going into you, there's nothing that you can give out."

Raquel Russell, Communications Assistant, University of Toronto Scarborough Library

If you struggle with household distractions, try to set up in an area of your home where you can minimize the temptation for procrastination; work away from televisions, messy kitchens, or other household members when possible.

Computers can be a source of distraction. When you're feeling stuck, it's easy to flip to your favourite social media site and fall down an Internet rabbit hole. A great way to overcome online distractions is to incorporate regular breaks into your day. A [2011 study, conducted by the University of Illinois](#), found that brief diversions from a task can dramatically improve your ability to focus on a task for prolonged periods. For example, you might consider working for 25 minutes, and then taking a five-minute break.



"On my laptop, there's an app called Self Control, and you can put in certain websites that it will block you from going to. If you don't want to go on Twitter or Facebook, you can put those in and can set the amount of time that you want [the sites blocked for]."

- Blair Elliott, Communications and Events Associate, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada

Mindfulness training can help cultivate a present-centred, attentive, and nonreactive state of mind. In a [2014 study, researchers from the University of Miami](#) found that students who participated in a seven-week mindfulness training course reported being more accurate in their work and more on-task. If you feel overwhelmed or distracted by your work tasks, take a short break to focus on your breathing and stay in the present moment without letting thoughts and worries about work flood into your thinking.

It might be tempting to try to kickstart your productivity by taking on simple short-term tasks. However, research suggests it's actually more productive to prioritize your most important work.



"I always found that the thing that worked for me in self-employment was having a goal for the end of the day. I would look at what's the one thing I don't want to do today? And do that first...Get that done and out of the way."

- John Smee, Publisher, Bluffs Monitor

If you're a parent working virtually, be sure you know your employer's expectations. Identify your child's routine to build the foundation of your schedule. Split necessary coverage times with other household members, or, people within your larger support network. If you're a single parent, be honest with your employer about your boundaries and turn to your support system if you need help.

QUICK TIPS:

HAVING KIDS AT HOME DURING COVID-19

MODIFYING SCHEDULES DURING COVID-19:

While kids are home from school, you can work in four-hour shifts in which one partner works and the other takes care of the kids, or work in shorter 30-minute to two-hour shifts that rotate among caregivers within the household. Single and non-nuclear families might have to get a little more creative when it comes to childcare (some single parent families are self-isolating together) or be honest with employers about circumstances and limits. If you have an older child, organize virtual playdates or calls with extended family members while you get in some work.



FIND NEW WAYS TO EXPLORE OLD ACTIVITIES:

Try to continue old activities while your family is isolating indoors. Consider moving playdates online, registering your children for free online physical activities, or pooling resources like activity ideas, lesson plans, or schedules with other families.



EMPLOYER'S CORNER



Employers can help support their virtual employees' productivity and motivation by checking in regularly to ensure their staff aren't getting overwhelmed. It's also helpful to be a little more patient, flexible, and understanding during periods of transition to virtual work, as it may take your staff a little time to adjust.

FINDING A BALANCE

Worker burnout is not unique to physical office spaces. virtual workers are just as at risk of burnout. If you're always "on" and answering emails well after business hours, or keep yourself available to jump into work at a moment's notice, you're more likely to struggle with motivation and risk experiencing burnout. This fear of not being able to strike a good work/life balance was also cited as a top concern for youth survey respondents.



Stick to a daily schedule as much as possible and when you're done work for the day, stop working. Sign out of email, turn off your phone, or plan an activity for the end of the day that will ensure a hard stop to professional duties.

Maintaining productivity while working virtually was the number one concern cited by youth in a survey conducted by the CCYP. Create daily goals, develop a routine, limit distractions, and reach out to your team if you need help. Survey respondents cited creating realistic to-do lists and communicating with colleagues about work goals as key ways of remaining productive. During your workday, be sure to take periodic breaks to maintain productivity, eat a well-balanced meal, and stretch your legs.



