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Study Factsheet Series - No 6

Plan or Fail

Managing your time for effective study

Studying involves meeting conflicting deadlines and unless you plan ahead you will find it very difficult to manage. Planning saves time, stress and energy.

Plan ahead and prioritise

The first step to good time management is to prioritise your tasks. That is to decide which task is most important and should be completed first. This will depend on many variants, first of all on due dates and amount of work they each need.

To prioritise successfully you need to develop daily, weekly and long term plans.

Long term planning

Using a yearly or semester planner.

A planner can be placed on your wall or by your desk that can allow you to plan your workload over an entire year/semester and helps to remind you about deadlines and commitments.

- > Place the planner in a position where you have easy access to it
- > Write in the dates assignments are due and exams scheduled
- > Work out how long you will need to complete each task
- > If you have several assignments due at the same time, then you'll need to begin each task earlier
- > Set start dates for each task and write them on the planner
- > Draw lines back from the due dates to start dates, using different colours for different items. This will give you a good indication of how much time you have to complete tasks.

Example of backward planning:

12 October - hand in assignment
11 October - finish final writing of assignment
9 October - finish second draft
6 October - finish first draft, show to teacher for feedback
4 October - finish research
1 October - start research

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Planning on a Weekly Basis

Use time slots wisely

Students often believe they have no time to study, but many of them think of study time in terms of long time slots (three hours or more). While long time slots are necessary, medium and short time slots can be used just as effectively. A well-used 15 minutes is more effective than a wasted 2 hours. Different periods of time suit different activities. For example:

Short Time Slots One hour or less is useful for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Reviewing lecture notes > Completing short readings > Previewing long readings > Doing problems > Revising for exams > Jotting down essay plans > Proofreading assignments 	Medium Time Slots One to three hours is a good time for more concentrated study. Medium slots can be used for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > More detailed note-reviewing > Reading for courses/assignments > Taking notes from readings > Drafting/editing an assignment > Revising for exams 	Long Time Slots More than three hours can be set aside for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Working on an assignment > Completing an extensive amount of reading > Doing research for assignments > Revising for exams
<i>Bus and train journeys or lunch breaks are useful for this kind of work.</i>		
<i>During medium and long time slots, divide study time up into one hour sections and take breaks. Try not to study for longer than an hour at a time, as concentration begins to slip.</i>		

Fill in a weekly planner

For weekly planning, use a diary, a timetable or a CITSA Diary.

Fill in all the main demands on your time:

- > Lectures and tutorials.
- > Hours of work (if you have a part-time job).
- > Any regular sport or leisure commitments.
- > Mealtimes and regular family commitments.
- > Sleep times.

When you have blocked in the main demands on your time, look at the blank time slots left. This will help you work out how many hours a week you actually have to study.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6 -7 am		GYM	SHORT	SHORT	SHORT	SHORT	Sleep
7-8 am	SHORT		Tutorial	Lecture			
8-9 am	Lecture	SHORT				GYM	
9-10 am		Lab					
10-11 am			MEDIUM		LONG	MEDIUM	LONG
11 -12pm	LUNCH						
12-1 pm	SHORT			Lab			
1-2 pm	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH				
2-3 pm	SHORT	MEDIUM	Discussion Group				
3-4 pm	Tutorial						
4-5 pm							
5-6 pm		Lecture	MEDIUM/	DINNER	DINNER	Party!!! Let My Hair Down!!!	
6-7 pm	GYM		LONG	WORK	WORK		
7-8 pm	SHORT		Dinner				
8-9 pm	Dinner						
9-10 pm	Sleep	Dinner	MEDIUM/ LONG				
10-11 pm		Sleep					
11-12 pm			Sleep	Sleep			

Next, plan time slots to use for study. Fill in times that could be used as study periods including short, medium and long time slots.

Be flexible

Some weeks will be busier than others, and unforeseen things can happen. Remember that a timetable is only a plan or a guide. You don't have to follow it religiously every week, but try to stick to your plan as best you can. If you plan a study time slot and miss it, don't panic – look at the schedule and rearrange your time.

Be realistic

A great deal of time management is really about taking responsibility for your learning. The best plan is to be aware of how much time you have and to manage it effectively. Be realistic about your time and what you can do with it.