

Time Management

Effective time management is about finding ways to complete the tasks that help you reach your goals. Really effective long-term time management, however, is about self-knowledge, and involves spending time reflecting on your own preferences and priorities.

Aims of the leaflet

- Start you thinking about your own time management skills and issues
- Help you start reflecting on your existing responsibilities and commitments
- Suggest effective ideas and strategies for building study into your life

This leaflet is divided into the following sections:

1. Experience and reflection
2. Where to study
3. Useful tools and materials
4. Planning a term or semester
5. Planning a week
6. Making best use of study time

If you would like this leaflet in an alternative format, contact:

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Experience and Reflection

Time Management is not a mechanical formula that you impose on yourself as a kind of punishment, denying yourself TV, nights out and more. A common assumption when returning to study is that you will be able to do everything differently and change all your habits. In fact the best thing to start doing early on is to **build** on those habits, including your likes, dislikes, and energy levels at different times of day.

This section will help you reflect on how you manage time, what your priorities are and how to build in a study schedule that works for you.

Think generally about the things you manage/juggle in your life at the moment (children, work, shopping, study,).

Think about how much you fit into your average day, including time spent on routine tasks, travel, TV, sleep, etc.

Identify times in a week when you might fit in time to study

Reflect on previous study habits:

- What did you enjoy? Find useful?
- What was hard/boring/an effort?
- What helped?

The following reflective exercises are useful for the first week of your course. It takes a while to adapt to new routines and work out how to make study a priority in your life, and reflecting on your life and commitments in general is important. It means you can make realistic changes, based on self-knowledge about what works best for you.

Keep a record, for a week of your course, of how you spend your time – it's worth putting in all the details, truthfully. Make sure you note down:

- Course activities
- Your own study time
- Paid or unpaid employment
- Relaxing/socialising/TV time
- Exercise/recreation/shopping
- Domestic chores/family activities
- Travel
- Sleeping/eating

It's worth doing this as accurately as possible – i.e. if you think you spent two hours reading when in fact half of it went on a phone call, be honest with yourself! Maybe two hours reading is a bit too much, so think about aiming at less.

At the end of this, take time to reflect on the data you end up with, and ask yourself the following questions:

- What times of day/week do I study best?
- Was this a heavy week for study? Why?
- Did I work more effectively at home? In the library? Why?
- Did I relax when I needed to?
- Any particular pressures this week? How did I deal with them?
- What distracts me most? When?
- Do I need quiet? Music? Warm/cool room? Food?
- How often do I need breaks? (Probably more often than you think..)
- Do I work better with others or alone?
- When do I feel energetic/alert? When not?
- Anything I need to change/do differently next week? How?

It really is worth taking time over this. The better your awareness of your own study/time preferences, the easier it is to identify the best times/places in the week to slot in different types of study activity....and when not.

Now think about:

- Things you want to change or do differently
- How effectively you used your study time
- How to cut back on any other involvements which use time
- Any change in priorities – and how to keep time for things you enjoy

Where to study

Finding the ideal space isn't easy. It may be that you use different spaces for different activities.

Questions to consider:

- What kinds of study tasks do I need to do in this space?
- Is there room to write? Space for files/boxes?
- Do I prefer a warm room? Cool?
- Is there good light?
- Noise – what helps? (music?) What doesn't?
- What distractions are there? How to deal with them?
- What's the library like? What kind of study can I get done there? When is it not so good?

Basic tools and materials

Work out more about your own preferences as you go along, but these are useful ideas...and it saves time to have a supply of, say, pens and paper.

- Diary – basic appointment times, lectures, meetings
- Wall planner – for a week, month...whatever suits you. Just a daily 'Things to do' list could be the most useful, so you can tick things off as you go.
- 'Post-it' notes (multi-coloured ones are good) to help note important bits of paper, phone numbers etc
- Pens, paper, small notebook for jotting down ideas, thoughts etc.
- Some kind of filing system, which could range from differently coloured folders to cardboard boxes, one for each topic. Think about your available storage space....some people prefer piles on the floor – Whichever system you use, check you can easily find something. If you can't, you need to think about a better system! It saves a lot of time later on when revising etc.

