



Managing your Time

This study advice sheet introduces you to the process of planning your learning and organising your time. **Effective time management** is about finding ways to complete the tasks that help you reach your goals.

Time spent planning your learning can greatly benefit your studies on two levels. Firstly, you are more likely to avoid last minute rushes and you will be able to continue to enjoy a wider number of activities if you have a realistic picture of your commitments.

Secondly, if you approach a piece of work in a planned way you are more likely to carry out each stage efficiently and effectively, producing higher quality pieces of work.

Try not to think of time management as something you have to do as a kind of punishment. You don't have to change all your habits just because you are a University student. In fact, you should try to build on your knowledge of yourself and what works for you. For example, are you a 'morning person', someone who is bright and wide-awake and can think more clearly in the early part of the day? Or do you need at least 3 cups of coffee before you can say 'Good Morning'? In which case perhaps you have no trouble studying at midnight! Reflecting on what works best for you is an important part of the learning process. A plan or timetable needs to suit your personal needs. It is pointless spending time and effort on producing a wonderful plan in if it doesn't suit your preferred way of working. You will need to make new routines and work out how to make study a priority in your life while you are working towards your degree but, if you spend time thinking about your life, your commitments and your habits, the changes you make should be more realistic and should work for you.

Key stages in time management include the need to:

- **Be aware**
 - **What broad activities take up your time?**

It will be really helpful to develop an overview of all of your time commitments. You may like to make a list of all of your main activities. This should include your course commitments, such as, attendance at lectures, tutorials, independent study time, planning and writing your assignments. You should also list what activities you do in your spare time, your family commitments, travelling time - and don't forget time for relaxing, shopping, eating, drinking, sleeping and so on.

Consider all of your activities that take up time. Having established such an overview you will find it easier to move on to the next stages of prioritising your workload and drawing up work plans.

- **Be realistic**
 - **How can these activities be broken down into tasks?**

Once you have listed all of your main activities, you might find it helpful to analyse each of them task by task. What will you need to do to fulfil all of your commitments?

For example, when writing an essay you may need to consider a wide range of tasks as follows:

Task analysis: essay writing

Analysing the title

What am I being asked here?

Brainstorming

What do I already know about the subject?

Further reading

How can I fill the gaps in my knowledge?

Essay planning

How can I structure my response?

Prioritising information

What is directly relevant, partially relevant, or simply irrelevant

Writing the first draft

How can I express my ideas in full?

Time for reflection

How do I feel about the draft?

Revising and redrafting

Do I need to explore my ideas in more detail?

Proofreading

How can the presentation be improved?

Preparing for submission

How should I present the final copy?

Evaluating feedback

Where have I done well?

Where can I improve?

Obviously, each of these can be broken down into smaller tasks requiring shorter and shorter amounts of time. Judge for yourself how detailed you want your task analysis to be. If you produce a list of the tasks involved in each of your activities you can assess how long each of them will take and allocate time accordingly.

• **Making plans**

Once you have developed a clear idea of your key activities and their related tasks you can begin to make plans.

Many people find it useful to plan their time on a variety of levels:

- A Long Term Timetable indicating regular and predictable events in your week
- A detailed Week Plan highlighting your workload over a seven day period
- A Daily Diary, deciding first thing in the morning what is to be done that day. Such a list can be checked throughout the day, ticking off those tasks already achieved.



When making your own plans, you may find it useful to consider your regular or timetabled commitments e.g. you can enter the times of your lectures and tutorials.

Identify all such regular commitments and put them into some sort of plan. With a clear picture of these fixed points you can arrange the rest of your activities around them. You can use a diary and/ or calendar, either a printed or electronic version, to enter the information. Or you may find it useful to use the planning sheets available for viewing and downloading from the Loughborough University Library's study skills web pages at:

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/library/skills/planningSheets.html>

• **Action planning**

Action planning is the planning that guides your day-to-day work. It is the process of planning what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and what resources you need to do it.

Once you have written a task sheet, detailing all of the tasks in the order in which they will need to be done, you can develop an action plan by assessing how long each task will take and giving each task (or stage) a deadline for completion.

Action plans can cover a range of time periods from hours to weeks, months or even years! It may seem that it's a lot of effort to make these plans but it will save time in the future. Remember to be realistic about how long things will take you. If you don't allow enough time you may miss your deadlines!

• **Prioritising**

When you are faced with many different demands on your time it is essential that you are able to prioritise your workload. Ask yourself what is the most urgent thing you have to do? Meeting a deadline to hand in your assignment is going to be high on the list of urgent things! There are many different factors affecting individual priorities including:

- Personal motivation / interest
- Oncoming deadlines
- Confidence with the task / skill
- Difficulty of the task

Prioritising your time involves juggling each of these, relating individual tasks to each other and putting these in the wider focus of all your commitments and responsibilities. If you are not confident about the essay or assignment, or are finding it too difficult, it may be more important for you to seek help from your tutor or from other sources of support on the website or in the Library, before you start writing.

Ask such questions as:

- What is urgent?
- What is routine?
- What can be prepared in advance?



In other words, you need to be aware that:

- some things demand immediate attention
- some things can be predicted and routinely planned for
- some things can be prepared in advance

• **Motivation**

A clear focus is important for your motivation, as is some indication of when you will be finishing.

Take real breaks. Leave your work area completely, have a stroll outside, make a cup of coffee.

Avoid being drawn into something on the television or a conversation that you will find difficult to break away from.

Introduce variety so you are not always doing the same activity. Vary the type of task that you are doing.

Tackle tasks that you find uninteresting at the start of a work period. Get them out of the way and reward yourself with more inspiring work.

• **Evaluating your progress**

Finally, you should assess how effectively you are fulfilling all of your commitments at all stages. Once you have developed an initial overview of your activities and tasks you will need to reassess these as priorities and commitments change.

If you have produced an action plan for a project, keep this with you and tick off areas of completed work. Are you ahead of schedule? Are you behind schedule? How can you resolve any difficulties?



Time management checklist

Establish your regular commitments

What will you be doing each week?

Put this information into a weekly plan

Photocopy enough of these to last a term

What broad activities are you involved in?

Study?

Spare time?

Eating, sleeping, shopping?

What tasks are involved?

Break down the major activities into their constituent parts

Establish priorities

What is urgent?

What can be done over time?

What is routine?

Relate tasks to time

What types of tasks are they?

Do they need consecutive time?

Can they be done in small breaks?

Where do you need to be to complete the task?

Make work plans

Plan each week – be prepared, get an overview

Plan each day – be active, use checklists

Stick to these plans

Make sure they're realistic

Try not to develop a backlog

Get motivated

Be focused – always know what you want to achieve

Stay motivated

Introduce variety – don't slog away at one thing

Take real breaks but avoid distractions

Complete tasks

You'll feel better in the end

Reward productivity

You've earned it!

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