

COVID-19: Remote Work Guidelines for Departments and Supervisors

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Temporary remote work arrangements can be helpful in urgent situations, allowing for continuity of operations. However, suddenly switching employees to remote work with no clear communication, tools, or processes in place can also be challenging for both supervisors and employees.

What is remote work?

A remote work arrangement is an option that allows an employee to work at home or another off-site location, for a specified number of hours per week, month, etc.

Remote work is neither a universal employee right nor a universal employee benefit. Remote work arrangements must be mutually agreed to by the employee and direct supervisor, and must be approved by the appropriate Vice President, and may be discontinued by the University at any time.

Remote work may be used as an option when appropriate to the needs of the department under special circumstances such as a pandemic, natural disaster, or other reason for campus closure. Remote work is not appropriate for all employees and jobs, nor all employees in the same or similar jobs, and should be considered on a case-by case basis (see more specific considerations below). Remote work may be approved on a time-limited basis.

Direct supervisors are responsible for developing a means of evaluating employee work (including hours, for non-exempt employees) and work performance, and holding those working remotely accountable for the output and quality of work expected. Temporary remote work arrangements must be reviewed periodically to determine whether or not the arrangement should continue.

As a supervisor, what are some of the things I should consider?

Supervisors need to determine whether the work that is being done can be accomplished in just an equally or more effective manner by utilization of a remote work arrangement. They should take performance into consideration, the reliability and work styles of their employees, and the constituents who need to be served.

Can hourly employees (non-exempt) work remotely?

Yes, hourly employees can be permitted to work remotely. However, employees and supervisors are still required to comply with all timekeeping and overtime regulations defined by policy. Hourly employees who work remotely are required to be cognizant of these policies and structure their remote work just as they would in a typical workplace. Hourly employees may be managed by results, supervisors must ensure accurate recording of hours worked.

What kind of work may a non-exempt staff member perform remotely?

Remote work is best suited for jobs or tasks that involve reading, writing, research, talking on the phone, and working with data. In general (and at the discretion of supervisors and administration), a job is suited to remote work if some or all of the components can be done off-site without disruption to the flow of work and communication.

Here are some ideas for tasks supervisors might consider appropriate for specific assignment to employees (in addition to the general categories identified above). Remote work should always be directed by supervisors:

- Customer service/response and scheduling: Use tools such as phone twinning and group calendars
- “Back Burner Projects:” Remote work time can be ideal to have your team member tackle delayed projects such as writing manuals or other types of documentation.
- Research: Ask the employee to do benchmarking research on a topic the department is interested in pursuing.
- Planning: Is there planning that needs to occur in your department?
- Data-Crunching: Compile department data to generate reports/metrics.
- Creating instructional or informational modules or videos
- Updating Websites: Review department websites (and other promotional/written materials) for information that needs to be updated.

What types of jobs are not as well suited for remote work?

Employees in positions requiring *in-person* contact/customer service, or that rely upon specific equipment or supplies may not be appropriate candidates for remote work arrangements. Administrative and/or supervisory roles similarly may be excluded from consideration for remote work arrangements if there are employees who cannot work remotely who need to be supervised in person.

What about salaried employees?

Salaried employees are not covered by the overtime and record keeping (e.g. electronic timekeeping) requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Therefore, there is inherent flexibility in work scheduling for those individuals. Even though the law allows this latitude, exempt staff members still need to adhere to the same guidance in establishing what type of work can be done off-site versus on-site. Performance of work can be demonstrated by results.

Managing Employees

Trust is the foundation of a successful remote team, and remote work can even lead to increased productivity. However, remote work during a stressful time is not the same as long-term self-selected remote work. Supervisors need to manage expectations about productivity and start by trusting that every team member is working to the best of their ability during this time.

Supervisors should schedule synchronous conversations with their teams, and one-on-ones as needed, to discuss these expectations and provide opportunities for team members to share updates and concerns.

Communicate News & Decisions

When changes are made to how, when, and where work is getting done, it can be challenging to ensure everyone is kept properly aware of news and any decisions that have been made. Consider how information will flow and what steps may be needed to limit gaps.

Work Space

When working from home or elsewhere, an employee working remotely is responsible for establishing and maintaining an adequate and safe work environment. When working at home or elsewhere, the employee working remotely is responsible for establishing a work environment free of interruptions and distractions that would affect performance.

Children and Other Dependents

Remote workers should not provide primary care during established working hours for children or dependent elders who require a provider's care. Remote work should not be a substitute for ongoing child care needs. In light of COVID-19, employees may use accrued leave time to care for healthy children during school or child care closures. Remote work may occur while dependents are present if their school or child care is closed and alternative care is unavailable, under the following guidelines:

- Missouri Western is not responsible or liable for the health and safety of your dependents while you are working remotely, or for your health and safety while you are delivering care to your dependents. It is up to the employee to determine whether work can be conducted safely.
- If a dependent is ill and requires ongoing attention, employees may need to use accrued leave time away from work, as needed. Employees may also be covered under FMLA, which provides leave to care for a covered family member's illness.
- Supervisors and employees are expected to determine what can reasonably be accomplished while dependents are under the remote employee's care (whether healthy or ill), and the amount of time they expect to be able to work.

