

TIME MANAGEMENT PLANNING TO SUCCEED

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Why is scheduling important?

Students who spend time planning what they will do each week tend to be more likely to complete their assignments on time, with less last-minute work, and at a higher level of quality. Perhaps more importantly, in the course of a semester, they also often have more free time than those who don't plan ahead. Although getting a system up and running can be labour intensive at the start, once you find a system that works for you, you will be surprised at how little time it takes.

Effective time management is more than scheduling; it is using time efficiently. Planning tasks ahead of time eliminates the need for you to spend some of each available block of time deciding what you are going to do in that time. It is as if your schedule makes the decisions for you. It allows you to focus better during the work time you have set aside and leaves free time later when you don't need to worry about what you "should" be doing – you already did it!

Why can't I just make lists?

Making a list is better than not planning at all and reduces demands on your memory system trying to keep track of everything "in your head;" however, unlike an organizer, a list (on a piece of paper) is easily misplaced or lost. Lists are also not very specific – they just outline the things you have to do, not when you plan to do them. And finally, lists can begin to look overwhelming as tasks begin to pile up. An organizing system takes your task list and breaks it down into what needs to be done this week, or today, which makes your to-dos seem more manageable.

How specific should I be?

The best schedule is one that works for you. The best plan is one that you know you can complete. Using someone else's schedule and making overly ambitious plans is unlikely to result in lack of success and a perception that planning doesn't work. You may find that setting aside time to "study" or "be in the studio" is sufficient. Alternatively, you may find that being more specific with that time "read chapter 3 of Art History Text" and "work on DRWF in studio" is better for you.

Whenever I have tried managing my time, I find that I don't follow through with it and then have to spend more time re-organizing what I thought I was going to do.

Keeping to your schedule is not necessarily a matter of willpower – it is a habit. Like any habit, good or bad, it takes time to develop. In this instance, an entire semester of trying and adjusting your time management practices is probably just barely enough time to evaluate whether time management “works” for you.

Also, things inevitably come up that require you to adjust your schedule. A system that works is flexible. It does not mean that the time you spent planning was wasted, it just means you need to re-plan.

A deep thought:

You do not manage time. Time passes no matter what we do. Time management is really task management. You manage what you do with the time you have.

The Traditional Approach

Most of the methods of managing time involve “left-brained” principles based in logic and outline a series of organized steps. An example follows.

1. Get the big picture: The Semester Calendar

- a. This gives you a visual picture of when crunch times are likely to occur and allows you to plan ahead. It needs only to be done once each term unless you drop/add a course. You will need a four-month/semester planner. Leave this in a fixed location where you spend time working so that you will keep it in mind as the semester progresses.
- b. In a four-month planner, fill in important dates (can be gleaned from course outlines).
 - i. Due dates, exams, critiques, shows, etc.
 - ii. Include other important dates from your life outside school that you know of in advance

2. Add dimension to your picture: Break assignments into parts

- a. This step encourages you to think about your course load in more detail. This is just a thinking exercise and does not require any materials.
- b. Most tasks at the post-secondary level are best thought of as being made of several parts. For instance, to write a good paper, you have to define your topic, gather information (e.g., research), develop an outline, write it (including the reference list), and edit the piece for it to be completed. For an exam, attending lectures, keeping up with assigned readings, and studying are required for success. And when building a piece/design, you have to give yourself time to conceptualize, re-think, and then make the work.
- c. Looking at your Semester Calendar, break each of the larger tasks into their parts and begin thinking about how much time each part will take and when you would have to begin each of the major assignments in order to finish them.

3. Bring your big picture into focus: Estimate how long each part will take

- a. This step helps you to figure out how much time will be required outside of class to complete your course requirements.
- b. Each student is different and progresses through tasks at his/her own pace. Therefore, estimating how long each part will take will require an understanding of where your individual strengths and challenges lie. This self-awareness develops as you progress through your degree.
 - i. Begin with your first course. Take your course outline and add up the amount of time you think it will take to complete each task (and its parts).
 - ii. Do this for each of your remaining courses.
 - iii. When uncertain, a rule of thumb is that each course will require 2-3 hours outside of class for every 1 hour spent in class

4. Create a groove to get into: The Master Calendar

- a. This gives you a visual picture of the time you generally have available each week. This needs only to be done once at the start of each term – unless you drop/add a course, get a job, etc. that changes the structure of each week.
 - i. In a weekly planner, fill in each course.
 - ii. If you have any outside commitments and know when these will happen each week, fill those in as well (job, clubs, sports/leisure activities, committees, etc.).
 - iii. Block off time before class to get ready, eat, and commute
 - iv. Block off time during the day for meal breaks
 - v. Ensure there is enough time each day for adequate sleep
 - vi. Provide space in the week for “down time” (social, leisure activities).

