

The Little Book of Time Management



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

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*'Until you value yourself, you will not value your time.
Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it.'*
M. Scott Peck

Introduction to time management

Time management means making the most effective use of your time by controlling events in order to accomplish the things that you need and want to do. The challenges in being able to do this are:

- ⌚ knowing what you want
- ⌚ establishing priorities
- ⌚ being self disciplined.

Time and energy are the most valuable resources we have.

Time management is easy to talk about but not so easy to do! Everything from the unexpected invitation for a cup of coffee to the shuffling of responsibilities between home and university can make you fear you simply cannot get everything done. This can cause stress and affect your study and home life.

As a student you continually make choices to balance competing demands on your study time in order to achieve your goals. You will have scheduled classes every week, but you will also have to manage the rest of your time to complete your coursework.

'Don't leave for tomorrow what you can do today.'

Why is time management important?

Better time management enables you to:

- ⌚ reduce stress levels.
- ⌚ reflect more.
- ⌚ improve your self confidence.
- ⌚ improve your performance.
- ⌚ reduce any feelings of guilt.
- ⌚ have more time for leisure and pleasure.
- ⌚ be more productive.
- ⌚ increase your personal and job satisfaction.
- ⌚ have more control over your life.
- ⌚ better balance competing demands on your time.



How well do you manage your time?

Do any of these statements apply to you?

- ⓪ I lack time to think or reflect on my work/study.
- ⓪ I study or work long hours.
- ⓪ I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work I have.
- ⓪ I lack the time to plan activities.
- ⓪ I get frequent interruptions from people, in person or on the phone.
- ⓪ I find that I hop from task to task rather than see one task through from beginning to end.
- ⓪ I find myself performing one task whilst thinking of another.
- ⓪ I tend to do smaller tasks first then find I have no time for larger tasks.
- ⓪ I get easily distracted, e.g. by friends wanting me to do other things.
- ⓪ I am usually late for appointments.
- ⓪ I can think of a few things I intended to do last week but have not found the time.
- ⓪ I often eat snacks in place of a proper meal.

Causes of time management problems

Tackling time management issues is easier if you work out why managing time is hard for you.

Here are some common causes of poor time management:

- ⌚ Focussing on other people's problems rather than concentrating on your own.
- ⌚ Not setting priorities.
- ⌚ Poor concentration.
- ⌚ Not being able to say "no" to requests.
- ⌚ Taking on new tasks then failing to complete existing tasks.
- ⌚ Relying on mythical time – putting off jobs in the mistaken belief there will be time later.
- ⌚ Underestimating the time needed to complete tasks.
- ⌚ Not allowing for the unexpected.
- ⌚ Putting off what needs to be done, especially if it is difficult.
- ⌚ Finding it difficult to set personal limits.

'Time and tide wait for no man.'

How do you currently use time?

Which is true of you?

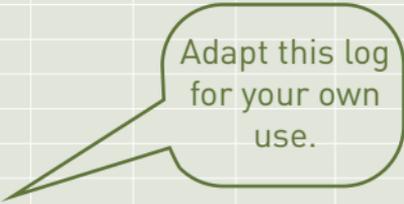
- Ⓐ I spend most of my working day doing what others want me to do.
- Ⓑ I work on fun or pleasant tasks before doing unpleasant ones.
- Ⓒ I put off tasks that I think will be difficult.
- Ⓓ I find that tasks always take much longer than I anticipated.
- Ⓔ I wait until a deadline is near before really starting a project.
- Ⓕ I give high priority to those tasks that will advance my personal goals.
- Ⓖ I tackle the jobs that can be completed in a short time, before working on larger, longer-term tasks.
- Ⓗ I do the work I've planned before doing the unexpected.
- Ⓘ I tackle the small jobs before embarking on the bigger ones.
- Ⓚ I work on the squeaky wheel principle - the task that makes the most noise gets done first.
- Ⓛ I regularly think about how what I'm doing actually matches what I think I want to do.
- Ⓜ I wait to be told what to do.

My week: Time usage analysis

1. It may be helpful to log how you spend your time for a full week. Choose a typical week.

My time log

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
0700							
0800							
0900							
1000							
1100							
1200							
1300							
1400							
1500							
1600							
1700							
1800							
1900							
2000							
2100							
2200							
2300							



Adapt this log for your own use.

2. Now summarise the time you spent on the various activities.

3. Complete the following statements:

_____ hours of my time are committed and cannot be rearranged (e.g. lecture time, doctor's appointment, travelling, picking up children).

