

# Time Management

## What is time management?

Time management is the act of controlling your task list in order to do them more effectively, quickly, or to meet a deadline. By actively thinking about what you need to do and when you need to do it by, you can more easily control the long list of tasks you need to undertake. This will often involve prioritising activities and employing particular strategies to organise yourself.

## Dealing with deadlines

As a student it is likely you will have many conflicting demands – College, work, social events and children – whatever the reason, it is important you manage your time effectively, otherwise your deadlines will get closer and you will begin to feel stressed by them. It can be difficult to juggle deadlines as many of them will come at the same point in the year, but by learning to manage your time your deadlines will not seem so stressful.

Time management is a transferable skill; this means that you use it in your everyday life. You may not believe it but you are already an expert in time management. Setting your alarm clock to get out of bed in the morning, making it to the cinema for a screening at a particular time, arriving in time for a doctor's appointment - these are things we all have to do which means everyone is capable of managing their time effectively and meeting College deadlines. Try using some of the techniques you use for other activities, such as using your phone to check information and make it a tool for managing your time more easily. If you've got 15 minutes to spare on the bus, use it to look up information for your essay – that's half an hour a day of study in time that would be otherwise unused! This is an easy and effective way to prioritise your studies.

## Prioritising your tasks

We all have a variety of things which are important to us in life (family, friends, College, work etc.) but we cannot manage all of our responsibilities at the same time. In order to define your goals clearly, try ranking each of the main priorities in your life in order from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). This will help you to decide which goals you need to prioritise in terms of time. Do bear in mind that the order of the list might change based on what you need to achieve at a particular moment in time. However, the list will allow you to devote a realistic amount of time to each priority.

For instance, you may have a very active social life but, because of the amount of time you spend with your friends, your College work is suffering. Once you have realised your College qualification is important to your long term goals, you can prioritise your time effectively. After you have allocated an appropriate amount of time to College work you will not feel guilty about the time you spend with friends. This will reduce your stress levels and offer a better balance in your life. Once you have a list of priorities you can begin organising your day-to-day activities.

## To-do lists

Good time management often begins by thinking about everything you must do in a particular time period. The easiest way to do this is keeping a 'to-do' list which helps you organise tasks depending on how soon they need to be done. This is a very simple and effective way to manage your time.

By making sure you keep a note of your activities and removing them from the list when they are done, you will never feel overwhelmed by your tasks. Remember, there are many ways you can make your to do list – some people like to carry an organiser or notepad, others keep notes on their computers or smartphones. Using technology is a great way to keep track of your to-do list because you always have it with you. Modern devices will allow you to keep all of your appointments and tasks in one place!

This is a very convenient way to stay organised and manage your time because you can set up alarms and alerts to remind you of the items on your list. The important thing is to find a method which suits you and refer to the list every day.

Your to-do list should help you to:

- Focus your mind on important objectives
- Remember to do tasks in a timely fashion
- Order your thoughts
- See the bigger picture
- Save time
- Decide on priorities
- Avoid becoming side-tracked
- Feel more in control
- Keep a record of what you've done

When writing your to-do list remember to include how long each task might take to complete, when your deadlines are and how high up your list of priorities it is. This will help to make sure you complete each activity within the necessary time frame. If you include the task without these extra details you may miss deadlines. The following example is a good way to set out your to-do list:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Psychology report	14 hours	28 <sup>th</sup> March	Short term
Book holiday	2 hours	30 <sup>th</sup> April	Long term
Monthly shopping	2 hours	25 <sup>th</sup> March	Short term
Pick up kids	1 hour	Today (16 <sup>th</sup> March)	Immediate
History revision	8 hours	18 <sup>th</sup> March	Immediate

Once you have your to-do list written you should feel more organised, but one of the difficulties students experience with their College work is procrastination. Everyone finds reasons to put off their College work sometimes but when these reasons become a regular occurrence you might find yourself rushing to get assignments done and that can cause your stress levels to rise. This is just one of many barriers that stops students from completing their work in a timely fashion.

## Barriers to Time Management

### Procrastination

The key to overcoming procrastination, or putting off your work, is to understand why you are doing it and then taking active steps to overcome it. Procrastination is usually caused by ignoring what you should be doing, in favour of something you enjoy more or you feel more comfortable doing.

It is very easy to prioritise the things that you enjoy such as socialising with friends, but this can often restrict how much College work you have time to do. If you do not leave yourself enough time to complete a task it means you will have to rush and it won't be your best work. If one of your priorities is to gain a good mark for your coursework or exams then it is important to devote a realistic amount of time to these tasks.

