

Time Management

Time management is about balancing different aspects of your life in ways that make your goals achievable. Over time, your goals will change, so it is a good idea to review your time management at six monthly intervals, or more frequently if your situation changes.

1. Identify your goals

	Study goals	Life goals
Short-term goals (days to weeks away)		
Medium-term goals (weeks to months away)		
Long-term goals (months to years away)		

Short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals are all necessary to maintain motivation. If you only have short-term goals and live from day to day, your life can become totally unstructured and directionless. If you only have long-term goals, it can be difficult to focus on the day-to-day tasks required to achieve the goal. Your long-term goal might be to complete your course, but you need short-term and medium-term goals to make this a reality.

2. Examine how your time is currently spent

Keep a record of your activities for one week. Mark essential activities with an asterisk, such as sleeping and work. Add these up and subtract from 168 (i.e., the number of hours in a week) to get the number of hours at your disposal. If you have very little time left, you might need to reconsider your definition of essential.

3. Analyse your subjects

How you spend your available time will depend on what you are studying. Answer these questions about your subjects.

- How is the subject assessed?
- Does the subject require a regular time commitment, or do demands fluctuate?
- Can assignments be completed in small segments, or are longer periods required in order to make any progress?

- How do you rate the subject compared to others you are studying in terms of difficulty/demands on time?

The answers to these questions will help you to design an appropriate study timetable for each subject. They will help you to decide how much time you need to allow for each subject and how the time should be distributed.

4. Plan and record your time use

On a weekly planner, block in all the committed time you identified in the previous step (i.e. time devoted to essential or obligatory activities). Make several copies of the sheet. On one copy, indicate what you hope to achieve. On another, record what you actually do. At the end of each day, compare the two. Do not expect them to be exactly the same, and do not give up because they are different. Take note of what is planned for the following day and try again! Record your activities in this way for three to four weeks, then reassess your goals, and if necessary, adjust your plan.

Some points to consider when planning your use of time.

1. Aim to spend the hours a week (including class time) on each subject that your lecturer specifies.
2. Plan regular 5–10 minute breaks every 30 to 40 minutes.
3. Study your most difficult subject when you are freshest.
4. Decide on your best time of day for studying. Are you a 'morning person' or a 'night person'?
5. Try to vary your subjects during a study period. This makes learning more efficient.
6. Try to use travel time constructively. Listen to tapes or read when using public transport.
7. Try to form regular study habits: same time, same place. This helps establish a routine.
8. Avoid distractions such as noise and interruptions. Let those you live with know when you should not be disturbed.
9. Have your material and your workspace organised and tidy. It will be much easier to get started.
10. Reward yourself when you keep to your study plan.