_____ hours of my time are under my control.

_____ was the busiest day. Is this typical?

_____ was the least busiest day. Is this typical?

I was most productive at this time: _____

I was least productive at this time: _____

_____ hours were spent on productive activities.

'Work expands so as to fill the time available.'

Recognising time wasters

Everybody wastes time to some degree. The important thing is to recognise when and why you are doing this – are you recharging your batteries or are you simply avoiding starting some onerous task?

A large part of time management is avoiding or managing “time wasters”.

There is nothing wrong with time wasters in themselves; it is only when they interfere with the time you have allocated to the priorities in your life that they become problematic.

Time wasters may be self-inflicted or arise from external sources – add yours to these lists:

Self-inflicted	External
Putting things off	Television
Perfectionism	Crises
Lack of self discipline	Travelling
Worrying	Waiting
Personal disorganisation	Idle conversations
Over commitment (inability to say no)	Intrusions (i.e. visitors, phone calls, emails, texts)
Lack of priorities	Socialising
Indecisiveness	Social networking sites



How to develop a time management strategy

Why set goals?

It's true that if there is something you really want to do, you find the time to do it! It's important to decide on your goals. They give you direction and provide a measurement of your success.

Goal setting is about identifying targets and objectives that you want to accomplish, and then working out how best you can achieve them.

You may not really know at this stage, or be able to articulate your goals, but there will be things you want to do. It's a good idea to know where you're going and goal setting can be very helpful.

Setting goals can help you:

- ⌚ become more organised.
- ⌚ be less stressed.
- ⌚ increase your motivation.

How to set goals

There are different ways of setting goals. One example is the following seven steps in goal setting:

Step 1 - Brainstorm what you want to do in the next six months and group similar goals together, e.g. study, employment and social. Try to identify a balance of work and personal goals.

Step 2 - Check each goal for compatibility and attainability.

For example "I want to write an essay and I also want to spend time with my friends too".

In this situation you need to make a decision of which takes priority, as both can not be achieved. An alternative would be to modify this, e.g. *"I will spend Sunday afternoon, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday concentrating on my essay and spend the remainder of the time seeing my friends".*

'Your greatest resource is your time.' Brian Tracy

Step 3 - Once you have modified your goal write it down more clearly and predict an outcome. For example, *"I want to have researched the subject for my essay and have an outline of it in two weeks time"*.

Does your goal now meet **SMART** criteria?

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Realistic

Time-limited

In other words there's no point in thinking 'I must be better organised'. It's much better to think, *'I'm going to get my assignment written and handed in the day before the deadline'*. You will then need to work out how to do that.

Step 4 - Decide on an action plan, detailing how you are going to achieve your goal. Try to have at least four steps for each goal. For example, the problem of writing an essay could be tackled in the following way:

1. Organise yourself. Make a space in your room by clearing your desk/table to write on.

'One step at a time.'

2. Look at your lecture notes, handouts, etc., to identify how much information you already have.
3. Do a literature search online and go to the library.
4. Set aside Tuesday and Wednesday to concentrate on the information collected.

Step 5 - Plan how to deal with obstacles.

More than likely there are going to be obstacles to be overcome. For example: *"I always go out with friends on Friday evenings - so on Fridays I will work on my essay during the day instead"*.

Step 6 - Include a treat for yourself when the previous steps have been achieved. For example; *"If I have finished my essay in 2 weeks time, I will treat myself to a weekend away with my friends"*.

Step 7 - Imagine the completed result. Visualise what your life will be like once you have achieved your goal. Are you going to reward yourself with a treat when you have achieved your goal? This will increase your motivation.

How to prioritise

There are only 24 hours in a day. It may not be enough time to achieve everything so you need to prioritise.

It is not the quantity of what you do, but the quality and value of it.

If you also have work or family commitments, it is important to strike a balance by not overdoing it in one area at the expense of another.

Prioritising is giving value and order to the activities to which need to be done. Here are two techniques to help you prioritise.

Technique 1

One way of prioritising your tasks is to assign a value 1, 2 or 3 to each task. Where 1 represents high priority tasks, 2 represents medium priority tasks and 3 represents low priority tasks.

Technique 2

Create a priority matrix from the combination of one of these task categories:

Combination of urgent and important	Combination of impact and effort
Urgent and important	High impact high effort
Important and not urgent	High effort low impact
Urgent and not important	High impact low effort
Not important and not urgent	Low impact low effort

Create your own priority matrix

Make a list of goals/tasks you want to achieve in the next 3 months and put them in the relevant boxes.