Everyone has their own preferred methods for working virtually. Some people prefer to get dressed in office attire and groom themselves as though they were going to be in a room of people. Others enjoy the fact that they can dress down. There is no wrong way to work virtually. Rather, the best way to work virtually is the one that makes you the most comfortable and productive.

If you're feeling unmotivated, anxious, stressed, or generally out of sorts during your work day, take a few minutes to reflect on what is causing these emotions to surface. Grab a piece of paper and take at least five minutes to write a plan of how you'll overcome this feeling and complete your daily tasks.



"I would say to not think of [working virtually] as something that has to be done all at once. I think finding a new way each day to kind of shift into working from home and preparing yourself for a different way of work is a good way to navigate that. Don't be too hard on yourself. I think it is important to prepare for the long haul."

CONT...



Over 50% of survey respondents cited physical activity as a key way they recharge during and after the work day. Work can be stressful, and if we don't take the time to disengage that stress from our bodies, we can end up carrying it with us into the following day. Find a physical activity that works for you based on your physical ability and experience level.

"I try to go for a walk every day. Sometimes, even in the middle of the workday. Even if I'm by myself, I just try to go for a walk and listen to music."-

Roohi Sahajpal, Employment Counsellor, Vancouver, B.C.

Organizing the supplies in your work area can help switch your brain into work mode. Thinking ahead and grabbing a glass of water and a snack can also help you feel more comfortable as the work day continues.



Carve out a space in your schedule to focus on the elements of your job that you enjoy and will help you accumulate positive professional experiences (in both the short- and long-term). Take time to celebrate your accomplishments—even in workplaces that don't necessarily take the time for you.

Over half of the youth surveyed by CCYP were concerned about encountering mental health difficulties in virtual work positions. To combat this, focus on doing things that make you feel competent and effective. For example, if you find yourself working on a challenging project and are struggling with motivation or productivity, plan for success. Identify a difficult but possible task to accomplish. Once it's complete, and you're starting to feel more effective, gradually increase the difficulty levels of tasks you take on. Soon, you should start to feel a sense of mastery.



Don't forget to take care of yourself just as you would if you were in a physical workplace: treat illnesses and take time off when you're sick, eat regularly and mindfully throughout the day, and prioritize getting a good night's sleep and regular exercise.

EMPLOYER'S CORNER



Consider positioning yourself as a resource to virtual employees who are struggling with productivity, or identifying a staff member who can fill that role, by fostering open and honest communication about employee challenges.

CREATING YOUR VIRTUAL WORKSPACE

As you're discovering, virtual work offers a lot of flexibility when it comes to working the way you want to, and that flexibility covers your office environment too.



CREATING YOUR OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

While self-isolating, many of us aren't going to be working from optimal office environments. We'll be working from spaces we share with roommates, pets, partners, or family members, which might mean competing for space, quiet, and Internet connection. In a survey conducted by the CCYP, nearly half of all respondents anticipated facing distractions due to roommates or other household members. Here are suggestions to help you work optimally with others while under isolation:



Set clear boundaries around your workday. Inform others when you'll be participating in important meetings or tasks and aren't to be interrupted, and where within your space you'll be working from, while also respecting their schedules and boundaries.

If you have limited space, consider sharing or swapping times in communal areas.

Have conversations around what's expected when it comes to phone etiquette, noise levels, and workday interruptions.

Recognize that the pandemic is placing an added strain on mental health, so we must be conscious of supporting and helping each other through this time.

"What I came to realize in the first two weeks of COVID-19, was that my office space was also a mental space for me. I found it really difficult to do some of the bigger thinking, particularly around how am I running this company right now? I found that my physical office space created a mental space for me to think."

- Spencer Saunders, President, Art & Science
Digital Experience Design

While working virtually in environments that aren't ideal, we might have to get creative with how we set up our office. During self-isolation measures, people around the world are coming up with all sorts of unique ways to cope in the absence of proper office infrastructure including using cabinets, ironing boards, clothes hampers, highchairs, recycling bins, and bathtubs as desks; replacing standing desks with ladders or stacks of books; or working from closets, bathrooms, and cars for privacy.