There are a variety of strategies you can use to stop yourself from procrastinating. A great one is to remind yourself of your end goal. Although the particular assignment you are working on might not seem important at the time, it contributes toward your end result for your course. Gaining a particular grade might allow you to progress on to a university course or get a job you want. By keeping in mind your long term goals you will find the motivation you need to focus on short term ones. You could also allow yourself rewards at the end of each study activity you complete. It could be a chocolate after an hour of revision, or a day trip after submitting a report. Find a method that works for you to keep you motivated.

### Perfectionism

Another barrier that many students face when trying to manage their time is being a perfectionist or perfectionism. This means that the person strives for their work to be flawless and they will usually have incredibly high standards. Whilst this may not seem like an obvious barrier, having very high standards can put you off completing work. Have you ever stopped midway through a task because you felt it was never going to be good enough? Do you find that your attention to detail means you miss deadlines or delay submitting work because you are not happy with it? If your answer is yes to either of these questions it could mean that perfectionism is stopping you from managing your time well.

Perfectionists tend to set themselves unrealistically high standards and they are often very critical of the work they do. While you are learning, and even after you leave education, you will be constantly developing your skills and knowledge. This means that although your work can be excellent it is never going to be perfect. Perfection is impossible to achieve because it is subjective. Each person's interpretation will be different. The best way to manage perfectionism is to stick to your brief. If you have covered all of the points that you need to, you have researched effectively, written carefully and proofread your work, it will reach the required standards. This will stop you from spending too much time worrying about minor details and see your work as part of a bigger picture.

### Undefined goals

Sometimes your College assignments will be broad. This might mean that you are given a general topic to write about rather than specific questions to answer. In these cases it can be difficult to manage your time. You may find you are spending too much time researching, or you are not able to get on with writing because you are unsure how to start. This may be because you do not have a clearly defined goal or objective in mind. When working to such a broad brief you need to plan what your end goal is going to be and exactly what steps you are going to take to get there. It often helps to devise questions that need to be answered. This will give you a direction to start from. By narrowing down the topic you will find it easier to focus and to plan and manage your time more effectively. You can find more advice and guidance on planning, researching and writing your assignments in our Research Skills and Writing Skills guides.

### Stress

Stress can come in many forms but it is always distracting. Sometimes stress from other parts of your life can affect your ability to complete your College work and to manage your time. On other occasions, it is the College work itself that causes the stress. Whatever the reason, it is important that you try to manage your stress. The best place to start is talking to someone. By discussing your fears and worries you will not only share the load, but it may also help you to identify ways to cope. Your tutors will often be sympathetic to your stress but they can't know you are struggling if you don't discuss it with them. It is no good waiting until the last minute to let them know. Tell them in good time and they will be able to help you find ways to work around your stress. If you don't feel comfortable talking to your tutors, talk to someone you do feel comfortable with; this could be a friend, a family member or the Student Services team at College. For more information on stress and how to manage it, see our Stress Management guide.

## Time Management Strategies

Once you have identified what the barriers are to managing your time effectively, you can start employing strategies to combat the problem. As discussed earlier in this guide, keeping a to-do list is a great way to organise yourself on a daily basis, but there are lots of other techniques and strategies to help keep on top of your work and make it seem more achievable.

### Breaking work down into chunks

For most College assignments you will have a lengthy deadline to begin with, a month or even two. That's a lot of time when you think about it as a whole, but what if you were to break your assignment down into chunks?

If, for instance, you have an essay to write, there are various activities you must undertake to get it written and each of these activities takes time.

The following example lists tasks you would carry out when writing an essay with approximate times for each:

- Finding your resources – 4 hours
- Assessing how useful they will be – 2 hours
- Reading them – 8 hours
- Writing your notes – 4 hours
- Writing your essay – 8 hours
- Proofreading your assignment – 2 hours

Using the above example, we can see that writing this essay might take you 28 hours in total. If you think about getting that done alongside all of the other tasks you have to undertake, it may seem difficult to find the time. However, when we look at it over a longer period of time it seems much more manageable.

If you have four weeks until your deadline, that's seven hours per week which isn't much time at all! If we break that down even further and anticipate you will study for one hour a day, you can comfortably achieve your goal in that time. Especially when you consider that the time does not need to be spent in one solid block. For some tasks it could be two periods of 30 minutes or even four 15 minute periods, how much better does that sound than four days of solid working? Not only will you find your stress levels are lower, you will also feel better for having achieved something constructive. Learning how to manage your time effectively can have a very positive effect on your performance at College and also your stress levels.

