



You are much more likely to succeed at university if you are well organised, but organising your time is more complex than just writing out a timetable in your diary. You may need to think about your working style when planning your study time.

- What is your usual way of getting things done?
- Do you work steadily over a long period?
- Do you work in isolated bursts?
- Do you have one big flurry of activity when the pressure mounts up?

Your schedule must be practical and realistic. Some students who are not used to having large amounts of time available need to develop good organisational skills. If you are adding study to an already full life, you may need to establish new priorities.

SETTING GOALS

There is always time for whatever you consider most important. It is all a matter of priorities. 'I didn't have time for...' usually means: 'I considered other things more important than...'. Spend some time sorting out the priorities in your life. What things are vital, important, desirable, neutral, unnecessary?



Make sure you make room for all of the vital components and do not be concerned about the unnecessary. It is important to set very specific long-term and short-term goals.

Be realistic, remembering your own work style and your priorities:

- Mark target dates on your calendar for tests, tutorial papers, essays.
- Each week make a list of things you hope to achieve in the week. Rank them in order of importance and tick them off as you do them.
- At the beginning of each study period, set yourself definite goals for that session. Check that you achieve these.

PLANNING YOUR SCHEDULE



At the beginning of a semester, you should receive a handbook or outline for each subject or topic you are studying. These documents usually set out your assignments, including their due dates. Transfer these due dates into one place your planner or diary. This way, you will not find yourself surprised by assignments that 'sneak up' unexpectedly.

You may find it helpful to make a detailed weekly plan of your time:

- Block out your fixed commitments: lectures, tutorials, travelling time, work.
- Mark in those things that are important or necessary for you: sport, recreation, housework, favourite television shows.
- Identify times when study will be the number one priority for you and let others (partner, children, friends) know that you are not available at these times. You may choose to allocate particular time-slots to particular subjects or activities, or vary these according to demands.
- Check that you have a balance between study and your other needs, including sleep, exercising and socialising.
- Allow some unscheduled time for emergencies (that may occur as deadlines come close).



USING YOUR SCHEDULE

- Use time when you concentrate best for the most demanding tasks.
- Use small blocks of time for 'busy' but not deeply intellectual tasks, like photocopying or sorting out lecture notes.
- Develop a filing system that organises notes and handouts, so that you do not waste vast amounts of time searching through the mess. You can try things like labelling papers clearly, using subject folders or plastic envelopes, and colour-coding work.
- Re-assess your schedule from time to time. Are you keeping up to date in all your subjects? Do you need to allocate more time to study generally, or to certain subjects? Do you need to study at different times?



FINDING TIME

It is essential that you are able to re-organise your life so that study time is available. This may require a big change in your lifestyle, especially if you have a non-student partner. In your planning, work out ways of ensuring that you can make the most of your available time:

- Find a regular study place which can be safely left and returned to, i.e. not the kitchen table.
- Ensure that there are as few distractions as possible when you are studying.
- Count the hours spent on study in a 'good' or 'typical' week, so that you can work out what is realistic for you.
- Allow some free time. You deserve it.
- Make use of 'hidden' time (though don't count it as part of your total). While having a shower, washing dishes or doing your laundry, call to mind the points made in a recent lecture or think about what you might say in an essay you are working on.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU LOSE YOUR MOMENTUM



Sometimes students can lose heart during a course. Compared to school or work, university can seem a lonely and uncaring place. Country or interstate students, mature entry students and international students can feel particularly isolated. Overseas students can get homesick, and distance education students sometimes fail to see the relevance of their study tasks. At times, a normally able and successful student may lose interest and become disheartened with their subject or course.

The following may help:

- Join and participate in clubs and groups. Allow time for new relationships to develop.
- Counsellors and academic skills advisers may be able to provide helpful information and support.
- Lecturers are often happy to offer advice, support and information, particularly in their subject area. After all, they want you to succeed.
- Some courses form support groups so that students can air their concerns and help each other



through difficult times. If no such group presently exists in your course, see if you can form your own with some other students.

- You may need to think about why you are doing the course or subject you are having problems with. What is your goal? What must you do to attain it? Setting your sights on the end result and remaining focused on this can sometimes help you through the grind.

LATE SUBMISSIONS

If you are having problems meeting deadlines, is it for one of the following reasons?

- You keep giving other things higher priority. It may be useful to spend some time sorting out what things are most important to you and making choices about what you will spend your time on.
- You misjudge how long the task will actually take you. Keep a record of the time spent on each phase of an assignment. Use this as a guide when planning your next one, making allowances for length and difficulty.
- Due dates suddenly appear and take you by surprise. Break down the total task into smaller steps and set yourself realistic deadlines for each step (allowing time for unforeseen events like toothache or surprise visitors).
- You think there is a 'right' answer and you're not sure you've found it. There is no magical 'right' answer. Your reading, thinking and discussing will help you come up with your own individual response to a question.
- You need to be certain you are on the right track. Perhaps you wait until the lecturer covers the topic before you start writing – even if it is just before your paper is due. If you have analysed the question carefully and chosen recommended or relevant readings, you are likely to be on track; if in doubt, talk to a tutor or lecturer.
- You have too much information or you take too many notes. Making a preliminary plan before you start may help you focus on relevant points and not gather unnecessary information.



Different schools and departments have different policies regarding extensions and late submissions. These policies are set out in course outlines and the external studies handbook. If you are falling behind, talk to someone who may be able to help you, such as a lecturer or academic skills adviser. If you are sick, a medical certificate is essential.

EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT



It may appear that your friends are being successful yet seem to have more free time than you do. We all have our own unique learning styles and rates and so must work out a schedule that meets our own needs. The 'early birds' will be bright and alert before sunrise but will start nodding off early in the evening. The 'night owls' may have difficulty making 9 o'clock lectures, but can keep working until very late at night while the rest of us are sleeping soundly. There is no **right** pattern of study that suits us all.

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Marsalis, LA & Rowland, F 1993, *A guide to learning independently*, Longman Cheshire, Sydney.

Nash, R 1995, *Studywise: strategies for academic success*, Flinders University: University Study Skills Centre, Adelaide. Percy, D 1984, *Study tactics*, Macmillan, Melbourne.



NEED A SPACE TO MAP OUT YOUR TIME?

Pop into the FUSA office on Level 1 of the Hub and get your free student planner.