Tertiary studies - time management

Summary

Time management is an essential skill for all tertiary students. Managing your time will help you cope with the pressures of study. Use self-help strategies and student support services on campus to help you get organised and keep on top of your studies.

Time management – get organised

Getting organised and keeping on top of study commitments is an ongoing activity, battle or chore for all tertiary students.

If you’ve just left school, you will find yourself in a much less structured environment. You may, on the one hand, have more free time, but you also need to develop independent study habits. Many students need to organise their study time around work commitments and, depending on your circumstances, you may need to carefully allocate your time to juggle family and personal commitments as well. Time management is an essential skill to help you to get better organised and cope with the stress associated with study. Use online self-help resources to improve your time-management strategies, or seek advice from on-campus student support services.

Planning is essential to time management

Planning is the key to getting organised and you should start right from the beginning of the semester, or today. The skills you gain from learning to manage your time will always be useful to you as a student, but can also help in other aspects of your day-to-day life.

Tips to manage your time include:

- Develop the habit of listing your tasks and putting them in order of priority, which means you attend to the urgent tasks first. You might use headings like ‘must do’ and ‘wish to do’, or number them in order. Tick them off when completed.
- Make short-, medium- and long-term plans. For example, write study schedules for the day, the week, the term and the year.
- Get yourself a yearly planner or a calendar. Keep it handy in your study area so that you can see it at a glance. Write important dates, your assignment deadlines and exam schedules into your planner. It is a good idea to write each task in a differently coloured pen. Estimate the time you will need to complete each task. Write a start date for each assignment into your planner.
- Use a diary with a timetable for weekly planning – many tertiary institutions provide diaries for students and they also contain important information. Write in every commitment across the whole week (for example, your classes, travel to and from your tertiary institution, meal times, part-time work, social engagements with family and friends, and regular sport). Include your start dates for each assignment in your diary. Then assess each day and find empty time slots that you can devote to study. Write these in.
- Don’t worry if unexpected events cause you to miss a study period. Your planner is only a guide. Be flexible in your approach and reschedule your study period.
- Discover your learning style and experiment with study techniques to find out what works best for you. That way you will get the most out of your study time. Ask yourself questions such as, ‘Am I a morning or evening person?’ and ‘Where do I study best?’.
- Be assertive and learn to say ‘no’ – it can help you to prevent over-committing your time.
- Have some exam strategies in place and ways to deal with exam stress. Exam periods call for a different time-management approach as you revise and prepare for final assessments. Managing your time throughout...
the semester is one of the best long-term exam strategies.

- Be realistic – don’t set impossible goals such as six hours of continuous study without a break. Reward yourself for your efforts and plan to have some fun and relaxation so that you don’t experience burnout.

**Quick time management tips**

Suggestions include:

- Take advantage of small chunks of free time – for example, while travelling on public transport you could read over lecture notes, make assignment plans or proofread your work.
- Tackle small tasks as soon as you get them.
- Keep something handy at all times to write things down. Capture those valuable thoughts that you might have while you’re waiting in a queue for the photocopier.
- Spend a few minutes writing up a plan for each assignment. Break down the various tasks and list them in order of priority.

**Time management – avoid procrastination**

Procrastinating means putting important things off to another time, so that you spend your study time doing other things. This can be a big issue for many students, so try not to let it derail your studies.

Try figuring out what makes you procrastinate – you’ll then be in a better position to do something about it. Routinely break what seems to be a large task into manageable parts. Prepare drafts of your work in advance. Consider making changes to your study environment and reducing distractions.

Use ‘self-help’ materials to overcome and minimise procrastination, or get help from a counsellor or learning skills adviser.

**Manage your own time wasters**

Identify your own ‘time wasters’ and have strategies to manage them. Common time wasters, and ways to deal with them, include:

- Television, DVDs, YouTube – plan what you watch rather than surfing channels, or make watching a program a reward for studying.
- Internet, email, social networking sites – limit the amount of time you spend online. Avoid the temptation to keep checking for messages and updating your social network site when you are working at a computer.
- Video games – resist the urge to be spontaneous and instead schedule game time into your week, perhaps as a reward for study achieved. It may help to pack away gaming gear so it is less tempting.
- Telephone and text messaging – responding to every message as it arrives can disrupt your study. Make use of voicemail and set aside time to catch up on calls as a break from study.
- Housework and housekeeping – use the time when you are most alert for study and schedule other time to catch up on housework.

**Where to get help**

- Counselling at your university or TAFE institute
- Learning skills advisers
- Other student support services