

# Time Management

As a student, managing your time effectively is important. However, because studying is likely to be just one of many elements that make up your life, developing skills in time management can be overlooked. Other responsibilities like family, friends, work, sports and parental duties demand your time also, so coming up with a way to manage it all will have a positive impact on everything you do.

The aim of this is handout is to give you practical strategies to help you manage your time effectively.

Managing your time can be broken down into three major areas:

- Planning your year
- Planning your week
- Planning your work

## Planning your year

Federation University provides a wall planner with all semester dates, including lecture periods, SWOT Vac, the examination periods and holidays for higher education, TAFE and Victorian school terms. Using the University wall planner gives you an accurate basis on which to build your yearly planner (search for it on our website: [federation.edu.au](http://federation.edu.au))

Set out all important dates and deadlines on your yearly planner, both academic and social. The planner will also act as a convenient visual aid that identifies periods of time in which you have commitments or free time. Include the following major commitments your yearly planner.

### Term dates

When does the academic year start, and when are the semester and term breaks? Record the periods you will be involved with classroom activities and placements, if you have them.

### Assignment due dates

Check your course outline for details:

- When are laboratory reports due?
- Dates for essay submission?
- Do you have regular tests?

This will show how your workload is distributed. It will also enable you to schedule activities to ensure tasks are completed on time.

### Examination times

Don't forget to include exams on your yearly planner. This will allow you to set up a study timetable that is specifically geared towards your examination schedule.

### Personal events

Include the important dates on your social calendar, such as regular work, sporting commitments, travel, birthdays, weddings, religious festivals and observances, etc. This will enable you to plan other activities (e.g., preparations, travel, gifts) around these dates as you fine-tune your timetable.

### Expect the unexpected

You may have to attend a conference during the year, or take unexpected breaks from study due to family events.

### Beware of the winter blues

Be mindful of unanticipated problems like catching a cold or getting sick.

Display your yearly planner in your study area so it is prominent. Update it regularly as new commitments arise. Cross items off as you complete them or when the date passes to give yourself a sense of achieving your goals.

Plotting your year is not the end of planning. Rather, use your yearly planner to break down and plan for tasks that are specific to each week of the current month.

## Planning your week

The weekly planner is intended to put the focus on activities listed in your yearly planner. Each of your study commitments will need preparation and time allocated to them to complete specific tasks.

For example, writing an essay requires time for:

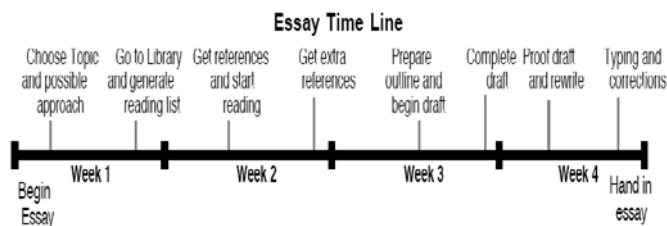
- choosing your topic
- research
- organising information
- writing drafts
- proofing final draft
- etc.

Allocate each of the above activities a time slot based on your best guess of the time needed to complete the task. Over-estimate the time required - things tend to take longer due to interruptions, or unexpected changes to the parameters.

For example, schedule activities like "Visit library and prepare reading list for essay on Polypeptides", or "Study Biology notes on Cell Reproduction for weekly test" etc., in a particular week.

If activities have fixed deadlines (e.g., hand in essay, sit a test) it is useful to **work backwards** from the due date to determine the latest starting date that will guarantee the work is completed. Itemise every task required to complete the work and allocate a time estimate against each.

The total time, calculated by adding each estimate, will enable you to schedule these tasks into your working week using a time line. The following diagram shows an example of a time line for writing an essay.



Keep two weekly lists:

- **Must Do:** contains items that must be completed during the week.
- **Wish To Do:** lists things you would like to do if time permits.

