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# Time Management – Tips and Techniques

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# **Time Management**

## **Manage yourself, not your time**



Many of us claim our days are never wasted. "I'm very organised" we say "I know where I am going and what I'm going to do". If you truly feel that way then you are in the minority. Most people become frustrated with a day that is unproductive. We would all like to get more done in a day. The idea of time management has been in existence for more than 100 years. Unfortunately the term "Time management" creates a false impression of what a person is able to do. Time can't be managed; time is uncontrollable; we can only manage ourselves and our use of time.

Time management is actually self management. It's interesting that the skills we need to manage others are the same skills we need to manage ourselves: the ability to plan, delegate, organise, direct and control.

In University you will be expected to do a lot of work in your own time, outside of lectures, labs, practicals, etc. – when and how is up to you. You will be expected to read around your subject – but how much you do is up to you. You will be expected to hit the ground running – on a degree course, you may be expected to sit end of course exams 14 or 15 weeks after you start university. You are now responsible for planning and organising your work – and therefore responsible for managing your own time.

Being a college/university student offers a good opportunity for developing this skill as well as providing a new challenge. You will have personal goals to achieve for assignments, projects, exams and leisure time.



## 'Time Stealers'



In order for a time management process to work it is important to know what aspects of our personal management need to be improved. Below you will find some of the most frequent reasons for reducing personal effectiveness. Tick the ones which are the major obstacles to your own time management. These we refer to as your "Time Stealers".

### *Identifying your time stealers*

- Interruptions – telephone, personal visitors
- Tasks you should have delegated
- Procrastination and indecision
- Acting with incomplete information
- Dealing with team members
- Crisis management (fire fighting)
- Unclear communication
- Inadequate knowledge
- Unclear objectives and priorities
- Lack of planning
- Stress and fatigue
- Inability to say "No"
- Desk management and personal disorganisation

Fortunately there are strategies you can use to manage your time, be more in control and reduce stress. You can analyse your time and see how you may be both the cause and the solution to your time challenges.

### **Time management issues in more detail**

1. **Shifting priorities and crisis management.** Management guru Peter Drucker says that "crisis management is actually the form of management preferred by most managers" The irony is that actions taken prior to the crisis could have prevented the fire in the first place.
2. **The telephone.** Have you ever had one of those days when you thought your true calling was in Telemarketing? The telephone - our greatest communication tool - can be your biggest enemy to effectiveness if you don't know how to control its hold over you.

3. **Lack of priorities/objectives.** This is probably the biggest/ most important time waster. It affects all we do both professionally and personally. Those who accomplish the most in a day know exactly what they want to accomplish. Unfortunately too many of us think that goals and objectives are yearly things and not daily considerations. This results in too much time spent on the minor things and not on the things which are important to our work/lives.
4. **Attempting too much.** Many people today feel that they have to accomplish everything yesterday and don't give themselves enough time to do things properly. This leads only to half-finished projects and no feeling of achievement.
5. **Drop-in visitors.** The five deadliest words that rob your time are "Have you got a minute". Everyone's the culprit - peers, friends, family, etc. Knowing how to deal with interruptions is one of the best skills you can learn.
6. **Ineffective delegation.** Good delegation is a key skill. If you have a heavy workload in college, delegate household chores, for example, to others. You can always make it up to them when the pressure is off.
7. **The cluttered desk.** When you have finished reading this article look at your desk. If you can see less than 80% of it then you are probably suffering from 'desk stress'. The most effective people work from clear desks.
8. **Procrastination.** The biggest thief of time; not decision making but decision avoidance. By reducing the amount of procrastinating you do you can substantially increase the amount of active time available to you.
9. **The inability to say "no!"** The general rule is, if people can dump their work or problems on to your shoulders they will do it. Some of the most stressed people around lack the skill to 'just say no' for fear of upsetting people.

## TIME MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

As a student, there are some basic Principles of Time Management that you can apply.

1. **Identify "Best Time" for Studying:** Everyone has high and low periods of attention and concentration. Are you a "morning person" or a "night person"? Use your power times to study; use the down times for routines such as laundry and errands.
2. **Study Difficult Subjects First:** When you are fresh, you can process information more quickly and save time as a result.
3. **Use Distributed Learning and Practice:** Study in shorter time blocks with short breaks between. This keeps you from getting fatigued and "wasting time." This type of studying is efficient because while you are taking a break, the brain is still processing the information.
4. **Make Sure the Surroundings are Conducive to Studying:** This will allow you to reduce distractions that can "waste time." If there are times in your home when you know there will be noise and commotion, use that time for mindless tasks.
5. **Make Room for Entertainment and Relaxation:** College is more than studying. You need to have a social life; yet, you need to have a balance in your life.
6. **Make Sure you Have Time to Sleep and Eat Properly:** Sleep is often an activity (or lack of activity) that students use as their time management "bank." When they need a few extra hours for studying or socialising, they withdraw a few hours of sleep. Doing this makes the time they spend studying less effective because they will need a couple hours of clock time to get an hour of productive time. This is not a good way to manage yourself in relation to time.
7. **Always define your objectives as clearly as possible:** Do you find you are not doing what you want because your goals have not been set? One of the factors, which mark out



successful people, is their ability to work out what they want to achieve and have written goals that they can review constantly. Your long-term goals should impact on your daily activities and be included on your "to do" list. Without a goal or objective people tend to just drift, both personally and professionally.

8. **Analyse your use of time:** Are you spending enough time on the projects which, although may not be urgent now, are the things you need to do to develop yourself or your career. If you are constantly asking yourself "What is the most important use of my time, right now?" it will help you to focus on 'important tasks' and stop reacting to tasks which seem urgent (or pleasant to do) but carry no importance towards your goals.
9. **Have a plan:** How can you achieve your goals without a plan. Most people know what they want but have no plan to achieve it except by sheer hard work. Your yearly plan should be reviewed daily and reset as your achievements are met. Successful people make lists constantly. It enables them to stay on top of priorities and enable them to remain flexible to changing priorities. This should be done for both personal and business goals.
10. **Action plan analysis:** Problems will always occur, the value of a good plan is to identify them early and seek out solutions. Good time management enables you to measure the progress towards your goals because "What you can measure, you can control". Always try to be proactive.

Time management (or self management) is not a hard subject to understand, but unless you are committed to build time management techniques into your daily routine you'll only achieve partial (or no) results and then make comments such as "I tried time management once and it doesn't work for me". The lesson to learn is that the more time we spend planning our time and activities the more time we will have for all activities. By setting goals and eliminating time wasters and doing this every day you may find you will have extra time in the week to spend on those people and activities most important to you.