

# Using Zoom to Create a **Pomodoro Study Café** for Students

Building Student Engagement  
During Remote Learning

Karen Howell, USC Libraries  
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Hello everyone! I'm excited to share with you a way to create a virtual study environment for students using Zoom and other tech tools.

## Outline

**Purpose** of virtual study environment

**Planning** Pomodoro Study Cafe

**Creating** with Zoom & other tools

**Adapting** to changing environment

I've divided this presentation into four categories: the Purpose of creating a virtual library study environment, Planning a Pomodoro Study Café, Creating it using Zoom & other tools, and Adapting to our ever-changing health and education environment as we go through surges and move from a pandemic toward an endemic.

## I. Purpose

“Physically Restricted,  
Distantly Connected”

Photo Series from  
Daily Trojan



So first, the Purpose of a virtual study environment. Here are some photos from the USC student newspaper in Fall 2020. I saw student postings that they were feeling isolated, unable to focus, experiencing high levels of stress and concerned about mental health. This was the Impetus to focus on creating a virtual study environment, to help provide a virtual sense of connection.

USC Libraries will ...

advance a vibrant, inclusive  
library **environment** for  
intellectual and creative  
achievement

Why would we do this? Our USC Libraries mission statement includes a section on us advancing an **environment** for intellectual and creative achievement.

## Environment vs. event

virtual library study **environment**

**space** to improve focus and reduce stress

build mutual **support** and **community** for scholars

Rather than a one-time event, an environment provides ongoing support and structure designed to foster certain behaviors. The support and structure of the virtual study environment helps students learn by experiencing positive behaviors and building support and a community of scholars among students of all levels.

## Collaborators

A collaboration of USC Libraries, Student Health Keck Medicine, Mindful USC, Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity, Student Affairs Recreational Sports, Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, Phi Kappa Phi

No one does everything by themselves. I collaborated with campus partners to plan the Pomodoro Study Cafe, building upon our prior collaborations on campus for end-of-semester de-stressers during finals (Study On).

## **II. Planning**

### **Pomodoro Study Cafe**

Our cross-campus planning resulted in a virtual library study environment that we called a Pomodoro Study Café.

**pomodoro**  
**STUDY CAFE**

Connect with your fellow Trojans through our **Virtual Study Sessions**

Register at [libguides.usc.edu/uscstudycafe](https://libguides.usc.edu/uscstudycafe)