### Must Do

*Write up lab.*  
*Do tute problems*  
*Prepare essay plan*  
*Study for quiz on Friday*

### Wish To Do

*Revise for exams*  
*Re-write Analytic notes*  
*Prepare for next prac.*  
*Do extra problems*

## Planning your work

### What time is available?

To calculate what time is available to you for study, work out what time *isn't available* for study. This includes:

- Your currently scheduled classes
- Travel to and from university
- Time for preparing and eating meals
- Time for sleep
- Time for shopping and domestic activities
- Time in employment
- Time for parenting
- Regular recreation activities (e.g., sport, visiting friends, going out)

### How much of your time is fixed?

Using the weekly planner on the last page, fill in all of your committed time. Total the number of fixed hours and add to this the time allocated for sleep. Enter this total in the space allocated (A). Do not include your private study time.

A reasonable estimate is three to four hours of study per course per week outside the classroom. For example, if you are taking five courses, then expect to spend between 15 and 20 hours per week doing private study. Note that these estimates are only a guideline - you need to determine how much time you will really need.

### How much study time do you need?

On the weekly planner, add your estimation of the hours you need to maintain your workload.

Try to find out (e.g., from lecturers, mentors, the course outline) the amount of time you should allocate. Enter estimates for each subject into the table. Calculate the total and write it in the space provided at B.

The amount of time you need will depend on current course work and your level of understanding of course material. This varies from person to person. Similarly, your work commitments will fluctuate throughout the year, so anticipate busy periods and quiet ones.

### What is left?

To determine how hectic your life will be, add the number of committed hours (A) to the time estimated for study (B). Enter this total in the space allocated at C. As there are 168 hours in a week, subtract the total in C from 168. Place the result in D.

The total number of hours remaining (D) is the free time you have available for other activities outside of your fixed study time. If this figure is less than 10 to 15 hours then you don't have much choice about when you study - you will probably have to be goal-orientated to ensure your study is done.

If you are a full-time student and this figure is greater than 10 to 15 hours then this means you have some flexibility in how you assign your workload and when you prefer to study.

## Approaches to organising study time

There are two distinct (yet very different) approaches to organising your study time:

**Goal-orientated:** This approach requires you to schedule exactly when you intend to work in advance. Allocate your study time into the free areas of your timetable. Be aware of your study habits, i.e., do you study better in the evening or the morning? Choose study times to incorporate your preferences.

**Procrastinating:** Procrastinating means putting work off until tomorrow or perhaps the next day, or the next, instead of today. Most people procrastinate about doing things that are boring or difficult, and sometimes things don't ever get done. Procrastinators may prefer to approach the problem another way:

Do not allocate any time at all to study. Instead, record study time as it is completed and record it in half-hour blocks. This allows your study to be performed in chunks and will provide you with a record of the work that you have actually done. The key to this approach is to actually start working and to reward yourself afterwards for the study you did perform.

### Monitor your progress

Regardless of the approach you choose to adopt, it is important to monitor how you went. If you are not sure which approach suits you best, then experiment with both. It may help to keep a log of all your activities over a fortnight.

Use your log to evaluate:

- How good were your predictions?
- Were your goals realistic?
- How hard was it to maintain your schedule?
- What difference/s did having a schedule make to your study patterns?

Although getting this information might seem like a lot of trouble, recording how you really use your time will give you more confidence in approaching new tasks because you will better understand how long it takes to complete specific activities.

Use what you learn through observation and reflection to improve your time management. **Be realistic.** Don't set impossible goals (e.g., 6 hours of continuous study without a break), and reward yourself for your efforts (e.g., watch your favourite TV show, call a friend). The skills you gain from learning to manage your time will always be useful to study life as well as in other aspects of your life.

## Time-saving tips

- USBs frequently malfunction, and students often lose their work. Back up your work on hard disk or CD.
- Expect things to take x2, x3, x4 or x10 longer than expected. Plan with this in mind and start early.
- Keep an ongoing note of all books and journals etc., for use as references.
- Sign up for library info sessions on "Refworks". It is software that will cut down the time spent on referencing.
- Network with students doing the same units either in study groups or by using Blackboard or Elgg (if applicable), a social network site with other students enrolled in your unit.
- Plan time to enjoy your friends and family. By being relaxed and maintaining a balanced lifestyle, your time at University will be more efficient.

## Other helpsheets available

- Five-step Planner
- Federation University Australia Wall Planner
- Structuring your Essay
- Mind Maps
- Concept Maps

