Time Management

As a student you may find that there are many competing demands on your time. Study, work, family, leisure and many other areas of your life are all competing for the same limited amount of time in day, week, month or year. But you must remain focused on your goal, which should be to complete your study for the upcoming semester. Time management is simply the practice of managing your time efficiently to maximise your performance. In your case, your ability to achieve the tasks related to completing your assigned study. In most cases, this will include the completion and timely submission of assessment items like essays, projects, reports and workbooks and may even include attending written examinations.

Time Management in Practice

There is an endless range of time management strategies and techniques available on the internet, through self-help books and through the accumulated wisdom of your friends, family and colleagues. It is doubtful that any of the established “methods” can claim to be 100% correct and there is no guaranteed method of being a good time manager. However, the first thing you need to do is to have an awareness of the need to manage your time. After that you need to start using time management techniques and see which ones work for you. Below is a list of some of the more common methods.

Establish routines

Routines may seem boring but they do work in terms of getting things done. You probably already have plenty of routines established and are actually already used to following them. For example, you may make yourself a cup of coffee every morning when you get out of bed or you may wash your clothes on a Sunday. If you set a routine to study, and then apply yourself and stick to that routine, you will find it becomes easier to achieve your tasks and to reach your goals.
Examples of Routines

- **Use time management tools**

  Time management tools can include lists, diaries, time planners or calendars. By simply plotting due dates for assignments on a standard calendar, you are using that calendar as a time management tool and you are managing your time by setting goals!

- **Set time limits for tasks**

  Not all tasks will be achieved easily or quickly. However, not all tasks require days and days of effort. To start with, estimate what you think is a reasonable amount of time for the task, write it down, then keep an eye on the clock and compare how long it actually took you to finish the task with what you thought it was going to take.

- **Create time management goals and use a time management plan**

  Putting a date on the calendar is great but it does not have much meaning unless you are actually going to use it to motivate yourself to finish the task by that date. One way to do this is to look at these dates as goals, things you are trying to achieve and have a plan of how you are going to achieve it. For example, you might need to submit Assignment 1 – Ethics Essay on the 20th of May. The best way to make sure you achieve your overall goal is to break it down into some smaller, more manageable and more realistic smaller or sub-goals and then try to stick to completing these smaller goals on time.

  - 1st of May: Gather all readings and researched evidence from library
  - 7th of May: Write first draft of essay
  - 14th May: Include all references, re-read and make corrections
  - 20th of May: Submit essay to lecturer
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- Find out where you’re wasting time.

As you try to achieve your time management plan, you will not always be successful. This is not a problem; it is part of learning about how to manage your time. Look at where your plan blew out and where you either spent far too much time on a part of your plan or when external things got in the way of achieving your goals. This may mean some hard decisions (like not watching the football on the weekend before an assignment is due) but you need to make these decisions if you want to achieve your goals.

- Don’t waste time waiting

People often mention they do not seem to have enough time. But realistically, there are often situations where being a little more organized or thinking ahead could have allowed you to use some “dead time” as productive time. For example, if you are waiting at an airport for your flight, take your book of readings and do some readings instead of staring out the window of the airport lobby. If you are sitting at your computer, turn off the email or Facebook and really concentrate on maximizing that time for your studies. If you have to do something that does not allow you to actually physically do work like read or write, like making dinner, spend that time making dinner and thinking about what you might write about in your next assignment.