**\$5 Starbucks Gift Cards are given away every hour!**

**8 - 11 PM PT**  
**Mon - Thurs**  
**1/19 - 5/12**

except holidays and Wellness Days

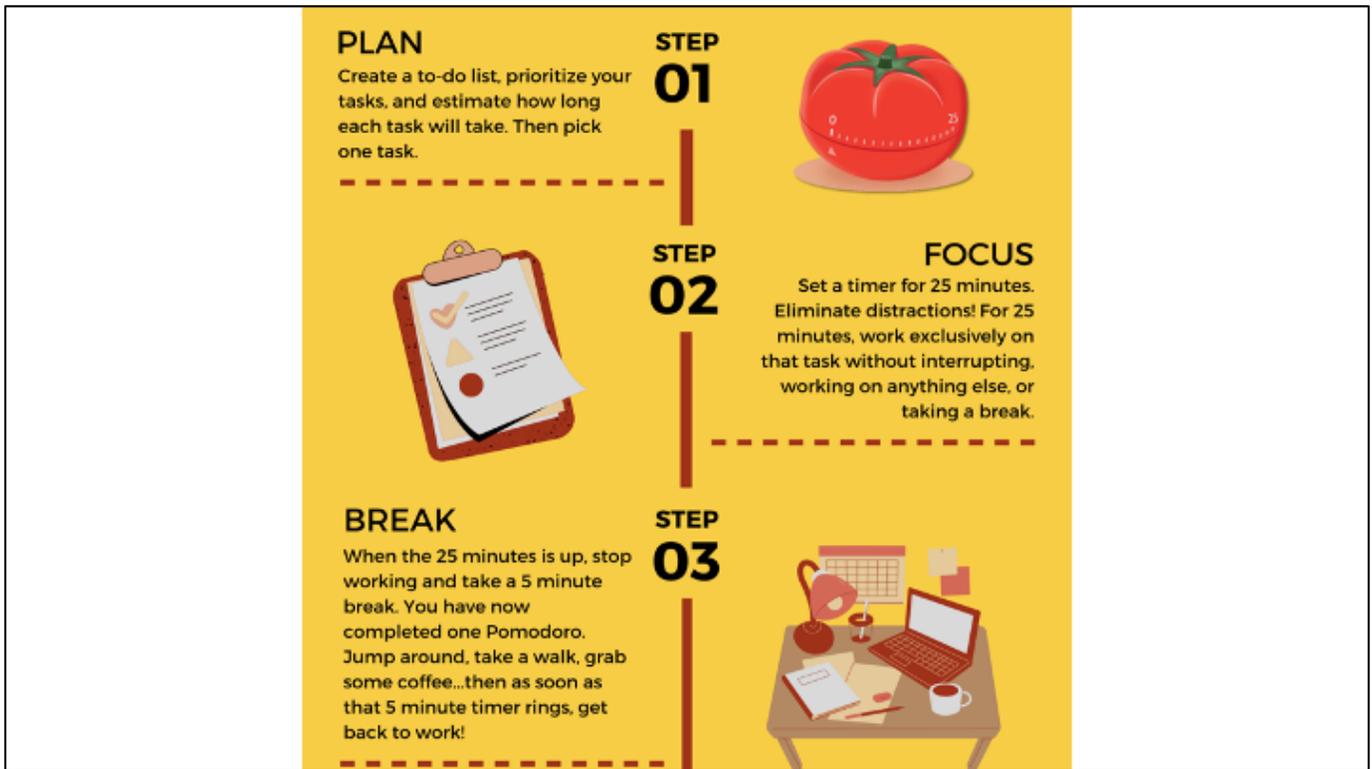
USC

So what is a Pomodoro Study Cafe? I designed the virtual environment based on two concepts. First: mindful study sessions based on the Pomodoro Technique. I'll talk in a moment about the Pomodoro Technique. Second: a virtual cafe where students can gather in a third space - the 1st space is their home and the 2nd space is the university, where they could no longer come and meet with fellow students or us friendly librarians. So the virtual cafe would provide a 3rd space where they could gather with virtual strangers and develop a sense of belonging even when they are not directly interacting with each other. We started with a small pilot program in Fall 2020, and in Spring 2021, we expanded the Pomodoro Study Café to run all semester long, 4 nights a week, Monday through Thursday, 8 to 11 pm.

# Pomodoro Method

The Pomodoro Method is a time-management tool named after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer that was first used to implement it – Pomodoro means "tomato" in Italian.

The Pomodoro Method is a time management system developed by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980s when he was a university student in Italy. He used a kitchen timer to help him go through a sequence of focused work and breaks. Since he was in Italy, his kitchen timer was shaped as an Italian tomato called the Pomodoro.



Here are the 5 steps for the Pomodoro Technique. Step 1 – Pick a task to focus on. Step 2 – Set a timer for 25 minutes and work only on that task. Step 3 – When the timer goes off, reset it for 5 minutes and take a restorative break. This step is crucial for your being able to work with focus, take care of your physical needs, and not burn out.

The infographic is set against a yellow background with a dark red bottom section. It features illustrations of a person in a yoga pose, a person sitting in a chair, and a sequence of coffee cup icons representing work and break cycles.

**STEP 04**

**REPEAT 4X**

Set a timer for another 25 minutes and continue working on the task until finished. Pick another task when done.

**REWARD**

After 4 Pomodoro sessions, take a 15-30 minute break. You've earned it! Repeat as needed.

**STEP 05**

The bottom section contains a sequence of eight coffee cup icons. The first seven are labeled 'WORK 25' and 'TAKE 5' respectively, alternating. The final icon is labeled 'TAKE 30'.

