

Time Management

The university experience involves managing a great diversity of information, activities, processes, relationships, and other demands on your time and energy. Everyone has different ways of approaching time management, and this handout is a basic introduction to some of these ways.

Respect Your Own Learning Style

More important than any trick or technique is understanding your own abilities and challenges in learning and living. For example, some people enjoy routine, while others prefer change. Some people read quickly, others slowly. Some people process information visually, others in words...

These examples are just a hint at how different our learning and living styles can be. Getting to know your own style is an important part of becoming more comfortable with how you manage time. Here are a few ways to better understand your needs and learning style:

- Try working at different times of day, in different kinds of spaces, and in different kinds of ways. What works and what doesn't?
- Keep a journal dedicated to your working methods. Whenever you notice that one approach is going well or another is posing challenges, write down a few notes about it. Review occasionally and learn from your experience.
- Talk with friends and colleagues about their habits and approaches. Maybe the student sitting next to you has a great idea you've never tried before.
- Get support from OCAD U. Consider talking with someone at the Writing & Learning Centre for strategies, tips, and resources. Reach out to the Health & Wellness Centre if you're feeling overwhelmed or anxious.

Putting it into Practice

Use a planner: There are all kinds of paper and electronic planners available – find one you're comfortable using and that allows you the level of planning you need. If you're the sort of person who likes reminders, try one of the many digital solutions on your computer, smartphone, or e-mail account. If you prefer old-fashioned notebooks, check out OCADSU's student agenda. Whatever type of calendar you choose, use it to plan as much as possible:

- Start by blocking in your "must-dos" for the week. These are class times, work shifts, or other personal obligations.
- Block in your commuting time. How long does it take you to get to school? What time should you plan to wake up?
- Schedule time the evening before to do things like make your lunch, pack your bag, print your assignment, etc. so you don't have to rush in the morning.
- Block in study time: plan out what time and where you'll do your homework.
- Add due dates for your assignments noting when each stage should begin and end (i.e. brainstorming, researching, refining, revising, purchasing materials, etc.) Book an appointment with the WLC ahead of time.

Make the most of your planner: Each week make a rough list of things you need and/or want to achieve. Re-copy this list in order of importance. Decide on priorities based not only on due dates and grade percentages, but also on what inspires you and gives you energy. Use your planner to:

- Schedule activities strategically: Keep fresh by organizing different kinds of work in one day.
- Highlight top priorities using colour coding, stickers, alerts, etc.
- Check your planner every day for daily, weekly, and monthly concerns.
- Cross off activities that are complete – it’s a satisfying feeling!

Take Care: It’s important to be keep up your physical and emotional health. Make sure your schedule allows you to:

- Take breaks – at least 10 or 15 minutes each 90 minutes or so. (Recent research indicates that exposure to nature improves cognition – why not take a break in a garden or park?)
- Exercise, meditate, or let off steam – whatever that means to you.
- Keep hydrated, eat well, and get enough sleep.

Stay Flexible: Planning is excellent, but we can’t anticipate everything. For this reason, it is best not to leave things until the last moment. Keep an hour or two of free time in your day to deal with unforeseen events, activities that take longer than you expected, and so on.

Managing Procrastination

Procrastination is something everyone faces, but you can find strategies that work for you.

Strategies to Get you Started

Free Write: Set a timer and write non-stop for five minutes on the topic you’re writing or making about. Don’t stop to erase, cross out, edit, or think: just write.

Mind Map: Create a mind map for the topic you’re writing or making about. Create a mind map for all the steps involved in the project you’re working on.

Pomodoro Technique: Set a timer and work for 25 minutes, then take a five-minute break and repeat. If this is too long, try 20 minutes with a five-minute break.

Do Nothing: If you can’t get started, give yourself the option to do nothing. You can only work on the assignment or do nothing – don’t read, go online, go for a walk, etc. Just sit, think, look out the window. Eventually, you’ll get bored and start working.

Break it up: Make a list of each step that needs to get done. Start with the first step.

Take the First Step: Set a timer and work on it for a minimum of ten minutes. Once you’ve started, you’ll usually keep at it.

Pair the Task: This might be working with a friend, having a good snack, working in a special environment (e.g. a coffee shop), rewarding yourself with time online, etc.

Set short, specific goals: Each time you start working, set a small, specific, and realistic goal for that session.

Set fake deadlines: If you think you work best under pressure, set yourself deadlines for different steps of the assignments. Have a friend, tutor, or instructor check if you have completed the task on time.