5. Get into the groove: The Weekly Calendar

- a. The result of the previous steps has been to clarify how much time is needed and how much time is available. This step involves putting the two together. You will need an organizer of some kind. Whether electronic or paper-and-pencil, the organizer should be mobile and should be brought with you between school and home so that you can add/subtract tasks that come up and affect your plan for that week.
- b. Some prefer to be able to see the entire week, while others find this overwhelming and want to see only what needs to be done today. You will figure out which camp you fall into.
 - i. With your Semester Calendar, Master Calendar, and Time Estimates in mind, plot the tasks/activities (i.e., the parts of the larger tasks) in available time slots in your weekly calendar.
 - ii. Consider some important questions when you are filling in spaces:
 1. Do you work best at home or at school?
 2. Alone or with others?
 3. In the morning or evening?
 4. Are there differences between the different types of tasks (E.G., I create best at night but am more alert in the morning – maybe reading a chapter from AHIS text is a good thing to get done early. E.G., I write best at home but get more work done on my pieces when I'm in my studio. ETC.).
- c. Should I use this break as a break? Sometimes time between / after classes should be used to unwind, connect with friends, etc. At other times, these breaks are a perfect opportunity to finish something that can be done “quickly.”
- d. What is the priority? There is no clear answer to this question. Sometimes the priority might be the thing that is due first. Other times, it might be the thing that is worth more in terms of the overall grade for the course. And sometimes it might be the thing that is more important to you (i.e., courses in your major may be “worth more”, the course you are struggling in might be “worth more”, etc.)

Nutrition, sleep, and exercise provide us with the energy we need to meet our demands. If you are regularly not getting an adequate amount of any of these biological energy sources, you will likely find yourself burning out. Ensure your schedule allows time for meals, sleep, and physical activity.

Balance between school/work and play (social and leisure activities) helps to make your tasks seem worth doing as well as more manageable. Aim to make a schedule that allows for a balance between demands and these other important areas (“have to’s” and “want to’s”).

A good rule of thumb is that when you have a choice between two tasks, one you generally enjoy doing and one that you don’t like very much, it is good to **do the one that you don’t like first**. The one you like can be used as a motivator to complete the one you like least. If you consistently do projects you like and leave the ones you don’t for “later,” you will run out of “later” and complete it hastily, poorly, or under stress at the last minute. This will only reinforce the negative feelings you have about that class/task.

Let’s face it, **you will not love every class or task** in the four years of your degree. You will need to spend time on parts of tasks and in subject areas that are more difficult or less interesting. However, the quality of your work, your development as a student/artist, and the enjoyment of your four years will depend largely on whether you have spent enough time on the parts/tasks/classes you enjoy most/are best at.

When setting aside time to complete a task, try to **eliminate – or at least reduce – distractions** and stay focused on the task at hand. If you complete the work in the time you have set aside, you will begin to develop a sense of mastery and accomplishment.

Think of time management as task management: **“Within this time, I hope to finish X,”** rather than “I will work on X for three hours.”

Studying is best done when done regularly. **Review lecture notes and text chapters as soon after class as possible**. One hour after class will be as effective as several hours later in the week.

Provide for spaced review in which you review material covered in the past week. More importantly, **mass study periods are ineffective**. After a few hours, your ability to concentrate decreases rapidly. Try to limit study sessions to 2-hours for one subject area.

Finally, it is important to **include “rewards”** for completing activities and staying “on track” with your demands (sometimes even just for trying). This plays a vital role in sustaining effort and motivation, particularly for tasks that you do not find enjoyable. Consider the following examples:

- a) Social (time with friends, family, etc.)
- b) Leisure (time spent doing something you like to do, whether alone or with others)
- c) Verbal praise (giving yourself – or receiving from others – a “pat on the back” for a job)
- d) Material (treating yourself to a nice dinner or some “thing” that you have been eyeing)
- e) Reminding yourself of your longer-term goals (remember that this, perhaps arduous, task is part of the bigger picture and is getting you closer to where you want to be in life)