Step 4 – Repeat the 25 minute study, 5 minute break. Each 25/5 is a Pomodoro session. Step 5 – After 4 sessions (or 2 hours), reward yourself with a longer break of 15-30 minutes. To keep things interesting, we raffled off \$5 Starbucks gift cards every hour.

## **BENEFITS OF POMODORO**

Manage distractions by planning your time effectively

Prevent burnout by taking breaks

Decrease stress by focusing on one thing at a time

Feel productive by accomplishing tasks

## **WANT TO TRY IT OUT?**

Visit [libguides.usc.edu/uscstudycafe](http://libguides.usc.edu/uscstudycafe)

Using the Pomodoro Method for the virtual study environment gave students structure and tools to learn positive behaviors by experiencing them. They learned to manage distractions by breaking overwhelming tasks into bite-size pieces 25 minutes at a time. They learned how to prevent burnout by taking self-care breaks. They learned to decrease stress by focusing on one thing at a time. And they felt productive by making progress on their tasks.

## **III. Creating**

# **Pomodoro Study Café with Zoom & other tools**

So let's talk about using Zoom and other tools to create a Pomodoro Study Café.

# Technology Tools Used to Create Pomodoro Study Cafe

## Zoom

- To host sessions
- Communicate using chat

## Smartphone

- Simple timer

## Wheelofnames.com

- Spin the wheel name-picker to choose raffle winners

## Google Form

- Nightly sign-in to enter raffle and see terrible joke of the day

Here is an overview of the tools we used, and in the next few slides I'll give some tips. We used Zoom to host the virtual library study sessions and to communicate with students using chat. To time the 25 minute study sessions and 5 minute breaks, we used the timer built into our phone. To raffle off the \$5 Starbucks gift cards every hour, we used the virtual wheel spinner at wheelofnames. And to collect students' information for the raffle we used a Google Form. Our staff member added an optional question at the end of the sign-in so students could see a terrible joke of the day and this became very popular.

## Zoom tips

- Set up recurring session (watch maximum number of sessions)
- Require registration (protect from Zoombombing)
- Set up alternative host names (in case of electrical or network disruptions)
- Set up chime (only for hosts to hear) when someone joins session
- We encouraged students to turn camera on but did not require; hosts kept their cameras on

Here are some tips on using Zoom to set up the Pomorodo Study Cafe. We set up a recurring sessions so students could add them to their calendars and have automatic reminders. We restricted registration to USC students to avoid Zoombombing. Since we were all working or studying from home, we sometimes had electrical or network disruptions, so we set up alternative hosts so they could keep sessions online if the primary host could not stay connected. We set up a chime that only the hosts could hear when someone joined the session. That enabled us to greet students personally by name when they arrived throughout the evening, To address the tricky question of whether to keep cameras on or off, we encouraged but did not require students to turn on their cameras. The hosts kept their cameras on.

