

Improving your own learning & performance.

You are expected to do a lot of work in your own time, outside of lectures, labs, practicals etc. - when and how is up to you.

You are expected to read around your subject - but how much you do is up to you.

You will be expected to hit the ground running - on your chosen courses, you may be expected to sit end of course or mid course exams perhaps 4-5 weeks after you start college.



You are now responsible for planning and organising your work - and therefore responsible for managing your own time.

Being a college student offers a good opportunity for developing this skill as well as providing a new challenge.

You will have personal goals to achieve for assignments, essays, exams and leisure time - this section aims to help you manage your time to work more effectively and to reach your goals.

This section of the course contains a Time Organisation Questionnaire for you to complete. This will help you to begin to identify the ways you use your time, and possible time wasters.

Having completed this questionnaire, you might like to try keeping a diary for a week so you can begin to build up a picture of how you spend your time.

When you have completed a schedule or diary for a few weeks, you could consider the following:

- Why did I spend my time in that way?
- Is the way I spend my time helping me to study efficiently? What is good about how I use time?
- Am I surprised by anything?
- Do I need to change anything? What?
- Is there anything I really can't change? What?

Developing a Time Management Strategy

Think about your responses to this exercise.

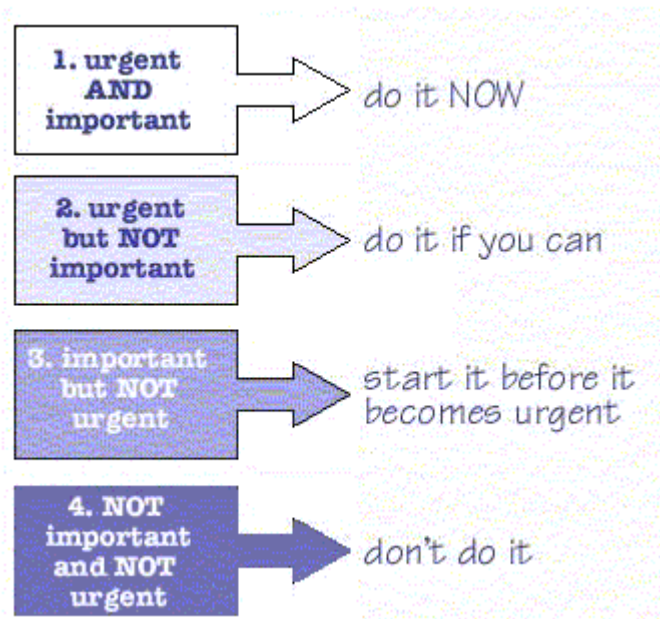
Have you been able to give sufficient thought to what you want to achieve and what others are demanding of you?

- ✓ If you haven't, your time will vanish before you've been able to attend to the study tasks that most need your attention.
- ✓ Realistic planning demands that you think ahead and make decisions about how you intend to spend your study time.
- ✓ Realistic planning also demands that you keep your plans fairly flexible - some tasks often take more time than expected and priorities change over time.

Prioritising

There is usually not sufficient time to achieve all your goals in a particular time frame. If this is the case, it is vital that you prioritise your goals. It is not the quantity of what you do, but the quality and value of it that is important.

- Plan everything out on a big piece of paper and tick off items as they are completed
- Prioritise using the following system:



- Have three trays and a waste bin. Allocate one tray for each of 1, 2, 3 above and throw category 4 into the bin
- Make out a list with the most important things first
- Identify which are your strongest and which are your weakest subjects. Should you allocate equal time to each, or more to the weaker one? Possible dangers include avoiding giving time to topics you dislike or feel weak at, spending so much time on them you neglect areas you are good at
- Is the time you are spending on something equal to its importance?

- Build in breaks - a coffee, a walk around the block, watching the news
- Reward yourself with a treat when you have achieved a target (or part of a target).
- Allow for unforeseen circumstances, e.g. a long queue at the library etc., and build in leeway.
- Make quick decisions about what action to take.
Repeatedly picking up the same piece of paper wastes time.

What is YOUR reaction to this approach?

Discussion Point!!

Do you think it would work? Would you try it? Or perhaps you do something like this already?