As isolation measures roll back, working virtually will expand. If your home environment isn't an optimal workspace, consider these alternate settings:

Libraries and local cafes often offer free internet connection and a quiet space to work.

Many urban centres are home to a number of co-working spaces, which are communal working hubs with various rental options depending on your needs. These spaces typically offer amenities like printing services, collaboration opportunities, networking events, and more.

Some universities offer free use of campus facilities to recent graduates and alumni.

Some employers may also offer to cover a portion or the entire rent on a workspace, or provide a stipend toward office expenses. Be sure you are clear on policies around virtual work reimbursement.

QUICK TIPS:

ERGONOMIC VIRTUAL WORK SOLUTIONS

Prop your monitor up to eye-level with books, pans, or boxes to reduce neck strain.

If you find yourself leaning closer to read your screen, make your font bigger.

Take regular breaks to stretch, move around, and stay hydrated.

Keep your knees at 90 degrees while sitting using a footrest (or a DIY version).

Rotate positions regularly if you can. Transition between working from a seated and standing position.

While working from a standing position, wear comfortable shoes that provide you with good support.

Use a pillow to provide more back support.



TECHNOLOGY

Virtual work can offer a lot of freedom but the independence also means you might have to troubleshoot problems on your own without the help of an IT department.

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY ISSUES:

If you're used to working in an office setting, you might find your home office Internet speeds simply don't compare. If it's reasonable for you, consider upgrading your networking tools. Note that some employers may reimburse office expenses, so be clear on those policies.

QUICK TIPS:

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY AND COVID-19

During COVID-19, many of us may experience slower Internet speeds because of how many people are going online. You can hotspot to a smartphone as a back-up option, but keep in mind your data plan limits and overage charges.

BACK-UP STORAGE:

It's very important to have a good data back-up system, and regularly make use of it, in case your computer crashes or dies and you need to access your files.

EMPLOYER'S CORNER:



EMPLOYEE TECH NEEDS

When transitioning to a virtual work environment, consider the hardware and software your employees require. In a survey conducted by the CCYP, 30 per cent of youth respondents felt they only somewhat had the technology necessary to do their jobs. Identify any tech requirements for the position and ensure your employees will have access to the tools they need prior to the first day of work.

Limits: A 2019 Communications Monitoring Report, noted that 89 per cent of Canadian households had access to the internet. However, the Canadian Internet Registry Authority found that those who lived in urban areas in 2019 enjoyed much faster and higher quality Internet experiences. It's important for employers to be mindful of this.

COMMUNICATING TECHNICAL ISSUES:

Occasionally, the Internet will go down and there won't be anything you can do to fix it. Make sure you can communicate what's going on to your team and supervisors. Have an alternate way to contact them, such as a telephone number.

MENTORSHIP & FEEDBACK

IN VIRTUAL WORK



As you've likely gathered by this point, the more support you have in your virtual career, the more likely you're going to succeed, which is why finding a mentor is so important. Below are some tips for finding opportunities for feedback.

LOOKING FOR A MENTOR VIRTUALLY

Looking for a mentor is challenging in any setting, but when you work virtually it can be more daunting because you may not have the same opportunities for spontaneous connection. Having a mentor can be a valuable source of emotional and professional support, a tool for professional growth, and can lead to career opportunities.

Since mentorship is often informal, it can be hard to know where to turn. Begin by identifying your short- and long-term goals. Consider what you want to accomplish professionally in the next three months, in the next year, and the next five years by creating goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

After identifying your goals, look around for people in your industry who have achieved those goals—maybe they have the position or job you want to have in the future. Do your research and note their career paths, whether they're within or outside of your network, and consider scheduling a few informal informational interviews to give you better insight into their roles and responsibilities. If you find yourself underrepresented in your field, look for identity-based networks or organizations to help connect you with a mentor who can speak to your experiences. Don't get discouraged if you don't find the right person immediately; it may take some time.