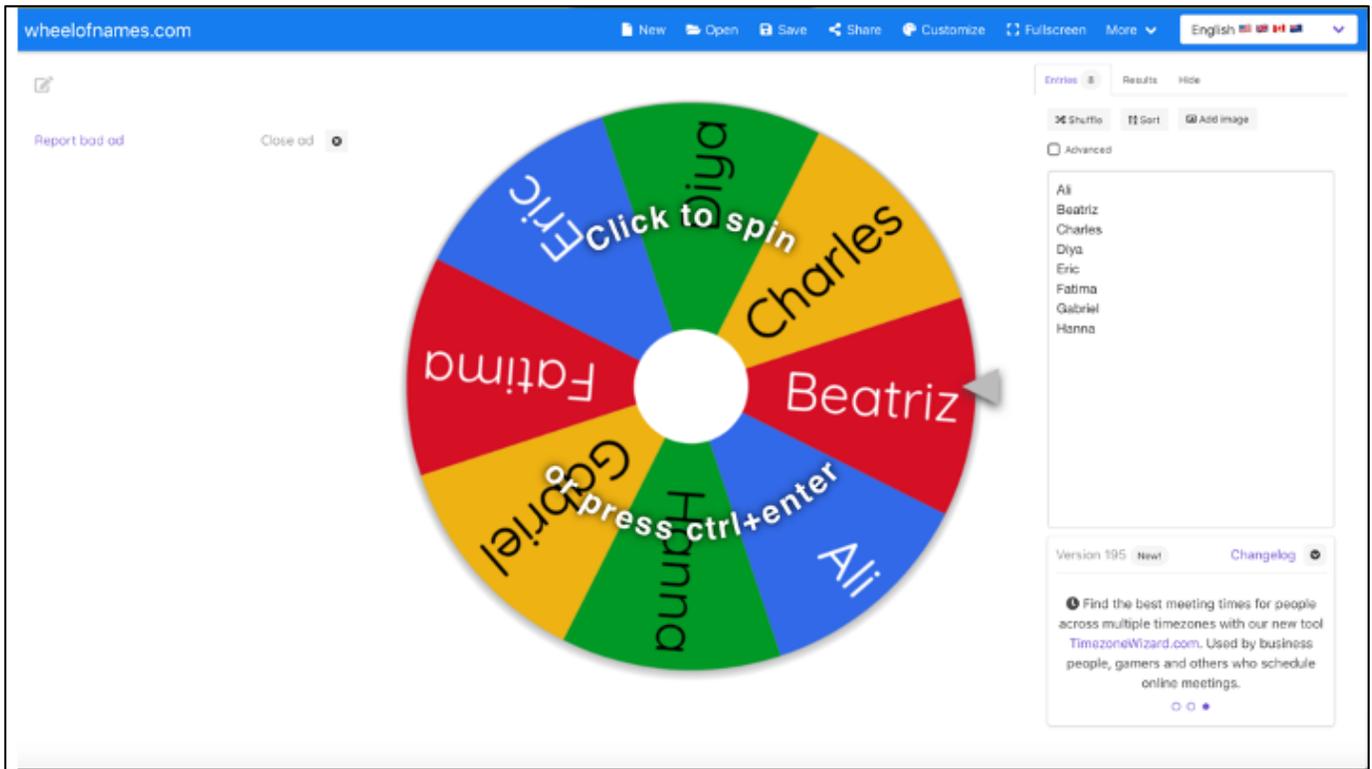
## Timer tips

We chose to use a phone timer to keep things simple

Choose a sound loud enough to hear but not so loud it disturbs others

Listen to student feedback: some sounds are experienced as too grating or squawky

Timer tips. We used the timer on our phone. It took a few tries to learn what sound to use. The sound had to be loud enough for students to hear that the 5- minute break was ending but not so loud it disrupted them when the 25-minute study session was ending. Students were not shy to tell us in the chat about sounds they experienced as too grating or squawky.



Wheelofnames.com is a fun way to make raffles transparent. The host pastes student names into the list on the right side of the screen. The names then show up on the wedges of the circle. Click to spin the wheel and choose the raffle winner.

## Google Form tips

### Google Form used

- for students to enter raffle and
- for us to collect attendance and demographic info for reports

### Students experienced the Google Form as a sign-in sheet

- They wanted the accountability, to show they attended
- They wanted to see the evening's terrible joke of the day, didn't care about the raffle
- Some wanted to see if their joke was selected for that night's terrible joke