Priority matrix

High Importance	Start before they become urgent	Do these now
	Do not do these	Do if you can
Low	Urgency	
		High

Plan and organise your activities

Some people think they work better under pressure. Whilst you may feel this is true for you, be aware that leaving things until the last minute can lead to an activity trap – too much work, too little time, too much to absorb. This may mean your work is rushed and not up to the standard of which you are capable.

Do not become obsessive about planning – planning takes time. You can fall into the trap of spending valuable time planning when you could spend less time planning and more time doing the tasks in hand.

Once you have identified your priorities in line with your goals you then need to plan and organise your activities:

- Group similar activities together.
- Ask yourself what is the objective of each activity.
- Delegate wherever possible.
- Identify the skills you need to help achieve your tasks.
- Estimate the time required to complete a task.
- Develop an action plan.
- From the action plan write a daily/weekly plan.

Review

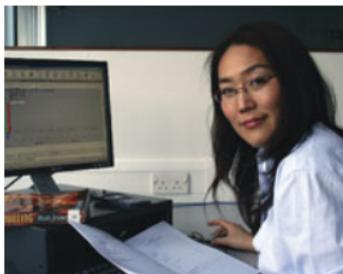
As you progress, regularly review your results against your plan and if necessary reprioritise your tasks.

Identifying the things that you know will happen at particular times, and those that you know will happen around particular dates and times, will put you in a better position to deal with those things that happen that are out of your control.

If you are finding it hard to discipline yourself, motivation is the key. You might want to examine the underlying reasons for this. Ask yourself:

- Is it that I just don't want to do these things?
- Do I think I can't do them - they're too hard/too scary/too challenging?
- Might I 'fail' if I try them?
- Am I basically not interested in them?

Only you can answer these questions – it might be worth going back to think about your values and your goals. Is there a mismatch between what you want to do and what you think you ought to do?



When is your best time?

Daily – are you a morning or an evening person?

Plan to do your difficult tasks at the best time for you. On days when you're feeling good, do the things you've been putting off.

Weekly - is there a pattern? Are you refreshed on Mondays or do you only get going by Wednesday?

How do you cope with weekends being busy as well as weekdays?

Monthly - what happens when you've worked solidly for three weeks without a break?

Yearly – when do you make new starts? Is it January, on your birthday or at the beginning of a new academic year in October?

And when do you slump?

Which are your easiest months and which do you struggle through?

Do something when you're not quite ready. Too often we wait until we're pretty sure we can do something perfectly. Stretch yourself. Be good enough. If you always wait until you're absolutely ready, it may be too late.

My best time is:



How to manage your study time

Managing your time is essential for independent learning on a university course. How much time you need for your study is very personal.

For a full time degree or postgraduate course you will probably need to spend up to 40 hours per week on academic work.

It is not a good idea to use all your available time for study. If you schedule study, relaxation and leisure time you will be in an appropriate frame of mind for studying and be able to enjoy your leisure time with a clear conscience.



Study tips

- ④ Don't wait until the last minute to complete assessments – many will require research which takes time.
- ④ Allocate time for preparation and actual study.
- ④ Ask for more information or clarification if you do not understand an assignment.
- ④ Set several small study goals – if you have been given a task that you find overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts or tasks.
- ④ Put the subject you find hardest or most uninteresting first on your study schedule.
- ④ Make sure that your week has a slot allocated to each subject you study.
- ④ Plan your study times when you have the best concentration.
- ④ Ensure the study location you use is appropriate.
- ④ Make use of small windows of time - for example, an hour between classes is sufficient time to do something useful such as reading a chapter of a book, reviewing notes you have taken in a lecture
- ④ Give yourself rewards – examples include: free time, a favourite TV programme, etc.

Top tips for better time management

- ⌚ Don't just think about what you're doing - think about why you're doing it.
- ⌚ Set **SMART** short and long term goals:
Specific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**imely.
- ⌚ Make daily or weekly 'to do' lists.
- ⌚ Identify your priorities.
- ⌚ Have a system – muddle makes work and wastes time.
- ⌚ Allocate specific time for specific activities.
- ⌚ Don't put things off.
- ⌚ Check whether you really need to do something.
Could you ask someone else to do it for you?
- ⌚ Maintain a balance between time spent at work, on study, at home and on personal development.
- ⌚ Regularly review your progress.





'Better late than never.'

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