

Time Management

Learning
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What is time management?

Time management is the ability to prioritise commitments and everyday tasks in order to complete them more effectively, and to meet deadlines. By actively thinking about what you need to do and when you need to do it, you can exert greater control over the long list of tasks you need to complete. This will often involve prioritising activities and employing particular strategies to organise yourself and your time.



Benefits of good time management

Time management is a transferable skill. This means that you can use it in all aspects of your life; at home, college or in a workplace setting. You may not realise it, but you may be an expert in time management already. 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 that everyone is constantly having to manage their time effectively to meet deadlines.

Having good time management skills will allow you to:

- Be more productive
- Become more organised
- Prioritise tasks and activities
- Meet deadlines
- Not waste time
- Have more time to relax
- Be more focused and feel more in control of your studies
- Improve the quality of your work
- Reduce stress
- Maintain healthy relationships with family and friends



Prioritising 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. To help prioritise your tasks, try ranking each of your main responsibilities in order from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important). This will help you to decide which tasks you need to prioritise with regard to the time available. Bear in mind that the order of the list is likely to 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 of your prioritised tasks.

Defining goals

Taking time out to define your goals will enable you to plan your time effectively. Sometimes your college assignments will be broad, for example when you are given a general topic to write about rather than specific questions to answer. As a result, you may find you are spending too much time researching or, perhaps, 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 a broad brief, you need to plan what your end goal is going to be and determine the 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 target that you can work towards. You can find more advice and guidance on planning, researching and writing your assignments in our Learning and Research Skills and Writing Skills guides.

Defined goals should be **SMART**

Specific

- What exactly is it that you want to achieve?

Measurable

- How will you know when you reach your goal?
- How will you measure your success?

Achievable

- Is your goal achievable?
- Do you have enough time and resources

Realistic

- Is the goal realistic and relevant

Timely

- Set a date to achieve your goal

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 and engaging in something you enjoy more or feel more comfortable doing instead.

It is very easy to prioritise the things that you enjoy, such as socialising with friends, but this can often restrict the time you have to complete your college work. If you do not leave yourself enough time to complete a task, it means you will have to rush and you will fail to produce 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 in order to complete these tasks.

There are a variety of strategies you can use to stop yourself from procrastinating. One effective method 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 towards the final grade for your course. Gaining a particular grade might allow you to progress 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 some chocolate after an hour of revision, or a day trip after submitting a report. Find a method that works for you and this will help to keep you motivated.

Perfectionism

Another barrier that many students face when trying to manage their time is perfectionism. This means that a person strives for their work to be flawless. Having such incredibly high standards may not seem like an obvious barrier, but this can stop you from completing your work.

- Do you set yourself very high standards?
- Are you very critical of your own work?
- Do you often feel your work is not good enough?
- Do you find that your attention to detail means you miss deadlines?
- Do you delay submitting work because you are not happy with it?



150%

If your answer is yes to any of these questions, it could mean that perfectionism is stopping you from managing your time effectively. Perfection is impossible to achieve because it is subjective and 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, have researched effectively, written carefully and proofread your work, then it will reach the required standards.

Distractions

Everyday distractions can side-track you, affecting your productivity, stress levels and ability to accomplish your goals. Whilst technology can be an excellent tool to help you manage your daily tasks, it can also be a distraction. Similarly, impromptu visits and invites from friends and family can tempt you away from the task in hand.

Learning how to manage interruptions and distractions will allow you to keep on track. The following tips can help:

Technology

- Use the 'Do not Disturb' setting on your phone or put your phone on silent
- Keep your email applications closed. Limit the number of times you check them throughout the day
- Switch off any social media alerts from your mobile devices
- Make use of catch-up TV or record programmes and watch them later (ask Learning Resources staff about Box of Broadcasts which is a shared, online TV and radio recording service)

Friends and Family

- Let them know in advance when you are unavailable and explain why you cannot be interrupted
- Schedule time for 'friends and family' into your timetable
- Do not be afraid to politely say NO to requests
- Avoid taking on too many commitments

Time management techniques

Once you have prioritised, set goals and recognised any barriers, you can start employing strategies to manage your time effectively. Keeping a to-do list is a simple but very effective way to organise yourself on a daily basis. However, there are also many of other techniques and strategies to help you keep on top of your work and make it seem more achievable.

To-do lists

Good time management often begins by thinking about everything you must do within a particular time frame. The easiest way to do this is by keeping a 'to-do' list, which helps you to 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 can avoid feeling overwhelmed by your tasks.

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 have done



Remember, there are many ways you can make your to-do list. Some people like to use traditional pen and paper, whilst others like to use technology by keeping notes on their PC, laptop, tablet or phone. Using technology 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 then refer to the list every day.

When writing your to-do list, remember to include how long each task might take to complete, when your deadlines occur and where the task appears on your list of priorities. This will ensure that you complete each activity within the necessary time frame which, in turn, will help you to feel more organised. If you include the task without these extra details, you may miss deadlines.

