

SKILLS FOR LEARNING

GUIDE TO TIME MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS TIME MANAGEMENT?

Successful time management is about you taking control of how you use your time so that you are not frantically rushing to meet deadlines and continually feeling under pressure. It will involve you planning ahead, setting goals for yourself and prioritising your tasks.

WHY IS TIME MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

University study often involves uneven periods of work in which assignment deadlines may all occur at the same time. This can make it difficult to successfully manage your work unless you plan ahead. Constantly working right up to deadlines does not allow you time to think fully about what you have written and may result in your work being of a lesser quality than you intended. Making the most effective use of your time can help you to work to the best of your ability and achieve your potential. At University, lectures and seminars are scheduled blocks of time, but then you have to decide how you will organise the remainder of your time so as to balance your studies with any other commitments that you may have, such as family or employment.

Time management can:

- Help you use your time to best effect
- Lessen anxiety as you feel more in control
- Make you more aware of how you work
- Reduce avoidance of more difficult tasks

HOW TO TIME MANAGE YOUR STUDIES

Be aware of time First look at how you are currently using your time. One way to do this is to make a chart that covers a typical week in which you log everything you do each day and how long you spent doing it (be honest and record activities such as chatting to friends or using the Internet) and at the end of the week, see how you have used the time. You can't add time to a week but you can decide to use it to better effect. Are there any small amounts of spare time that you could use more effectively? For example, reading your notes while waiting for a lecture to start. You could also read your notes while travelling to and from University, or listen to an educational podcast while driving. Gaining just 20 minutes of study per day can make a real difference over a semester.

Plan ahead At the start of a semester, get an overview of the weeks ahead by noting down lectures, presentations, exams, and assignment due dates as well as your other commitments outside of University. By doing this, you can see where there will be peak pressure on your time which should enable you to plan what needs to be done and by when. A wall chart will provide a visual overview or you could use a Google calendar or your phone calendar.

Make weekly plans. Record your commitments for the week ahead and also list what you want to achieve that week (your goals). Refer to your semester plan so that your weekly plan links to your more long-term goals for the semester. Keep a check to see if you are on schedule but be flexible as the unexpected can always happen. A daily “things to do” plan can link to your weekly plan.

Prioritise your tasks If you work hard and are well organised but spend your time on unimportant tasks then you are not making good use of your time. Prioritise tasks by deciding which ones are urgent and focus on these. Prioritising can help you to avoid concentrating on the tasks you prefer or the ones that are easier. For instance, in a choice between reading for an assignment on a course you enjoy that is due in three weeks or preparing a difficult presentation due in one week, concentrate on preparing the presentation. It is also essential that you give the right amount of time to each task depending on how much it contributes to a module’s overall mark; if assignments make different percentage contributions, spend more time on the assignment that has the greater contribution.

Study smart Develop successful study techniques such as reading actively and effective note-making as these will all help you to reduce the amount of time you spend on each activity. Focus on the task rather than the time. Think about what you need to accomplish rather than the length of time you are going to study; rather than deciding, “I will study for 3 hours”, decide that “I will actively read 3 chapters, reflect on my reading, and make notes on how they contribute to my assignment question”. It is not the length of time that you study for but how well you use your study time that is important.

Time plan an assignment Break it down into components (e.g. analysing the question, finding information, planning, writing, proofreading) then work back from the hand-in date and schedule time for each component. It is useful to build in extra time to cope with any unforeseen event. Immediately after lectures, review any notes you have made while they are still fresh in your mind: you won’t then have to use extra time later on trying to understand your notes. Aim to read before a lecture rather than after it; this will give you a basic understanding of the subject so that during the lecture it will be that much easier to think critically about what the lecturer is discussing. This is just a question of timing and does not require any more effort.

Take regular breaks You won't work or think effectively if you are tired and it will actually take longer to complete tasks so you will end up losing time. Study at the time of the day when you know you study best. Gather together everything you need before starting to study and make sure there are no distractions. If you set aside a free day for study, set goals for the day and timetable various study activities, otherwise you may find that the day just slips by.

HELP AND ADVICE

For more details on the help available please refer to the Skills for Learning website at: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills>.



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