

Managing Time

Problems with time management tend to fit into two categories: the first is having too much to do in too little time and the second is not getting much done in plenty of time. Let's begin by dispelling a myth:

Many people believe that there is a direct relationship between study-time and academic success. In other words, the more time you spend studying, the better you will do in examinations. Unfortunately, this theory is misleading for two reasons. First you can sit in front of your book for hours and yet achieve nothing because of a tendency to daydream. In addition, research shows that it is the quality rather than quantity of your study that determines the richness of your learning.

(Moran, 1997, p. 29)

Making good use of your time

First you must check whether you really want to change your habits. If you decide to make changes, you need to identify what your shortcomings are. These are the most commonly identified:

- Lack of clear focus, not knowing how or where to start
- Procrastination
- Task hopping
- Underestimating time needed for activities (e.g. travelling)
- Too many demands outside of University
- Difficulties with prioritising

But you need to look deeper too. If you are a procrastinator, what is the cause? Do you lack motivation, why? If you always seem to have too much to do, is it because you're not very good at saying 'no'? What stops you from prioritising?

Creating quality study-time

Below is a list of the most commonly identified remedies for managing time better. Set daily goals (with realisable and practical aims rather than over ambitious and vague ones)

- Set daily study priorities
- Create routines (for both times and places to work)
- Divide tasks up into small, manageable components
- Tackle small tasks first and progress to more demanding ones
- Study briefly and regularly
- End your study period by setting a task for the following day
- Review time spent on different subjects or courses
- Create work patterns that match your body clock (e.g. you may prefer to do demanding work at a particular time of day)

- Make a timetable (to include flexible time in case something comes up or takes longer than you thought)
- Record deadlines for each semester on a year planner
- Negotiate study periods with those you live with
- Take regular exercise
- Give yourself time off
- Give yourself rewards

You have to give these remedies a chance to work. For instance, it takes time and discipline to create a routine! Be prepared to adapt your approach if you need to. Most importantly, take control of the time that is yours to manage.

Using time more effectively: An Exercise

- 1 Select a typical study day in your recent past.
- 2 List what you did hour by hour, for a 24- hour period (you can do this by drawing a circle and dividing it into 24 segments – see page 3 of this handout). Some activities, like ‘sleep’, may take up several segments or blocks.
- 3 Divide the time into the amount of hours that you did not have control over (lectures, travelling, job, childcare etc) and the amount of hours that you did have control over (study, sleep, exercise, relaxing etc).
- 4 First, check to see if you had a sufficient number of ‘controllable’ hours in your day to give to your studies. If you didn’t, take a closer look at the ‘non-controllable’ hours. If you consistently don’t have enough study time, think about making some bigger changes. You might have to give something up, or you might be able to find time-saving ways to do things. There’s always something that you can do.
- 5 Now look at your controllable time and review how well you used it. Are there any surprises? Did you waste periods of time? How did you spend small amounts of time, for example the odd hour between classes? How productive were you in your study periods? Did you leave out any important activities? Are you generally pleased with what you see? If not, can you pinpoint what went wrong in the periods that you are unhappy about?
- 6 Draw another circle or chart, and divide the day into how you would prefer to use your time. Aim for a balance between different activities, both those that you do and do not have control over, and keep spaces for free time. This can form the basis for any changes that you decide to make. But don’t be too rigid!

References and further reading:

Moran, A. P. (1997) *Managing your own learning at university*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Time Circle

How I use my time now

OR

How I want to use my time

