Time Management

Making the most of your time

Time management is about making things happen, rather than having them happen to you!

At University you are expected to be an independent learner; you will need to organise your work (and life!) for yourself. This means you need to be self-disciplined and plan and use your time sensibly. You are likely to have a number of concurrent demands being made upon you by tutors, friends, family and work. This can be quite overwhelming at first and it is all too easy to get swamped by the many commitments you may have. While completing an essay in one course you may be starting one in another, you may be studying for an exam whilst you need to be keeping up with reading for all of your seminar classes and lectures, you may be working or volunteering, and of course you need to have a social life! Succeeding at university is not simply about intelligence, but about using your time sensibly and sticking to a plan. Good time management is a habit that will prove useful not just at University, but also in the future when you venture into the professional workplace. So, how well do you manage your time?

When given a reading list, I am most likely to;

A) Stick it in my bag to look at later
B) Attempt to gather some of the reading but leave the reading until later
C) Highlight the key texts I want and get to the library to read some of them

I am late to meet my friends, I;

A) Make sure I call them to let them know, they’d be worried about where I was
B) Do nothing, I’m always late, they won’t be worried
C) I’d send them a quick text if I was more than 15 mins late

It’s a friend’s birthday today, have you;

A) Sent a card yesterday when I was reminded it was their birthday by FaceBook
B) Birthday?! Oops I completely forgot!
C) Sent a card days ago and arranged to meet up

Your diary is....

A) My lifeline, I have a Filofax
B) In my bag somewhere, I’ll update it later
C) Lost

You have an essay due in next week, are you;

A) Panicking, I haven’t started writing yet and my notes are all over the place!
B) Fairly relaxed, you’ve finished already and are just proof-reading it
C) Nervous, you started work a little late but you should be finished in time

You’re planning a holiday for next summer, is it;

A) Still in the brochures on your bedroom floor - you’ll definitely get it sorted next week
B) All planned and researched online: tickets, insurance, transfers...
C) Lastminute.com all the way!

If you got mostly blue answers - you make an attempt to be organised and are not often left in a panic because you’ve been disorganised - sharpen this skill to enable you to get the most out of your valuable time at university.
If you got mostly pink answers - organisation is not a word you are all that familiar with - make university life easier for yourself by trying to develop this useful skill. Use the advice here and your Transition Diary to help.
If you got mostly green answers - you’re rarely seen without your diary and you know exactly when and where you’ve got to be for the next week. Remember to structure your time wisely and make sure you plan in relaxation as well.
Getting organised: Being organised is about knowing how you want to use your time - planning ahead, knowing what you priorities are, and sticking to your plans are key to good time management.

'To Do' Lists: Get a noticeboard where you can pin up a 'to do' list every day - things to do today and things to do soon - include study, social, and domestic tasks. It is easy to spend a moment each morning thinking about your priorities for the day - You can cross items off the list at the end of the day - it's good to record your progress!

Time Patterns: Look for patterns that suit you. You may prefer to work in the morning or evening, you may work better in short 30 minute bursts, or perhaps you become more engrossed in study as the day goes on. Look for your patterns and work to them - do not force yourself to conform.

Keeping a diary: See 'What's the plan of action?' below.

Mini-goals: As well as organising your time, mini-goals will create a sense of achievement while you study. You should break down larger assignments into smaller tasks - analyse questions, gather reading, read course notes. Break these into even smaller tasks - you must be very specific when planning your time in order to avoid procrastination. Have a start time and stick to it; you must complete the task before you stop studying. Make your mini-goals: specific, measurable, manageable and linked to a larger plan.

Keep good files: Good file keeping will save you lots of time. Label and number notes, keep colour coded files, file notes and handouts as you go along, and keep all your study resources in one place.

Computer organisation: An unorganised computer filing system can be extremely frustrating when you're looking for a piece of work or journal article. Name each file as soon as you open it - doc.1, doc.2 and doc.3 are not easy to navigate - and remember to save your work regularly. When you save your work, use a different file for each draft (Piaget essay 1.doc, Piaget essay 2.doc). Make directory folders for each subject by creating folders and subfolders within them. Check the compatibility of your home computer software with that of the university's.

What's the plan of action? Making a study plan may seem obvious but very few students actually do it; it is also overlooked that a plan should be a complete record of everything you have to do - deadlines, nights out, group study, part time work. Here are some tips for starting a study plan (use your Transition Diary):

- Schedule some free time to use to catch up anything that might have been missed
- Plan in your social events, that way you shouldn't ever feel guilty for taking time off
- Be specific about the task you will take on - which chapters you will read, which question you will analyse, which notes you will review
- Work on your plan week by week - start with a general semester plan, then each week write in the specific details of your tasks
- Write in exactly where, when and with whom each event will take place
- Work backwards - write in your deadlines and work back from there
- Be realistic and start early - none of us can work all day every day and leaving everything to the last minute will cause stress
- If you are a visual learner, get a wall planner so you can see your plan all the time

Organising your space: You should try to have a dedicated space for study so you can keep your study resources together. You should have good light, but sit with your back to the window to avoid distractions. Have a comfortable chair and plenty of surface space - keep it organised by having files and stationary organisers at hand - this will make it a pleasant place to be. Figure out where you study best to do different tasks - you may need complete silence when reading but light music when writing. Work wherever is best for you but create a space with a study ethos so that when you go there your brain knows it's time to study.

Time saving tips:
- Make sure pages of notes are labelled for referencing - put each major point on a new page so when you are writing essays you can shuffle pages as necessary.
- Read only what is relevant when planning an assignment - analyse your question and make a mind map before you do any reading to help.
- Use word limits to focus your study - 1500 word essays will require less energy than 3000 word essays.
- Use travelling time or queueing to think - always carry a small pad or Dictaphone with you to record ideas.
- Use mind maps to 'kick start' the thinking process.
- Always analyse your assignment and do a thorough plan - break the assignment down into manageable chunks and tackle each one as you see fit.

Motivating yourself: There will be times when you may be bored or struggle with work. It is important to maintain motivation during these difficult times of study.

Reflect upon your reasons for study - are you here for your career, social reasons, for your family, an interest in a subject, to prove something to yourself? What are the two most important factors?

Set goals to make study more manageable - see 'mini-goals'.

Celebrate success when you achieve a goal - the bigger the task the larger the reward. Treat yourself to a night out, a slice of cake, an hour on the PlayStation - turn these activities into your rewards and only allow yourself them when you achieve something.

Mark success by keeping a diary or journal; during the difficult times you can read back and see all that you have achieved and learn from your successes.

Attitude is very important when it comes to study. Think of difficulties as challenges that you will overcome, and remember we learn most from success that was hard to achieve. Tackle challenges in three ways: what is the problem, what needs to be done, and how can I do it? Do not be afraid to ask for help - we all need a little push sometimes.