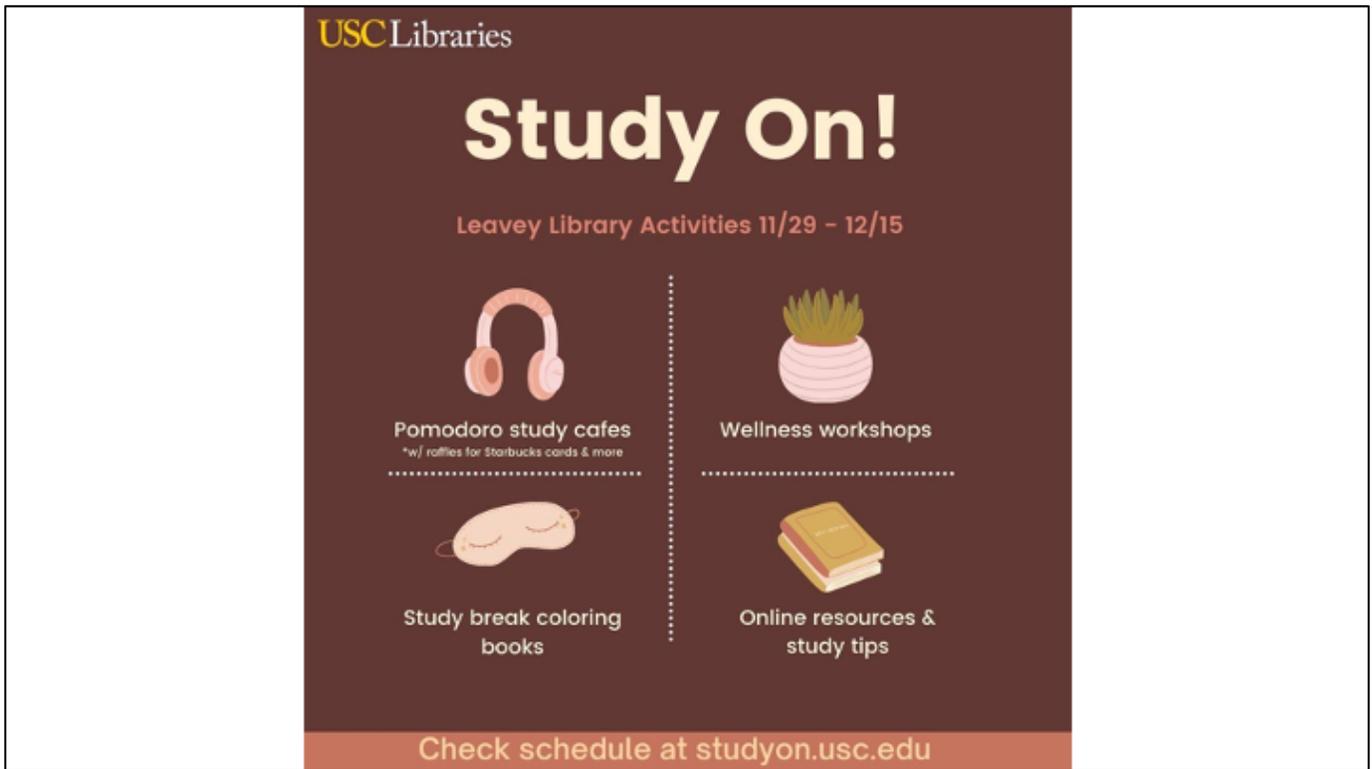
### Set up demographic categories you want for attendance

### Create a new tab for each session

We used a Google Form to collect students names for the raffle, as well as data to generate attendance and demographic reports. Instead of viewing the Google Form as a raffle entry, students started calling it a sign-in sheet, wanting the accountability to show they attended and looking forward to seeing the terrible joke of the day. We set up demographic categories and captured data from each night in a separate tab so we could track attendance over time.

