

A few pointers on managing your time

Managing your time effectively is critical for work-based learning, probably more so than on a conventional course where there are set short-term deadlines. Whether your deadlines are fixed, negotiated or self-imposed it is important to work to them; people who keep to deadlines are much more likely to complete their programmes than those who repeatedly miss or extend them. The following points may help you to manage your time effectively:

- Set realistic timescales, and keep to them. Only make adjustments if there are unavoidable reasons, and if you do need to make adjustments, do this as early as possible and ensure your new deadline is realistic.
- Start activities as soon as possible - don't leave them to the last minute. Making a start early allows you to have the activity in mind even if you know you will not be able to finish it immediately.
- Set aside sufficient time to work on aspects of your studies that aren't part of your everyday work. This is particularly important when you are writing or investigating or analysing information. Avoid distractions during this time - e.g. telephone, callers, checking email.
- Integrate study activities with your normal work - include them in any lists, diary entries etc - if they are left until a 'quiet moment' they may not get done.
- Consider using project management techniques such as critical path analysis, GANTT charts and flowcharts to manage more complex activities and manage your studies overall.
- If you are finding it difficult to get motivated on a particular task, it can help to discuss it with someone else; better still ask if they will review or discuss further drafts with you. If you have a mentor – use him or her in this way.

People find that different techniques work best for managing their time, and you may need to experiment to find those that work best for you. A note of caution, though - what you currently prefer doing isn't always the most effective way of working!