

How can I manage my time effectively?

STEP

1

2

'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.'

English proverb

A Reflection

Consider the following statements and state whether you agree/disagree with them.

1. I never have enough time to do everything I want. Agree / Disagree
2. I have trouble meeting my deadlines. Agree / Disagree
3. I spend all my time reading and never have time to write my essays. Agree / Disagree

B Contextualization

The following table contains extracts from the diary of Ming, a first-year undergraduate student. In the table which follows, assess her time-management skills.

Monday Check e-mail (1430–1500) Background reading for essay (1500–1800) Filing (2000–2130)	Thursday Brainstorm/plan essay in café (1500–1600) Write essay (1600–2200) Proofread essay (2330–0200)
Tuesday Talk to Ayumi about her essay (1100–1130) Instant Messenger (1130–1200) Background reading for essay (1200–1800) Meet friends (1900–2130)	Friday Review notes (1100–1200) Plan week ahead [Outlook] and alter as necessary (1200–1230) Lunch (1230–1300) Read (1300–1415)
Wednesday Background reading for essay (0800–1200) Lecture 2 (1300–1500)	Saturday Day off. No work.

Good time management	Poor time management
Saturday has been taken as a day off – it is important to rest.	

c Analysis

Time-management overview

The issue of time management is a critical one to be a successful student. The most important aspect of time management is planning. This section will identify reasons why planning is important and introduce strategies for time management which you can experiment with.

I never have enough time to do everything I want.

Causes:	Explanations/impacts:	Solutions:
You are trying to achieve too much	It is understandable that you want to do as well as possible, but you have to be realistic in your goals. In addition to the 'knowledge' challenge, you have the 'language' challenge.	You must prioritize your workload – focus on the tasks which are (i) most important and (ii) have the closest deadline. Sometimes you must make difficult decisions about how much time you can spend on a particular task.
You are not working efficiently	It is difficult to 'juggle' lots of different tasks, especially if you have not had experience of this before. When you have a lot to do, it can be difficult to know where to start. Sometimes it can feel as if you are not achieving anything.	You need to develop INFORMATION-MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS which can support what you do. Initially, it may take time to get familiar with these systems, but over time they will save you time (see below and Appendix 4, Step 12 for more details).

I have trouble meeting my deadlines.

Causes:	Explanations/impacts:	Solutions:
You are looking at things on a short-term basis	If you only plan your workload over the short term, you will forget your deadlines – the danger is that you will only remember them when it is too late.	You need to plan for the medium and long term as well – plan not only for the day, but for the week, month and course as a whole.

I spend all my time reading and never have time to write my essays.

Causes:	Explanations/Impacts:	Solutions:
You feel that you do not know enough about the subject	It may be that you lack confidence in your own knowledge, and you do not feel you know enough to start writing. But there has to be a point where you stop reading and start writing, otherwise you will not produce anything. Do not be afraid to stop reading.	You need to be more selective and focused in your reading (see Steps 6 and 9). In addition, you should decide how much time you can spend reading for an essay and follow this plan – 40% of the time available should be for reading, 60% for writing.

Top ten tips for managing your time

Tick the tips which relate to you. Examples from part B are used.

1. Be honest about what you do.

Background reading for essay (Mon 1500–1800; Tue 1200–1800; Wed 0800–1200)

‘Spending time in the library’ does not always equate to ‘reading for your essay’.

Progress should be measured by outcomes rather than activities. I need to do this. ☐

2. Work when you know you are most effective.

Filing (Mon 2000–2130) Most people find that working on complex, difficult tasks (e.g., reading a difficult text) is better earlier in the day. Time-intensive but relatively simple tasks (e.g., filing) may be better when your brain is more tired. I need to do this. ☐

3. Work where you know you are most effective.

Brainstorm/plan essay in café (Thu 1500–1600) Some work best in their room, some in cafés. For some people, this may depend on the type of work involved. I need to do this. ☐

4. Change the task when you start to feel bored.

Range of activities (Fri 1100–1415) When a task starts to make you feel tired, do something different. For example, writing an essay when you have no motivation will result in bad writing and you will just have to rewrite it. I need to do this. ☐

5. Be prepared to be flexible.

Plan week ahead [Outlook] and alter as necessary (Fri 1200–1230) You do not have to follow your schedule if it is not working. It is only a guide. I need to do this. ☐

6. Manage your time day by day and also by task.

Brainstorm/plan/write/proofread (Thu all day) TASK MANAGEMENT is important: plan out an individual task, developing a series of mini-deadlines. I need to do this. ☐

7. Involve your friends and colleagues.

Talk to Ayumi about her essay (Tue 1100–1130) It can be useful to involve others. Creating artificial deadlines (e.g., showing a draft to a friend) can help you focus on important tasks.

I need to do this. ☐

8. Do not be distracted.

Check e-mail (Mon 1430–1500); Instant Messenger (Tue 1130–1200) When you are working, work; when you are relaxing, relax. I need to do this. ☐

9. Use electronic calendars.

Plan week ahead [Outlook] and alter as necessary (Fri 1200–1230) Many people find electronic calendars a useful tool for managing schedules. I need to do this. ☐

10. Take time off.

Day off. No work. (Sat all day) It is important to take time off. The brain needs to be refreshed. Being a good student is about quality, not quantity. I need to do this. ☐

D Activation

Answer the following questions to test your understanding of this step.

- Try to answer the questions without referring to part C.

1. Why is it important to plan in the medium and long term as well as the short term?

If you only plan in the short term, you may well forget your deadlines.

2. What two criteria should you use to judge your priorities?

3. Why might it be inefficient to work on the same task for a long period of time?

4. Why is it important to get a balance between working and relaxing?

5. Why should you measure your progress by *outcomes* rather than *activities*?

6. How can you involve friends/colleagues in managing your time?

7. What does 'task management' mean?

8. Why are electronic calendars useful?

E Personalization

■ Ensure that you have checked through the top ten tips outlined in part C and ticked the ones that apply to you.

■ Think back over today, or the last week, and write down what you did and when you did it. It is important to know your current practice before you can consider how to change.

■ Get to know yourself better. Complete the following sentences.

- The time(s) when I work best is/are: _____
- The place(s) where I work best is/are: _____

■ Limit your social use of the Internet and your mobile phone to specific periods of the day. This may help you divide your work/personal time.

F Extension

■ Step 6 presents techniques for you to be more focused in **choosing your source material**.

■ Step 9 provides suggestions on how to **read more effectively**, which will enable better time management.

■ Appendix 4, Step 12 details time-management hyperlinks.