Planning a term or semester

Check what you need to do – assignment dates, any tests, meetings – over the semester, and mark them in on a basic wall planner. It helps to have an ‘over-view’ of what’s ahead.

Clarify how much time you have for preparing/planning/writing assignments and other tasks in terms of weeks – i.e. six weeks to do an assignment, which means about a week planning and sorting out reading, a week on research work, etc. It depends on the assignment, but it helps to sketch in some large targets for each week.

Don’t forget to put in any appointments, holidays (!) and other dates you need to bear in mind, but don’t put in too much detail at this stage – just give yourself the ‘big picture’ of the term or semester.

Planning a week

This is really building on the self-knowledge you now have about your own study habits and preferences, from the first few exercises in the leaflet.

Once you are clearer about where your time goes, and about your own study preferences and priorities, you can plan a week ahead as you go.

- Use a week planner or diary
- Make a list of what you want to accomplish in the week
- Break tasks down into manageable chunks

Don’t just put down ‘Plan essay’, but think realistically about what planning involvesfinding books, checking notes, thinking about the title, getting to the library etc. Think about how long each of these activities will realistically take, and allow time for each.

- This ‘breaking down’ of tasks is a key time management skill, which you probably use in your everyday life in other ways (like cooking a meal? Planning a journey?) and it applies crucially to study time as well. You can ‘tick off’ each stage of a task as you get it done, which helps you feel more in control and aware of your progress.

Fill out your plan for the week:

- Plan to study at the times when you work most effectively
- Plan other activities so that they complement your study time
- Set aside time each day to review how your work is going
- Be realistic! Use your self-knowledge to plan time effectively.
- After a week, look back on how things have gone – what worked well, what didn't, and why. It takes a while to find study patterns that suit you.
- Be flexible-plans have to change sometimes. Don't feel you have to stick rigidly to your original!
- If you have any panics or worries about time and fitting things in, talk to a tutor and make them aware of how things are going.
- Try and keep reflecting on how things go with your time and making changes.
- Set your own, short-term targets, rather than feel like you are struggling with big dead-lines set by your tutor...it makes a big difference to your confidence and sense of making progress.

Making effective use of study time

Once you have got your week sorted out, and know when you are going to study, it's important to make sure you get the most out of study time itself.

You will develop your own strategies as you go on, but here are some ideas that people use to get themselves going and staying focussed:

- When you sit down to study, wherever it is, and however short the time, make a quick list of what you want to do in the session (read 6 pages, make notes, check two library books for references...)
- Set yourself small, realistic targets for the session, not a big 'dead-line'.
- Decide your time limit – how long you plan to study for..and if you want a break, how long for and when to come back.
- Anticipate distractions – should you switch off your phone? Ignore the door?
- Plan your strategies.
- Spend the first few minutes doing something undemanding, like sorting notes, making headings, getting yourself into the right frame of mind for study
- Recognise your own concentration limits – if you feel tired or distracted, stop and do something else, have a walk, make a drink...
- If you are worried or upset about anything else going on in your life,
- Don't try to force yourself to concentrate on study if you really can't. It's better to talk to a tutor, or fellow student about any issues that are affecting your work, rather than worry on your own
- Give yourself the occasional reward or treat for getting something done – TV break, phonecall etc.

Time-savers

- As well as study time you have scheduled in, it is useful to make best use of odd bits of time, such as bus journeys or time spent waiting for a meeting or appointment. Carry a small notebook around for jotting down notes wherever you are – a twenty-minute bus journey gives you time to think about an essay title, or decide what to do if the library books you want aren't there – and saves wasting time later on.
- You don't have to think about study all the time – but any 'thinking ahead' time is time well spent.
- Talk to fellow students – a short conversation about a lecture you've just been to, or an essay title you're dealing with, can really help you sort out your thoughts – often faster and more effectively than an hour spent thinking on your own
- Get in the habit of sorting and filing lecture notes, reading notes etc as soon as you've done them – that way you can find them easily when you need them instead of spending precious time on a frantic search weeks later.

Add your own ideas here!