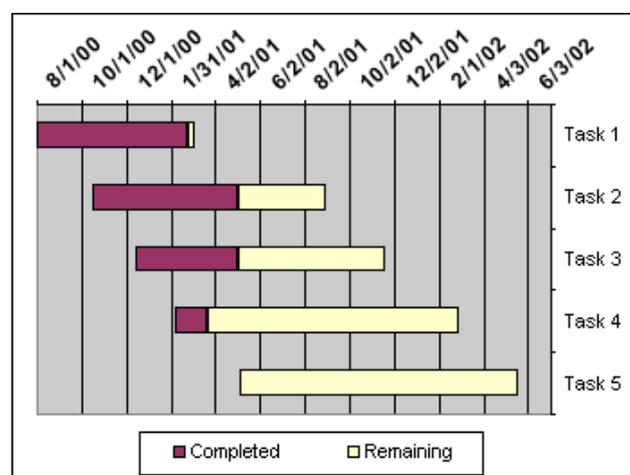
## Timetables

Using a timetable might seem like an obvious solution to managing your time. We are often told to use timetables to plan a revision schedule, but it is equally useful when planning your activities on a week-to-week basis. You might format your timetable like this:

	7 - 9	9 - 11	11 - 1	1 - 3	3 - 5	5 - 7	7 - 9
<b>Mon</b>	Walk dog Washing	Psychology Y203	Essay notes Lunch	History Y207	Dry cleaning Revision	Dinner Type notes	Free time
<b>Tue</b>	Yoga Revision	Sociology Y302	Politics NA 22	Lunch Essay intro	Revision	Meet Joe for dinner	Research project
<b>Wed</b>	Walk dog	Literature review	Literature review	Lunch	Type notes	Body of essay	Body of essay
<b>Thu</b>	Free time	Walk dog	Meet Mum for coffee	Politics Y207	Sociology Y203	Revision	Gig at Duke's
<b>Fri</b>	Revision	Revision	History NAB	Lunch	Psychology NA 22	Free time	Party at John's

## Gantt charts

A Gantt chart is a type of bar chart. It allows you to see, in a visual format, what tasks you need to achieve and when. It illustrates the start and end dates for the whole project and for each component part. This allows you to see where there is overlap between activities, how quickly each task needs to be achieved and how busy you are at any given point in time. It is a great tool for seeing your to-do list in context and for getting an idea of how much of a task you have completed. The following example shows you what a Gantt chart looks like:



You can use Microsoft Excel to create Gantt charts; for more information go to [tinyurl.com/q24qs9z](http://tinyurl.com/q24qs9z)

### Priority matrix

Another useful way to view your to-do list is by using a priority matrix. This allows you to identify how important your tasks are and how to assign deadlines from which to work on individual tasks. A priority matrix is made up of 4 quadrants as in the diagram below:



This is a really useful technique to use in the early stages of planning and organising your time. By identifying whether tasks are important or urgent, you should be able to see quite clearly in which order they need to be achieved. You could even change the titles for the quadrant to 'need', 'don't need' and 'enjoy', 'don't enjoy' to help identify priorities outside of College in your personal life. For more information on using a priority matrix go to [tinyurl.com/onhgapn](http://tinyurl.com/onhgapn)

### And finally...

This guide is intended to provide you with an overview of time management and some of the techniques you can employ to help you manage your own time. Remember that no matter how busy your timetable is you should always take breaks. If your breaks are structured into your time, it will allow you to relax and refresh. You will work more effectively if you take time away from your work. This not only gives you time to rest but also allows your brain the time it needs to process information. You may already have great time management skills but there is always room for improvement. If you feel that you need more support in managing your time, or wish to talk about any of the techniques covered in this guide, ask a member of the Learning Resources team – we are happy to help!

## Top tips

- Take control: Doing something will always make you feel better than doing nothing
- Know your priorities: Understanding how important and urgent each task is will help you to see it in context. This will make time management easier
- Connect with other people: Studying with others will make it easier to stay motivated and stick to your deadlines
- Work smarter, not harder: The quality of your work is what counts, not the quantity. Use good time management and organisational strategies to produce better work in a shorter period of time
- Take regular, structured breaks: By working breaks into your timetable you will not only get the time away that you need but you will also come back to your work with fresh eyes
- Transfer your skills: Use your experiences of time management from your personal life to help drive your time management in your College life