

Effective Time Planning Strategies

Introduction

One of the best methods of using time effectively and controlling procrastination is to plan when you will do specific study tasks. If you've been using the "I do what I feel like doing when I feel like doing it" method of time management and would like to reduce the stress, procrastination, and guilt that go with it, consider trying a flexible time plan like the one discussed below. Planning does not mean following a rigid, military-like schedule; rather, it means making intelligent decisions about when it is easiest and most efficient to get your work done. Time management means working smarter, not necessarily harder, and a good time plan is the key.

Find Out What Time is Really Available

When only a relatively few hours each week are spent in classes and labs compared to high school, it is easy to misjudge the amount of time which is actually available for studying. By making a master timetable of your weekly activities, you can not only get a realistic picture of how many hours are actually free, you can also plan work periods around other activities which you consider important and don't want to sacrifice for studying.

Using a standard class schedule form, or something similar, make a timetable of all your activities which are the same each week. These activities include classes and labs, sleep, meals, travelling time, sports or fitness activities, part-time jobs, church activities, etc., but not study time. It is important to be realistic about how long these activities take. For example, leave seven to eight hours a night for sleep, even if you can get away with five or six, and give yourself an hour for lunch and supper, so you can relax, socialize, or run errands as well as eat. Once this master timetable is complete, make a copy for each week in the semester.

List Study Tasks

Most people use some method of recording what they need to do, if nothing more than jotting due dates on

a calendar. To plan your time more effectively, each week make a comprehensive list of study tasks which includes some time to work on major assignments. The tasks are then rank-ordered according to your priorities, and the amount of time needed to complete each task is estimated. These three important steps - list, prioritize, and estimate - are a key element in time management. For more information on these steps see the Study Skills Tip Sheet [Making a Task List](#).

Decide What to Do When

Each week, using your task list and a copy of your master timetable, decide when you will do each task. Tailor the amount of detail in your time plan to your individual strengths, habits, and preferences. Some students like to know what specific task they will be doing in each free hour. Others will list what needs to be done on a particular day, but not specify a time for each task. A few students can work successfully from a weekly list, but it's difficult not to procrastinate with this method because big, unpleasant, or overwhelming tasks almost always get pushed to the bottom of the list.

When making these conscious, intelligent decisions about what to do when, consider your body's natural highs and lows. Plan to do priority tasks when your energy is high and your concentration is at its best. Save shopping, housework, or physical activities for late in the afternoon or evening if, like many students, that's when you're normally tired.

When planning how to use large chunks of time, it's usually more efficient to alternate tasks or subjects, so that in a three-hour period, for example, you would spend one hour each on three different subjects, rather than a marathon three-hour session on just one. One hour is only an example and may be too much or not enough for some tasks - the "best" method is always what works best for you. Plan frequent breaks, especially when you're under a lot of pressure. Your brain needs time to digest and process information; moreover, breaks relieve stress, help sustain motivation, and provide a transition period

when switching subjects. The guideline is about ten minutes per hour of study.

Each day, include an hour of "flexible" time in your plan. Flex time has several important functions. If you underestimate the amount of time some task takes, flex time provides an extra hour to finish it without getting behind or sacrificing some other activity. Procrastinators can use flex time to do work they've put off, or to reward themselves with sixty minutes of guilt free "do nothing" time when they haven't procrastinated.

Want more information?

The Counselling Department and the Academic Success Centre are your best sources for advice and information on issues related to learning, studying, time management, and academic performance.

Workshops on learning, studying, etc., are offered regularly each semester by the Counselling Department. Please contact Student Services at Abbotsford - 604-854-4528 (B 214) or Chilliwack - 604-795-2808 (A 1318) to make an appointment.

Study Skills Tip Sheets providing information on many learning and time management topics, as well as writing and referencing, are available free to students. The complete range of Study Skills Tip Sheets is available on-line at www.ufv.ca/counselling/study/.

Other Relevant Study Skills Tip Sheets

Controlling Procrastination
Making a Tasklist
Making Time Management Work for You

Web Resources

- York University's
http://www.yorku.ca/mclaughlin/documents/time_management.ppt

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