HOW TO ASK FOR AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK VIRTUALLY

When you work virtually, it's easy to get caught up in being productive, without stopping to ask for feedback about how you can be more effective. In order to improve and grow, feedback—including negative feedback—is vital to your job. If you feel you could benefit from feedback but aren't getting any, ask for a meeting with your supervisor or boss. During the meeting, focus on what you can do better in the future, and give your supervisor multiple opportunities to provide feedback by being specific about the situations you're looking for feedback from. Regularly incorporating opportunities for feedback can also help you communicate to your employer your hopes and goals for your career, which can create opportunities for you to progress.

Note: Opportunities for growth aren't always built into virtual work roles. Your best tool here will be communication; have a frank conversation with your employer about your short- and long-term goals within the organization, how to best set yourself up for success, and your dreams for the future.

EMPLOYER'S CORNER:

HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK VIRTUALLY TO YOUTH EMPLOYEES



With the shift to virtual work during COVID-19, and the potential for it to continue, employers have to build new communication practices to reinforce a positive and healthy workplace. According to youth survey respondents, good communication is the most important element of creating positive virtual work culture. Giving feedback to new virtual employees is integral to staff productivity, success, and satisfaction.

Keep your feedback timely and relevant, as issues can escalate if they're not addressed immediately. Before you give feedback, check in on your employee to see how they're doing and what they're working on to understand their mindset. Feedback can often be delivered more successfully if it includes appreciation and a clear desired outcome. For example, you might start by complimenting your employee's creative skills, while expressing a desire to help them improve their communication skills so their ideas are better understood. Be specific around your expectations and be supportive of your employees' self-leadership skills by asking open-ended questions like, "How can I help?" or "What do you need?"

"If you're communicating either on the phone or on Zoom, or even more so if you're communicating in writing, I think you need to come to that conversation having thought things out because you don't know how the other person is going to react—and I don't mean that in a negative or positive way—either way, you have to have thought through the parameters of what you're about to say, the impact it might have on the other person. You need to do that in advance of the conversation, whereas when you're in a one-in-one conversation, there's much more give and take." - **Helen Walsh, President & Founder, Diaspora Dialogues**



Conclusion

THANK YOU FOR READING **VIRTUAL WORK IS HERE: A GUIDE FOR YOUTH.**

We hope that youth feel more equipped with the tools they need to navigate virtual work opportunities, that employers are more open to hiring virtual workers, and employment service professionals feel they can support youth during this time of rapid economic transition. Virtual work offers a world of flexibility and opportunity, and it's been an honour to help start a conversation around it.

VIRTUAL WORK RESOURCES

DISCLAIMER: CCYP and Tamarack do not specifically endorse any of the tools in this list. These are tools recommended by interviewees, survey respondents and focus group participants and found through research. They are compiled for the benefit of the reader but should not be considered exhaustive.

WEB ARTICLES

BACKGROUND READING:

[COVID19: Working remotely](#)

by the Government of Canada

[Rights in the Workplace](#)

by the Government of Canada

GOAL-SETTING AND MENTORSHIP:

[S.M.A.R.T goals tip sheet](#)

by NPR

HOME OFFICE TIPS:

[The Buy-Nothing Home Office](#)

by NYTimes

[The Tech Headaches of Working From Home and How to Remedy Them](#)

by NYTimes

[WFH with a Roommate or Loved One? 5 Ways to Avoid Killing Each Other](#)

by the LATimes

[A Guide For Working \(From Home\) Parents](#)

by Harvard Business Review

MENTAL HEALTH TIPS:

[Three Tips to Avoid WFH Burnout](#)

by Harvard Business Review

[Coping with Stress and Anxiety During COVID-19](#)

by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health



BOOKS

BACKGROUND READING:

Remote: Office Not Required

by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson

Outliers: The Story of Success

by Malcolm Gladwell

Dare to Lead

by Brené Brown

7 Habits of Highly Effective People

by Stephen R. Covey

How to Do Nothing

by Jenny O'Dell

BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

How to Win Friends and Influence People

by Dale Carnegie

PRODUCTIVITY AND MOTIVATION:

Atomic Habits

by James Clear

Thinking Fast and Slow

by Daniel Kahneman

MENTAL HEALTH:

The Mindful Way through Anxiety

by Susan M. Orsillo and Lizabeth Roemer

Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise

by Thich Nhat Hanh



NEWSLETTERS

[Remotely Inclined](#)

[Yonder](#)

[Daily Remote](#)

VIRTUAL JOB BOARDS

[We Work Remotely](#)

[Remote.co](#)

[FlexJobs](#)

[Remoters](#)

[Remote](#)

[Indeed Canada](#)

[Monster](#)

[Workopolis](#)

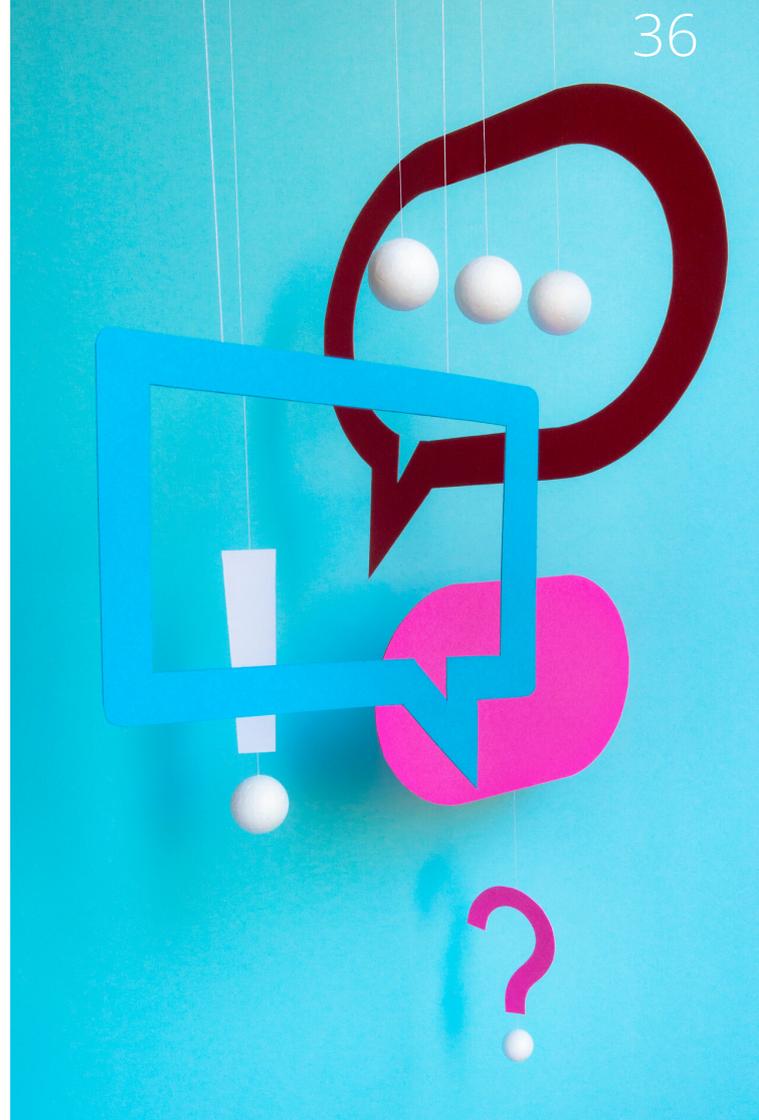
PODCASTS

[How's Work](#) by Gimlet Media

[WorkLife with Adam Grant](#) by TED

[How I Built This](#) by NPR

[WFH Daily](#) by Lower Street



VIDEOS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

[Why Working From Home is Good for Business](#)

by TED

[This is the Side Hustle Revolution](#)

by TED

INTERVIEWING:

[How to Prepare for Video Interviews](#)

by Work It Daily

[How to Look Good in Skype Interviews](#)

by NTDTrainingVideos

COMMUNICATION:

[The Secret to Giving Great Feedback](#)

by TED

[How to Collaborate Effectively If Your Team Is Remote](#)

by Harvard Business Review

PRODUCTIVITY:

[Working From Home Tips](#)

by HuffPost

[How to Actually Work When You're Working From Home](#)

by Harvard Business Review

[How to Make Faster Decisions](#)

by TED

[How Burnout Makes Us Less Creative](#)

by TED

MENTAL HEALTH:

[How to Embrace Emotions at Work](#)

by TED

[Why You Should Bring Your Whole Self to Work](#)

by TED



VIRTUAL TECH TOOLS

COMMUNICATION:

[Zoom](#)

Surely everyone has had the opportunity to Zoom by now but, in case you haven't, Zoom is a tool you can use to video conference, conduct virtual meetings, and group chat.

[Slack](#)

Slack is a chat room for your organization designed to limit internal emails. Its workspace allows you to organize communication by channels for group discussions, or private messages. You can share information, files, and install add-ons like SurveyMonkey.

[Google Drive](#)

Google Drive is a cloud-based file storage and synchronization platform that enables remote teams to collaborate seamlessly through Google Docs, Google Spreadsheets, Google Slides, and more.

[Trello](#)

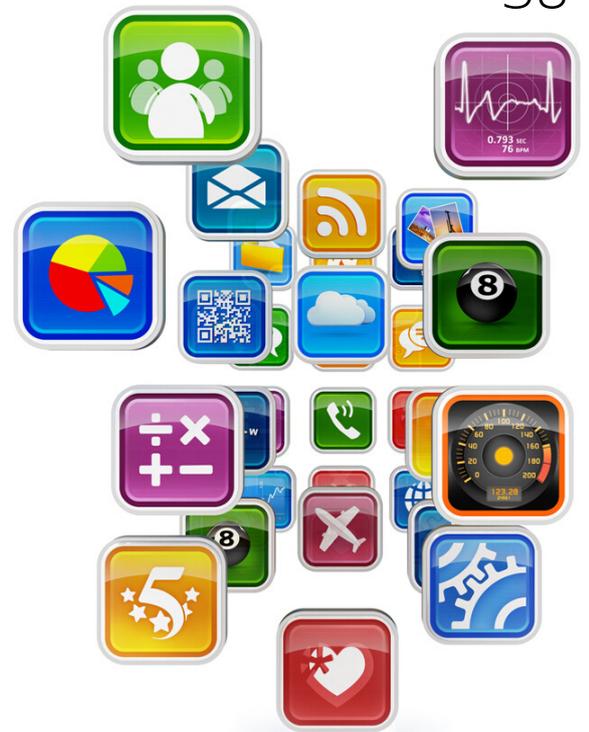
Trello is a tool for project management that is similar to a collaborative online corkboard. Use it to organize tasks, notes, projects, shared files, and anything else that helps your team collaborate.

[Microsoft Teams](#)

Microsoft Teams is a remote work tool that combines file storage, chat features, video meetings, and app integration.

[Grammarly](#)

Grammarly is a browser add-on that helps improve your writing style. The free version offers basic writing corrections, while its paid option offers advanced writing feedback.



PRODUCTIVITY



[SelfControl](#)

SelfControl is a free open-source app for Mac operating systems that lets you block your own access to distracting websites, mail servers, or anything else on the Internet for a set period of time.

[Timezone.io](#)

Timezone.io offers a quick and simple way to schedule meetings with team members around the world. This app can help you remember where and when your team is at any given time, and avoid mixing up timezone conversions.

[MindNode](#)

MindNode is a free visual brainstorming and mind mapping app for Mac and iOS that helps you connect your thoughts. This app is great for organizing your work projects and breaking down tasks into smaller steps.

[Forest](#)

Forest is a mobile app that helps you stay away from your smartphone while you work. You set an amount of time, and plant a tree. Your tree will grow while you work, but if you leave the app before the timer ends, your tree will die. Forest has teamed up with Trees for the Future, a tree-planting organization to plant real trees whenever a user spends virtual coins.

PLANNING:

[Toggl](#)

Toggl is an app that lets you track time spent on projects (with over 100 app integrations to make tracking easy). This app is useful if you work hourly or on multiple contracts at once.