# **IV. Adapting to changing environment**

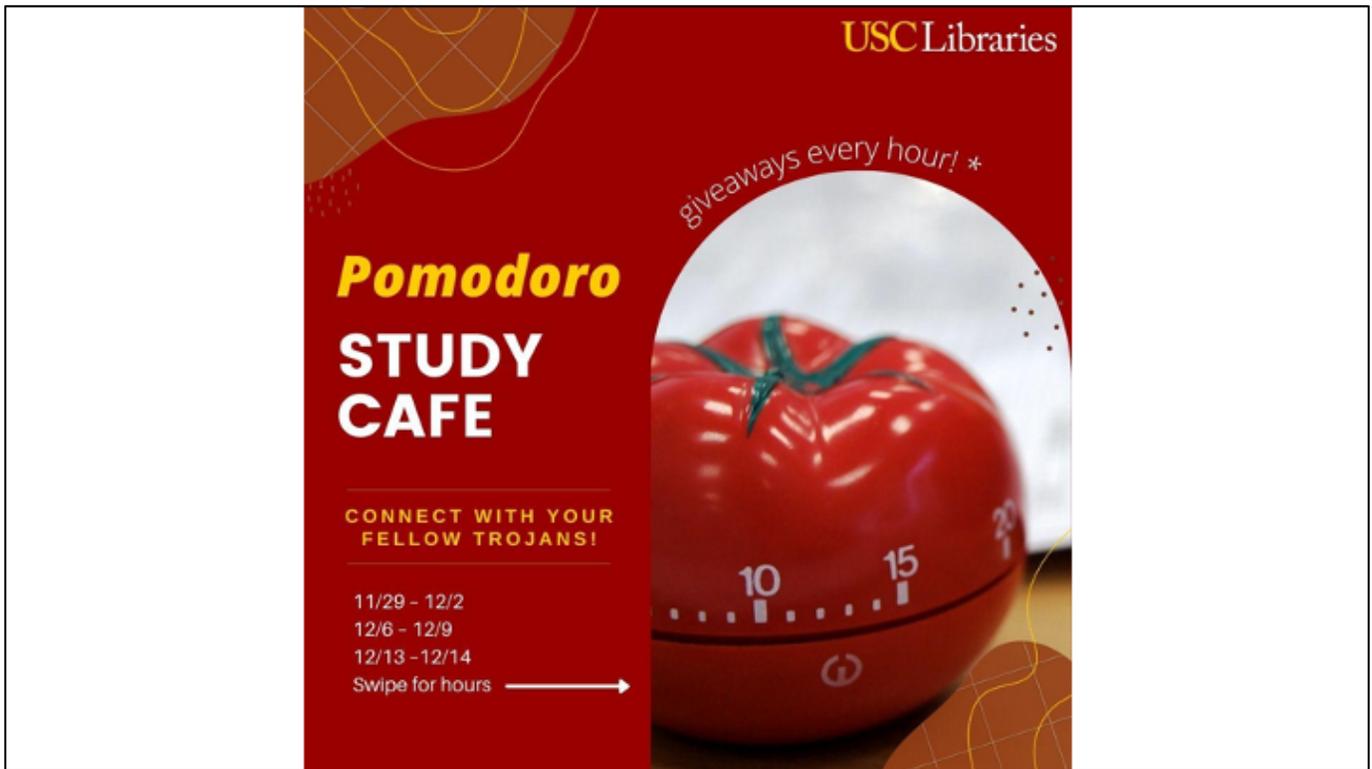
Throughout the pandemic we have continued to adapt to the ever-changing environment. After experiencing an all-remote learning Spring semester we transitioned to an in-person on-campus Fall semester.



In Fall 2021 When students returned to campus:

- Most students were FOC (first-time on campus)
- They wanted to experience the physicality of campus experience and were tired of Zoom
- So:
  - Instead of running a virtual Pomodoro Study Café throughout the semester, we integrated the Café into our in-person end-of-semester Study On de-stresser program
  - Sessions held in physical library classroom
  - Library provided branded physical raffle items (in addition to e-gift coffee cards)
  - Campus partners provided in-person wellness

workshops



But not all of our students were in-person. So for the distance learning students and students on the medical campus on the other side of town, we enhanced our LibGuide of resources with links for Do It Yourself Pomodoro Study sessions and videos of restorative breaks offered by our campus partners. We can now adapt the Pomodoro Study Café format to changing health conditions, whether offering sessions virtually during a surge when classes are remote, or offering in-person sessions with DIY online for distance learning or physically distant students.

**Writing can be a very solitary pursuit yet this community makes it feel more human**

**Thanks for creating and finding funding for the Pomodoro study sessions! I appreciate (as does my chair!) the progress they have fostered in writing my dissertation. One of these days I am going to be Dr. [ ] and your part in facilitating that is not to be underestimated!!!**

We are encouraged by the responses of our attendees. This graduate student wrote about developing self-confidence that she can complete her dissertation, by feeling part of a community of scholars and being accountable to write regularly. We received other similar comments, showing that the library succeeded in advancing an **environment** for intellectual and creative achievement.

Questions?

Karen Howell

[khowell@usc.edu](mailto:khowell@usc.edu)

<https://libguides.usc.edu/uscstudycafe>