



Time management

WHAT IS TIME MANAGEMENT?

Time management refers to effective use of your available time to achieve the necessary outcomes. For students, time management is essential to meet the demands of your chosen course of study in view of the competing demands of work, socialising, family commitments, and other interests which will infringe on your study time. Failure to organise your time effectively can result in high stress levels, overdue assignments, and poor preparation for assignments and examinations.

Time management is about planning. The following sections provide suggestions on how you can plan your time from a short term as well as a long term perspective in order to achieve your study goals and commitments.

LONG TERM TIME MANAGEMENT

At the beginning of the university year it is advisable to pin a year planner near your desk or place of study. Once you have all your course outlines, mark on the planner when the assignments are due, and when examinations are scheduled to take place. It is also important to be aware of how many weeks are in the semester, so that the examination period doesn't creep up on you unexpectedly. Some study advisors recommend that you should draw lines back from assignment and examination dates to a time when you think you should start working towards these commitments. This visual representation of your commitments can be an effective way of making sure you don't neglect a particular subject or assignment task.

WEEKLY TIME MANAGEMENT

Before you can draw up an effective weekly time management schedule, you need to take stock of your current weekly non university commitments. You can draw up your own timetable, or fill in the timetable provided at the end of this unit. Once you have completed this 'non-university' timetable, consider whether you are working too many hours, or enjoying too many leisure activities. However, leisure time is important so don't try and cut this out altogether otherwise your good study intentions won't last long! Then you need to include on your weekly planner your lecture, tutorial and laboratory work times (if applicable), and the time you spend commuting.

Before you allocate study times to your weekly planner, you need to be acquainted with the recommended hours of study you should be doing for each of your subjects. This information is mostly provided in course outlines. Because your study commitments involve tasks which take up different periods of time, it is useful to plan your study times with this in mind. For example, tutorial preparation such as reviewing lecture notes, doing set readings, or completing problems are activities which can be (mostly) completed in one sitting lasting between one and two hours. However, research for an assignment in the form of reading, essay writing and exam preparation requires a more sustained input. This means you need to find "chunks" of time, preferably three hours in duration, in which you can work continuously, allowing you to develop ideas and progress in your assignment work.

OBSTACLES TO STUDY

We all have our particular obstacles that prevent us from study. Some of these obstacles are real ones, such as family commitments or work, while others are more in the form of interruptions. These interruptions can be self generated (procrastinating, journeys to the fridge, etc.), or be caused by others (unexpected visits from friends, constantly ringing telephone, etc.). To deal with these obstacles you need to be resolved and motivated.

ACADEMIC LITERACY

When friends ring for a chat, tell them you'll call back when you have finished your study session. If you live in a busy household with friends or with your family, discuss your study times with them and the need for these time to be available to you and respected. This way you can negotiate mutually suitable times for other commitments so they don't infringe on your study.

It's up to you whether you use your management planner as a guide only, or whether you stick to it religiously. If you are dedicated and know you will make up for lost study time, then you can make some times flexible. If you know you are easily distracted, perhaps it is best that you stick to your timetable.

SETTING PRIORITIES

Some obstacles to study are less tangible things, such as anxiety or writer's block. You may be overwhelmed about the amount of work you have to do. One way to overcome this is to prioritise what you need to do. Pressing things such as assignments due the following week are more urgent than reviewing lecture notes. Some people find making a "to do" list for the evening study session valuable. Put the most pressing things at the top of your list. Ticking off completed tasks can make you feel like you have achieved something, and you have reduced the amount of things which need to be done. You can remake this list for every longer study session. Procrastination is a major obstacle to study, and while sitting down and writing a "to do" list is still postponing getting on with your work, it mostly will lead you in to the main activity of your study session.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, time management is about being responsible for your own learning. Recognising that you need to plan and prioritise your study commitments and other activities is part of being a successful student. The motivation and resolve to follow through your time management arrangements, however, can only come from you.