Discussing your reaction with other students, and maybe a tutor - especially if it is a negative one.



Managing Time for Study

Do not wait until the last minute to complete assessments -

Set several smaller study goals - if you have been given a task that you find overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.

Give yourself rewards - e.g. free time, watch a favourite TV programme etc. Make use of small windows of time that appear during your day. 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. Do not be tempted to ALWAYS spend this time having coffee chatting to your friends.

Listed below are some problems in managing time for study. Could you identify any additional problems you have had

finding time to study? Try making a list of these. In the second column, there is a list of ways of overcoming these problems - can you think of solutions to your particular areas of concern?

PROBLEMS

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Lack of an adequate study plan

- Set yourself targets for each study session, e.g. to read a number of pages, complete a number of exercises etc.

Finding it difficult to decide what to study and when

- Put the subject you find hardest or most uninteresting first on your study schedule
- Make sure that your week has a slot or slots allocated to each subject you study
- Plan your study times when you have the best concentration
- Ensure the study location you use is appropriate

Asking yourself "What am I learning?"

- Try to understand the main concepts and key points - only when you have grasped these will the detail start to make sense
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How you currently organise your work

Consider whether you would answer yes or No to these questions:

	Yes	No
Are your notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In piles on the floor?• On the floor, not in piles?• Filed systematically?		
Could you quickly find notes for a piece of work you did two months ago?		
Can you find equipment quickly (e.g. pens, calculators, files, paperclips?)		
Have you got a workspace/desk?		
Is there any space on your workspace/desk or is it cluttered?		
Do you have a reminder system for what you need to do?		

Giving attention to how you organise your work can save you hours of wasted time. It is well worth spending half a day setting up systems, which suit you and a couple of hours a week to maintain them or have a "sort out".

- 🕒 How could you improve your organisation, given any constraints related to where you live (at home, shared accommodation etc.?) Ask for feedback from friends about their views on how well (or not) you are organised. How do they do things

Time Wasters

Everybody wastes time to some degree.

A large part of Time Management is avoiding or managing/controlling time wasters - these can overwhelm you unless you take control or manage them.

Time wasters may be self-inflicted or arise from external sources:

Examples of self-inflicted time wasters

- Procrastination
- Perfectionism
- Lack of self discipline
- Worrying
- Personal disorganisation
- Lack of priorities
- Over-commitment (inability to say "No")
- Indecisiveness
- Socialising

Examples of external time wasters

- Intrusions (i.e. visitors, or phone calls)
- Television
- Travelling
- Waiting
- Idle conversations
- Crises
- Not being able to contact people

Some suggested strategies for dealing with time wasters:

Time Waster	Possible ways of limiting
Intrusions	Ask people to call by phone or in person at specific times. Answer the phone but say you'll call back. Specify a time, which is yours. Lock the door.
TV	Limit it by type of programme, or time each day.
Socialising	Only go out after 9.00pm, or only on set nights or days.

Lack of priorities	Plan ahead. Ask for advice from lecturers and friends.
Not being able to contact people	Leave messages. Write notes rather than make repeated calls. Say where you can be contacted.
Locating resources	Ask Library staff for help.

- 🕒 Look at the time log you completed at the beginning of the section. Identify your self-inflicted time wasters and develop a strategy for dealing with them.
- 🕒 Try out one of your strategies, but observe what happens and review the effect of the changes you have implemented. If it works for you, then continue with the changes, if it does not work try something different from your list.
- 🕒 Regularly review the changes you have made to ensure that they are still effective. If they are, continue with your changes. If not, introduce some different ones.
- 🕒 Now carry out the same procedure for your external time wasters. What have you learned about your time management as a result of this activity?

The Working Environment

Everyone has different ways of working which suit them best. Use the questions below to assess your preferred working style:

What time of day do I study best?

How long can I concentrate before I need a break?

Where do I study best?

What circumstances help me study?

Do I work better under pressure?

Do I work better alone or with others?

What other questions could you consider?

Finally.....

Actions

As a result of working through this section:

- What do you need to take action on?
- Which of the ideas suggested here could you try out?
- What help do you need?