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TIME MANAGEMENT

Most students find that attending university means juggling a number of commitments and tasks, often with overlapping deadlines and little time available. Struggling to manage these different commitments may lead to stress, unhappiness, and feeling overwhelmed. Managing your time effectively will allow you to meet deadlines, reach your goals, and perform better academically, while still having fun and enjoying your life.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND GOAL-SETTING

What do you want to accomplish? Once you have established what your goals are, it is possible to start organizing your time so you can accomplish them. Effective time management is all about developing an awareness of where your time is spent, a process that is refined through reflection and adjustment.

The basic process is:

- setting goals
- estimating the time needed to complete those goals
- making plans to accomplish those goals
- carrying out the plans
- tracking time spent
- adjusting plans
- setting new goals

Organization brings predictability and structure to your life. Organized things are easy to find and remember. That said, there is no one right way to manage your time. Your schedule should reflect your personality; planning every minute of each day is sure to make some people crazy and give others peace of mind. You'll probably fall somewhere in between.

CALENDARS

Term Calendar

Let's start with a look at the big picture. You can use an electronic organizer (iCal, Entourage, Outlook, etc.) or a dry-erase wall calendar to make a calendar for the rest of the term. Be sure to add:

- all the assignments and tests from each of your course outlines. If they aren't listed in the syllabus, you can always ask your prof.
- school activities (sports teams, extracurriculars, etc.)
- after-school activities, such as a part-time job, the time you usually spend at the gym, etc.
- new items to the calendar as soon as you become aware of them. Your calendar won't be much use if it isn't up to date!

With an idea of what your term is going to be like, you can start focusing on your immediate future.

How Are You Spending Your Time Now?

Try tracking your time in a log over the course of a week. Every hour or so, record what you've been up to in half-hour blocks. Take a look at your average day. Where do you waste time? When are you most

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productive? These are things to consider when you are making your schedule. Now that you have an idea of how you are **currently** spending your time, it's time to figure out how you **want** to spend your time. Remember, a good schedule will help you finish the stuff you need to do so you have more time for the things you enjoy.

Making Your Weekly Schedule

Now that you know what needs to get done this term, it's time to figure out how you can structure your week to get everything finished with as little stress as possible. You can use an electronic organizer or day planner to keep track of your weekly responsibilities.

Your schedule should reflect your priorities. Since you're a student, going to class should probably be one of your top priorities. Start out by putting your class schedule into the calendar. Be sure to add labs, tutorials, clinical hours, or whatever else you need to do to get your degree.

Another important priority should be to take care of your body. Often students let themselves get too busy to eat and sleep properly, and this can have a negative impact on academic performance, physical health, and mental wellbeing. Set aside time to EAT and SLEEP. Physical activity is another important component of physical and mental health, so be sure to set some time aside for exercise (it doesn't matter what kind of exercise: going to the gym, walking around campus, gardening, whatever works for you!).

Many students work part-time jobs; this is obviously a priority in any schedule. Make sure you put your work hours into your schedule. You can always shuffle your study time around, but your boss probably isn't going to be so flexible. Getting a phone call saying you should have been at work an hour ago is stressful; getting the same call when you have an assignment due the next day is much worse. Your schedule should protect you from these kinds of mishaps!

Getting back to your academic priorities, you aren't going to make the most of yourself as a student simply by going to class. You also need to study. Study time is very easy to put off unless you have a test coming up; by setting aside a little time to review your courses you will be significantly better off in the long run. You also won't have to worry about cramming, which is a stressful process at best. Not everyone studies the same way, however. Some prefer to wait until the end of the unit and then cover the entire chapter at once. Others prefer to break the work up into smaller chunks, reviewing lessons at the end of the day or week. Both strategies are fine, what is important is that you pick whatever works best for you and make it a part of your schedule.

You should also consider when you study best. If you're not a morning person, you probably aren't going to absorb very much information right after you've woken up. Remember, your schedule should fit your personality and preferences like a glove. Pick a study time when you will be alert and crisp; otherwise you are going to waste time. The same goes for your study environment. Make sure you pick a spot where you can focus; otherwise you are going to spend more time studying than you need to, leaving less time for fun. Remember: work smart, not hard!

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Once you know when/where you are going to study, it's time to figure out just how much studying you need to do. Take a look at your term calendar and see when you have tests and assignments due. Also take a look at any other important things you have coming up. Make sure your schedule has extra time set aside to complete these tasks. If you don't give yourself enough time you are going to have to sacrificed something else to make up for it, but if you finish early you can move on to the fun stuff!

Remember, there are always going to be distractions that will make you think of putting your study time off until 'later'. Remember that **you** planned your time this way so you will have more free time and less stress later on, and stick to the plan! Willpower is like a mental muscle, the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets.

The only other thing left to consider is buffer time. A good schedule will leave extra room for the unpredictable nature of everyday life. Some things will take longer than you expect; others will take less time. You also need to account for the time you spend getting from one place to another. By leaving a little wiggle room in between activities your schedule will still be effective in the face of unforeseen circumstances.

Now that you have set aside time for all of the important things in your life (your studies, your mental and physical wellbeing, and your income), it's time to reward yourself! Keeping track of recreational activities can also help you manage your time so that you keep important dates free. The rest of the time in your schedule is yours to do with as you see fit. Social time is a great way to relax, and is part of a healthy lifestyle. Alone time is also a great way to decompress. All work and no play make Jack a dull boy!

Using Your Schedule

Now you have a master plan for your term and a weekly schedule that should help you succeed in your goals. The only thing left to do is use them! It is important to remember that being organized doesn't stop at making a schedule. As you use the weekly schedule, you will probably find that some plans and strategies work out better than others. Moving forward, use the strategies you find most effective in practice.

Spend time reviewing the schedule so you know what you need to do in the immediate future. You might find that looking at it Sunday night before your week starts works for you, or that you need to review the schedule every day. Remember, you made it to be used!

TO-DO LISTS

Reviewing your schedule is good, but that strategy relies on keeping the stuff you need to do in your short-term memory. Between course load, work, and extracurricular responsibilities, students often have a lot on the go. It can be difficult to keep track of everything mentally, even with a good schedule. An effective way to stay on top of everything is to make a daily to-do list. At this point, it's pretty easy. All you need to do is copy the day's important items from your weekly planner on to a piece of paper, a pocket agenda, your iPod, etc. From that point, all you need to do is consult your list if you aren't sure what needs to get done next.

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PRIORITIZING

When completing items on your to-do list, rank them in terms of importance. What must be done before anything else can be accomplished? What is due first? What can wait, or what can you skip? If you have trouble deciding, use the two-minute rule: if a task on your list will take less than two minutes, do it right away. Get all those small things out of the way and you will be set to work on the larger, more time-consuming tasks.

CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that when you are starting out, things probably won't go perfectly according to schedule. At the end of the day, take a look and see if anything didn't get done. Don't feel bad if you didn't finish everything; if it's something important you can set aside time for it in tomorrow's list. Planning time is a skill, and like any skill you will improve at it over time with practice. By making mistakes, you can learn from them and get better at anticipating the future.

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