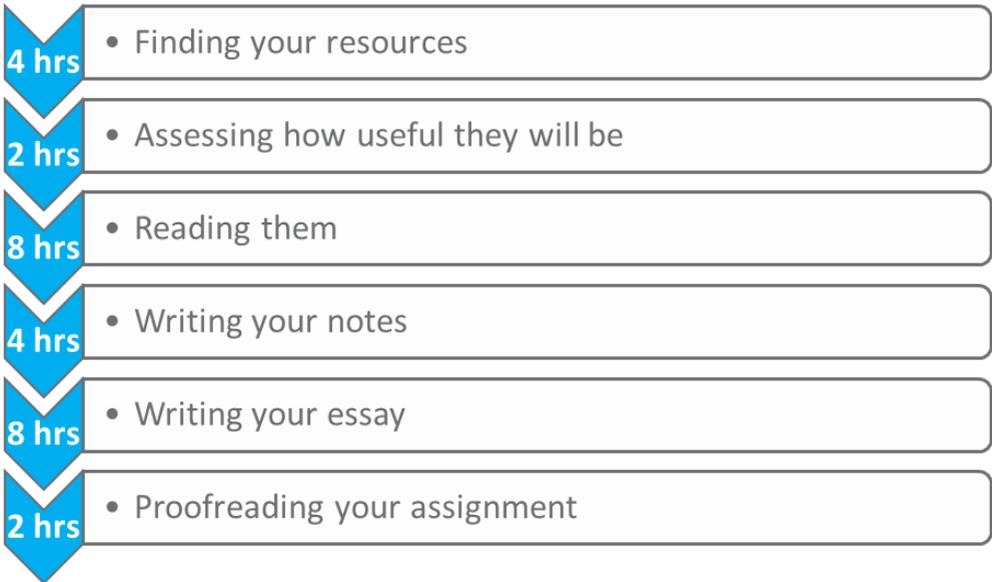
The following example is a good way to set out your to-do list:

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

Breaking work into chunks

When you are first given your assignment you will probably have a month, or even two, to complete it. That is 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 complete it 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:



Using the above example, we can see that writing this essay might take you 28 hours in total. If you think about completing this along with all of your other tasks, it may seem difficult to find the time. However, when we look at it over a longer period of time it seems far less intimidating.

If you have four weeks until your deadline, that is seven days per week which seems far more manageable. If we break that down even further and anticipate that you will study for one hour a day, you can easily complete your task 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 that your stress levels are lower, you will also feel better for having achieved something constructive.

Create a timetable or schedule

Using a timetable or schedule might seem like an obvious solution to managing your time, but it is highly effective. We are often told to use timetables to plan revision, but they can be equally useful when planning your activities on a week-to-week basis. Once you have identified your goals and priorities, you should create a timetable that enables you to keep on track, has realistic timings, will be effective in helping you achieve your goals and also allows a healthy work/life balance. Remember to schedule regular breaks into your timetable as this will not only give you some time away, but will allow you to come back to your work with fresh eyes.

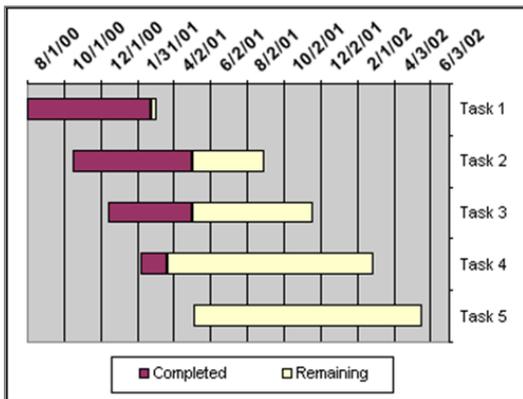
You might format your timetable like this:

	7 - 9	9 - 11	11 - 1	1 - 3	3 - 5	5 - 7	7 - 9
Mon	Walk dog Washing	Psychology Y203	Essay notes Lunch	History Y207	Dry cleaning	Dinner Type	Free time
Tue	Yoga Revision	Sociology Y302	Politics NA 22	Lunch Essay intro	Revision	Meet Joe for dinner	Research project
Wed	Walk dog	Literature	Literature	Lunch	Type notes	Body of	Body of
Thu	Free time	Walk dog	Meet Mum	Politics	Sociology	Revision	Gig at
Fri	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 which can be created in Microsoft Project. 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 an

overlap between activities, when deadlines are approaching 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:



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 for individual tasks. A priority matrix is made up of four quadrants, as in the diagram below:



This is a really helpful 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 determine 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, in your personal life, outside of college. Remember to constantly update this. Tasks will move from one quadrant to another as different deadlines approach.

Top tips

- Transfer your skills: use your experience of time management from your personal life to help drive time management in your college life
- Prioritise your tasks: understanding how important and urgent each task is will help you to view it in context
- Define SMART goals: you will find it easier to focus, plan and manage your time more effectively
- Recognise barriers: be aware of procrastination, perfectionism, distractions – learn how to manage these and, thus, overcome them
- Employ time management techniques: try using to-do lists, timetables, schedules, Gantt charts and the priority matrix - find what works for you and then use it to your advantage
- 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 including breaks within 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

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 this will allow you to relax and refresh yourself, enabling you to work more effectively. Taking breaks 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!



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