[Google Calendar](#)

Google Calendar allows you to keep track of your personal schedule and view the schedules of people on your team. This is a great tool to communicate your work boundaries with your team and ensure that meetings aren't scheduled at conflicting times.

SELF-CARE:

[Pomy](#)

Pomy is a focus-timer app for your eye health. It follows the 20-20-20 rule created by optometrists. It encourages you to work distraction-free for 20 minutes, then has you take a 20 second break to rest and refocus your eyes.

[Rootd](#)

Rootd is a panic attack and anxiety relief app available for iOS and Android. It can help you overcome periods of anxiety with mindfulness and visualization tools, as well as statements of affirmation meant to ground you in the present moment.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

[Wave Accounting](#)

Wave is a free invoicing and accounting software for small business owners and freelance workers. This app helps you keep track of payments you're owed and sends automatic reminders to your clients when they become overdue. You can also link it to your business banking account to keep track of expenses.

[GoDaddy](#)

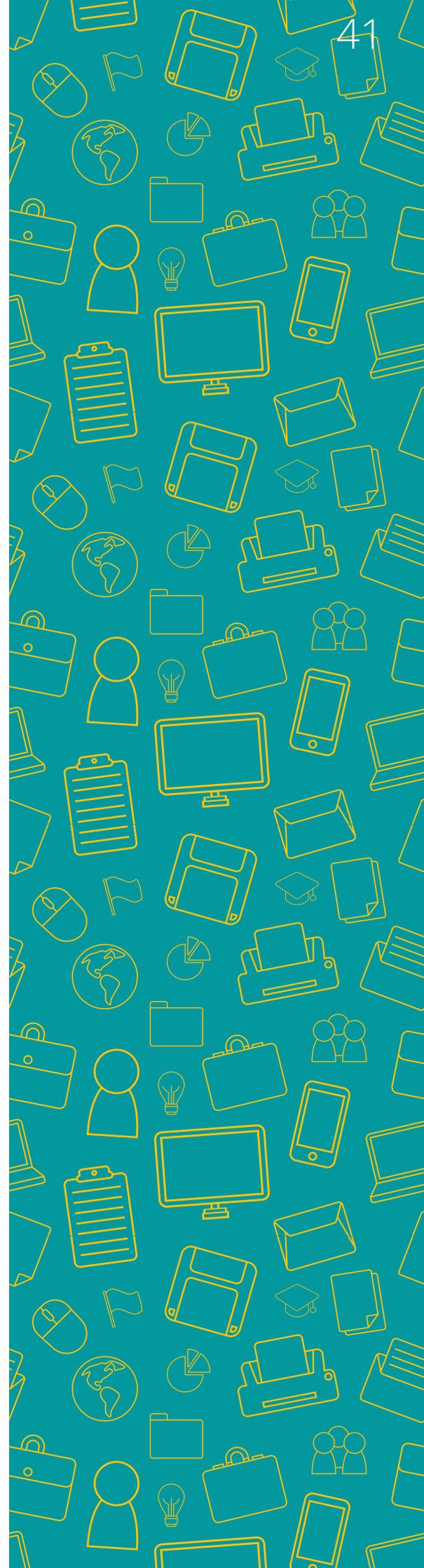
GoDaddy is a domain registrar and website host that can help small business owners set up their online store and secure their business name online.

[Squarespace](#)

Squarespace helps entrepreneurs build powerful and impactful websites. It's easy-to-use CMS, custom price plans based on needs, and flexible templates make website building easy, even for those with limited web development and design skills.

[Canva](#)

Canva is a free graphic design platform that helps you create social media graphics, pitch decks, and other visual content for your brand



ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

[Futurpreneur Canada](#)

A nonprofit that helps aspiring entrepreneurs launch their businesses.

[NEXT Canada](#)

NEXT Canada is a nonprofit dedicated to accelerating the growth trajectory of aspiring and scaling entrepreneurs that offers education, mentorship, and access to funding.

[Startup Canada](#)

A national community of Canadian entrepreneurs that offers digital programming and networking.

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