Hours of Work

The employee working remotely will agree with the direct supervisor on the number of days and/or hours of remote work allowed each week, and the work schedule that the remote worker will customarily maintain, along with the manner and frequency of communication. The remote worker will agree to be accessible by phone and electronic means during the agreed work schedule. The remote worker is responsible for recording of work and leave in the same manner as at the primary work location.

Computer Equipment and Other Work Resources

The employee working remotely may use a University-provided laptop or other electronic device, software, and peripherals to the extent these have been provided and assigned for the employee's use and the direct supervisor has approved their use off-campus. If University equipment is used, the employee is charged with exercising reasonable care for the equipment and may be held liable for

damage caused by negligence. University equipment should not be used for personal or other purposes beyond any incidental personal use it might receive if in the office.

The employee working remotely will otherwise be required to provide their own computer equipment, software and peripherals. An employee using their own personal equipment for remote work acknowledges and releases the University and relevant department(s) from any and all liability.

Whether the employee is using equipment belonging to the employee or the University, the employee shall comply with all relevant University policies on information, confidentiality, data, copyright, and security of property, etc., as well as all precautions and requirements prescribed by the IT department. .

Expenses

Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are necessary for email and WWW functions and are generally paid for by the employee working remotely. Work-related long-distance telephone (voice) expenses incurred by the employee at home should be reimbursed by the department upon presentation of an itemized copy of the telephone bill. Cell phone usage may be excluded from long distance reimbursements. These and other business expenses must be approved by a departmental supervisor and appropriate Vice President before they are incurred and must have proper documentation to support them before they will be reimbursed.

Confidentiality

Employees are entrusted with certain responsibilities and special privileges related to customer and/or employee information. During the course of performing the job requirements one may have access to information that is “confidential” or “non-public.” Employees are responsible for the appropriate steps to protect confidential information. Any authorized access, modification, manipulation, destruction, or disclosure of confidential information is a violation of MWSU policy.

Wellbeing

Encourage all employees, both remote and on-site, to care for their wellbeing. Employees working remotely should factor their wellbeing into their home office set-up by maintaining good posture, working in comfortable lighting, etc. Encourage employees to leave their workstation for 5 minutes of every hour – this helps circulation, eyesight, and other elements of wellbeing.

Employees who do not typically work remotely may experience challenges adjusting to a different environment, especially if they are accustomed to working very physically. Loneliness is also a common concern. Physical isolation at home combined with a feeling of work loneliness can be challenging for an employee. Use phone calls and video chats to increase interpersonal interaction.

Unplugging from work can be more challenging for remote workers. Encourage employees to unplug when their work is done and to focus on their self and family care.

Tips for Successful Remote Work

Employees who work remotely more often learn that working remotely is different than they expected and that it requires specific skills and habits. The following tips will help you get to work while at home.

- 1. Define your workspace.** It can be easy to sit on the couch with your laptop and expect to get work done. However, we are creatures of habit and most of us are used to lounging with our laptops to read the news, watch TV, play games and video chat. Establishing a workspace - a home office, kitchen table, desk in a guest room - gives your brain a cue that it is time for work and not play.
- 2. Master the basics.**
 - Set up twinning or call forwarding on your office phone. Telephone Services can assist.
 - Learn how to use VPN or other aspects of remote access to the MWSU resources you need. IT Services / Helpdesk can assist.
 - Use Skype, Zoom, and instant messaging options to stay connected with colleagues.
 - Plan for video calls/meetings by making sure you know how to use the technology, and making sure that what appears behind you is appropriate.
- 3. Set daily goals, track them and share your progress.** You may be surprised by how differently the work day passes without the comings and goings of an office to break things up or influence what you do next. Start each day of remote work by writing down what you need to achieve and then track your progress. Pay attention to how long tasks take you and start adjusting your daily goals to match your current rhythm. Communicate with your supervisor and/or colleagues if you think your remote work plan needs to be adjusted.
- 4. Eliminate distractions.** If home is where your heart is then remote work can mean pets, children or a favorite hobby are only a few feet away. Depending on your living arrangement, you may need to hang a “do not disturb” sign and/or set some ground rules so your family members don’t interrupt you. Pets often need a closed door to keep them away and you might need headphones to block the neighborhood noise.
- 5. Prioritize privacy.** Whether you are in your home or a public space, take a few minutes to assess the privacy of your workspace. Can someone standing behind you read your computer screen? Are your windows open so your neighbor can hear your phone call? What information do you need to secure before filling your water bottle or heading to the restroom? Your personal privacy matters too, so see if there is anything around you that you would not want visible during a video conference with your boss.
- 6. Stay connected.** Help those at the office remember that you are present. Many people say they do not call or instant message colleagues who are working remotely because they don’t want to bother them! However, they are working, not vacationing at home! You can even keep your daily coffee run – simply plan to call or video chat with a cup in hand at the time your crew would normally walk to your favorite coffee spot.

- 7. Dress for work.** Dressing casually is definitely a perk of working at home but getting “ready for work” is a daily ritual that many successful remote workers swear by for staying focused and separating work hours from the rest of the day.