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Managing time effectively

JARGON-BUSTING

Gantt chart: A tool used for project management which enables you to visually present start and end dates for particular tasks.

Prioritisation: The process of deciding and arranging tasks in order of importance.



AT A GLANCE

This chapter is for you if

- You feel as though you work every hour of the day but still struggle to complete everything you need to do
- Deadlines elude you
- You spend hours cleaning your room or making cups of coffee/tea or doing the ironing or washing the car before being able to get down to the task in hand
- Make list after list after list but never get to the end and always feel disappointed in yourself
- You feel that you could make more of the time you have

My friend Linda is the epitome of what it is to manage time well. We began our occupational therapy training together in the days when there were only 30 students in a year. For that first term, filled with good intentions, 29 of the group worked for 12 hours a day. But not Linda. While we all slogged away, she steadily worked from 9 to 5, taking weekends and evenings off to be with friends and care for her family. For the

remaining term and beyond we all procrastinated, partied hard and pulled all-nighters while Linda would work from 9 to 5 with trips to the theatre, cinema and meals out with friends, good holidays and all the time supporting her husband and children. At the end of the course we were exhausted and grateful for our seconds and thirds, and she, modest as ever, with her glowing first.

I remember visiting her in practice five years or so after we had qualified. She was held in the highest esteem, known as one of the most efficient people there and valued by everyone. Colleagues marvelled at how she was the one person who always left work on time and always met deadlines. We laughed together and I told her that I admired her effortless organisation. On hearing this she appeared visibly shocked and told me that this was far from the case. Time management was something that she had always had to work at. The secret of her success was simple: she was clear about exactly what she needed to achieve and when she needed to achieve this by, and above all she knew how to embed work and study into her daily routines so that she used every precious moment to the full.

Being a student can sometimes feel like spinning plates. There are so many opportunities available: new and exciting skills to master, books to read, societies to join, social events to attend, friendships to make – a veritable Aladdin's cave. It is absolutely right that you want to gain the most from every moment you have. If you can master time, the rewards are great, leading to less stress and more success.

Yet the benefits of managing your time effectively are not confined to the classroom. Health and social care environments are increasingly pressurised places in which to work. As a practitioner, you will need to organise your case load, meet deadlines, undertake procedures within established routines, prioritise, respond to situations very quickly, re-order your day at a moment's notice, prepare reports – all within time constraints. Within this environment you will be required to record how you have used your time and will be held accountable for this.

Good time management is not about working every hour of the day. It is about understanding the task in hand, deciding what you hope to achieve, weighing up your priorities, recognising the conditions you need to work effectively and making the most of the time you have available. If you can develop such skills, you will work more effectively, feel more confident and increase your chances of success at university and on placement.

This chapter helps you to understand how you currently use your time and the conditions you need in order to work at your best. You will have the opportunity to explore a number of tools and techniques that you can use in the classroom and in practice so that you can be the master of time as opposed to letting time be the master of you.

STARTING POINTS

The first step to managing your time effectively is to understand how you currently use your time. Answer the following questions to uncover your present work and study patterns.