**South Texas College News Center**

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**Top 5 Tips to Make the Online Learning Experience *Exceptional***

**Support Hotlines Shortcut**

As you navigate online classes, keep these links and support hotlines on hand. Your school is here for you, night and day, during this online adventure.

* **24-7 Blackboard Support:** 956-872-2598
* **Distance Learning Support:** 956-872-2598 or 956-872-2111, or support@southtexascollege.edu
* [**24-7 Online Tutoring**](http://www.southtexascollege.edu/cle/online_tutoring.html)
* [**24-7 Library Chat**](https://refchatter.net/chat/southtexascollege%40chat.refchatter.net?skin=1324)

**For a** **full list of resources and info**, including maps for free Wi-Fi, check out South Texas College’s [**Keep Learning**](https://www.southtexascollege.edu/keep-learning/) page.

**Welcome to Online Learning — It’s Going to Be an *Epic* Adventure**

Before we launch into pro tips for online learning, take a deep breath. *Relax.* The pressure is off because South Texas College has got your back.

**“Nobody expects you to be perfect right now,” says Dean of Distance Learning Dr. Rachel Sale. “We're going to get through it *together.”***

Now more than ever, you’ll find the support, resources and community you need to pursue your education … and even *enjoy* online classes.

“I look at this as a big adventure,” says Sale, invoking the true Jaguar spirit. “I hope we find a way to make this a great collaborative time.”

Calling all Jaguars: If you’re ready for the adventure, read on for the top five South Texas College online learning tips!

**Tip #1: Not Sure Where You Are With *Blackboard*? Check the “Map”**

“If you go into a new town, you get out your Google Maps,” says Sale. And when it comes to learning Blackboard, it’s no different, as there are simple “maps” you can use to learn the territory.

First, every student *automatically* has a Blackboard account and can log in with their regular school username and password.

When you log in, you’ll notice that you're already enrolledin a Blackboard orientation class – your map to success. This orientation is not required, but it’s strongly encouraged, especially if this is your first time using the platform. It will teach you all of the basic tools, including how to use the discussion forum, submit assignments and take quizzes.

Every online class is set up with a standard template, so once you learn your way around one class, you’ll be set for all of your other courses.

***New*** to the [**Keep Learning**](https://www.southtexascollege.edu/keep-learning/) page: [Video on how to log into Blackboard in English](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgkIOJEHb9M) and [how to log into Blackboard in Spanish](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmgSgNXJAtA).

**Get to know Blackboard’s *awesome* key features:**

* **Discussion Forum:** This is the place to ask questions, discuss material and find support from your classmates and teachers.
* **Lectures:** *Blackboard Collaborate* is a video lecture system. If instructors choose to give live lectures, they will be recorded here.
* **Chat:** With *Blackboard Pronto*, it’s easy to have class discussions and connect with classmates.
* **Bulletin Board:** When you first open Blackboard, you’ll see announcements and information about assignments from your instructors.
* **Calendar:** It’s easy to stay organized with Blackboard’s class calendar. If an assignment has a due date, it will automatically pop up here.

**Blackboard App**

For smartphone or tablet users, the Blackboard app makes it easy to access your classes from the palm of your hand. Download the app from the Apple or Android store, and proceed to the login, where you’ll use your regular school username and password. The app includes a series of tutorials to help you navigate.

“Take the time to learn how to go through Blackboard,” advises Sale. “The more familiar it becomes to you, the more confident you become.”

**Tip #2: Know Your Resources … and Ask for Support**

STC has a ton of resources to help students transition to online classes.

“I think the big thing is to accept that looking for help is just a part of being a good student,” says Sale. “It’s *not* a weakness.”

Jaguars are stronger together, and below is a list of places where you can find the support you need at South Texas College.

1. Your professors are totally committed to helping you. If you need support, check your course syllabus for the best way to contact your instructor, or look them up in the [Faculty/Staff Directory](https://staffdir.southtexascollege.edu/).
2. Ask your classmates for help on the Blackboard discussion forums.
3. Blackboard video tutorials, app help, and commonly asked questions are always available on the [Blackboard Help page](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student).
4. Need 24-7 Blackboard support? Call 956-872-2598, day or night.
5. Call Distance Learning Support at 956-872-2598 or 956-872-2111, or email support@southtexascollege.edu. “My staff is manning that helpline,” says Sale. “It is the same people that would help you if you walked into the office.” Sale adds that email is probably the fastest way to get support. STC staff members will get back to you as soon as possible.
6. Assistance is available via Zoom, around the clock, for tutoring and online paper reviews. For more information and to sign up, visit the [Online Tutoring page](https://www.southtexascollege.edu/cle/online_tutoring.html). All STC students begin the semester with *unlimited* appointments with STC tutors and five hours of *24-7* free online tutoring with outside tutors … so dive right in!
7. Electronic books and databases are at your fingertips on the [Distance Learning Library page](https://southtexascollege.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id=_104_1) (click on the “library” tab). There is also a research guide, journal locator, and a 24-7 library chat for help finding resources. Free textbooks, tours and tutorials are *coming soon*.

**Tip #3: Know Where the Free Internet Lives…**

Don’t let a lack of internet access or a spotty connection stand in the way of your education. Know where the free internet is in your town, and don’t be afraid to use it.

**South Texas College students have free Wi-Fi.** If you go to the [Keep Learning page](https://www.southtexascollege.edu/keep-learning/index.html), under the “Technology & Academic Support” tab, you’ll find Wi-Fi maps for STC’s campuses, the City of McAllen, Hidalgo County and more.

“We're going to be adding the maps to each town around here,” says Sale. “So, the Keep Learning page will continue to grow.”

The school has also reached out to every restaurant in the Valley offering free internet, and they have guaranteed that they will make internet available in their parking lots (see maps for specifics).

“People can just come up, grab a soda, and stay in [their] car and work,” says Sale.

Also, several mobile phone companies are offering two free months of hotspots, and Charter Communications (Spectrum Internet) is providing two months of free internet, including free installation and a free modem. Find more info under the “Technology and Academic Support” tab on the [Keep Learning page.](https://www.southtexascollege.edu/keep-learning/index.html)

**Tip #4: Build Online Study Groups**

Study groups are the perfect way to review material, ask questions and stay connected. Plus, it’s hard to procrastinate when you *promised* your friends you’d help them study!

“We’re encouraging students to form study groups using Zoom,” says Sale. It’s easy to make a free account at [zoom.us](http://zoom.us) and start creating study groups where you can work together, record meetings and share screens.

It’s all about building a community where you can look forward to going to school, seeing your friends and interacting with your instructors. Study groups make learning fun, and there are plenty of ways to connect in addition to Zoom, including Google Hangouts, WhatsApp, Facebook groups and conference telephone calls.

**Tip #5: Organize With a Calendar**

“I think probably one of the best things to do is to create your own personal calendar for each week,” says Sale.

Look at everything you have due for the week, and make a plan. If you have two papers due on Friday, don’t wait until Thursday night to start. Block out time throughout the week to write, contact tutors, ask for help, and visit the electronic library to do research.

When it comes to setting up a calendar, South Texas College students have options. You can use the calendar inside of Blackboard, the one embedded in your student email, or the app of your choice.

“Some people are going to go old-school, and they’re going to rip out a piece of paper and create a grid,” says Sale. “Use whatever works for you.”

**You’ve Got This, Jaguars!**

“If you get frustrated, don’t give up,” says Sale, who adds that the College is totally committed to helping you succeed in online classes.

“If you do hit a wall, you have many, many options on this campus to call.”

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