

## Chapter 7 Time Management



Mary Shier

**Student Success**  
An Invaluable Resource for  
College and University Students



This resource is a chapter from the book, *Student Success: An Invaluable Resource for College and University Students* by Mary Shier, published by BCcampus Open Education, illustrated by Gordon Shier.

Note that page numbers reflect the page numbers in the full textbook.

The full text can be found at [opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess](https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess), where it can be read online, downloaded, printed, or ordered.

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## Introduction

A great aspect of time is its equality. Regardless of race, religion, or age, everyone has the same amount of time in a day, week, month and year. Wealthy people cannot buy more time and poor people do not receive less time. A minute for a tall person is the same amount of time for a short person. An hour for a woman is the same amount of time for a man. Regardless of how many languages someone speaks, their sexual orientation, ethnicity, educational background, income or experience, everyone has 365 days in a year. Granted some people will live longer than others, but everyone has the same amount of time every day as everyone else.

Time is also how we keep track of when we're supposed to be and where we're supposed to be (work, home, class, meeting friends and family, etc.). Think about how many measures of time you have in your home (clocks, watches, cell phones, TVs, DVRs, computers, microwaves, ovens, thermostats, etc.). It is obvious time is important to us.

### Time: A Limited and Precious Commodity

We cannot go back in time. If I used my time poorly last Wednesday, I can do nothing to get it back. Other commodities may allow for accumulating more or starting over, but time does not. We cannot “save” time or earn more time.

“If you had a bank that credited your account each morning with \$86,400, but carried no balance from day to day and allowed you to keep no cash in your account, and every evening cancelled whatever part of the amount you had failed to use during the day, what would you do? Draw out every cent, of course! Well, you have such a bank, and its name is time. Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off as lost whatever of these you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries no balance; it allows no overdrafts. Each day it opens a new account with you. Each night it burns the record of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposit, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the morrow. You must live in the present – on today's deposit. Invest it so as to get the utmost in health and happiness and success.”

— Anonymous

We often bring up efficiency and effectiveness to describe how people spend their time. What is your relationship with time? Are you usually early, right on time or late? Do you find yourself often saying, “I wish I had more time?” Are you satisfied with your relationship with time or would you like to change it?

One of the challenges many adult students face is being over-committed. Some are working full-time and going to school full-time. Students may be taking care of children, siblings, parents, or be care-givers for loved ones with health needs. Students can have a multitude of other commitments and responsibilities. It can be difficult to take action to complete goals when there are so many areas competing for our time. And sometimes we cannot “do it all.” Sometimes we need to prioritize, let something go, adjust and reevaluate what the most important things are to us.

Other students may struggle because college does not have as much structure as they may have been used to in high school. They may think, “Why should I start a homework assignment now when I don’t have anything I have to do for the next three days?” This mindset usually leads to the student waiting until the last minute to start the assignment and as a result, the quality of work is not high.



Time management for successful university studying involves these factors:

- Determining how much time you need to spend studying
- Knowing how much time you actually have for studying and increasing that time if needed
- Being aware of the times of day you are at your best and most focused
- Using effective long-term and short-term study strategies
- Scheduling study activities in realistic segments
- Using a system to plan ahead and set priorities
- Staying motivated to follow your plan and avoid procrastination

For every hour in the classroom, university students should spend, on average, about two additional hours on that class reading, studying, writing papers, and so on. If you’re a full-time student with fifteen hours a week in class, then you need another thirty hours for the rest of your academic work. That forty-five hours is about the same as a typical full-time job. If you work part time, time management skills are even more essential. These skills are still more important for part-time university students who work full time and commute or have a family. To succeed in university, virtually everyone has to develop effective strategies for dealing with time. In this chapter, you will learn strategies for time management and discover tools to help you implement them.

## Learning Objectives

In this chapter on “Time Management,” students will:

- Apply strategies for effective time management.
- Evaluate different scheduling tools for learners’ personal needs.
- Develop long-term and short-term goals.
- Create personal schedules including study times, assignments, tests, and personal obligations.

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## 7.1 Strategies

### Time Management Strategies for Success

Following are some strategies you can begin using immediately to make the most of your time:

- **Prepare to be successful.** When planning ahead for studying, think yourself into the right mood. Focus on the positive. “When I get these chapters read tonight, I’ll be ahead in studying for the next test, and I’ll also have plenty of time tomorrow to do X.” *Visualize* yourself studying well!
- **Use your best—and most appropriate—time of day.** Different tasks require different mental skills. Some kinds of studying you may be able to start first thing in the morning as you wake, while others need your most alert moments at another time – whatever those times are for you.
- **Break up large projects into small pieces.** Whether it’s writing a paper for class, studying for a final exam, or reading a long assignment or full book, students often feel daunted at the beginning of a large project. It’s easier to get going if you break it up into stages that you schedule at separate times—and then begin with the first section that requires only an hour or two.
- **Do the most important studying first.** When two or more things require your attention, do the more crucial one first. If something happens and you can’t complete everything, you’ll suffer less if the most crucial work is done.
- **If you have trouble getting started, do an easier task first.** Like large tasks, complex or difficult ones can be daunting. If you can’t get going, switch to an easier task you can accomplish quickly. That will give you momentum, and often you feel more confident tackling the difficult task after being successful in the first one.
- **If you’re feeling overwhelmed and stressed because you have too much to do, revisit your time planner.** Sometimes it’s hard to get started if you keep thinking about other things you need to get done. Review your schedule for the next few days and make sure everything important is scheduled, then relax and concentrate on the task at hand.
- **If you’re really floundering, talk to someone.** Maybe you just don’t understand what you should be doing. Talk with your instructor or another student in the class to get back on track.
- **Take a break.** We all need breaks to help us concentrate without becoming fatigued and burned out. As a general rule, a short break every hour or so is effective in helping recharge your study energy. Get up and move around to get your blood flowing, clear your thoughts, and work off stress.





*Taking a well deserved strategic break can clear your head and inspire creative thought.*

- **Use unscheduled times to work ahead.** You've scheduled that hundred pages of reading for later today, but you have the textbook with you as you're waiting for the bus. Start reading now, or flip through the chapter to get a sense of what you'll be reading later. Either way, you'll save time later. You may be amazed how much studying you can get done during down times throughout the day.
- **Keep your momentum.** Prevent distractions, such as multi-tasking, that will only slow you down. Check for messages, for example, only at scheduled break times.
- **Reward yourself.** It's not easy to sit still for hours of studying. When you successfully complete a task, you should feel good and deserve a small reward. A healthy snack, a quick video game session, or social activity can help you feel even better about your successful use of time.
- **Just say no.** Always tell others nearby when you're studying, to reduce the chances of being interrupted. Still, interruptions happen, and if you are in a situation where you are frequently interrupted by a family member, spouse, roommate, or friend, it helps to have your "no" prepared in advance: "No, I *really* have to be ready for this test" or "That's a great idea, but let's do it tomorrow—I *just can't* today." You shouldn't feel bad about saying no—especially if you told that person in advance that you needed to study.
- **Have a life.** Never schedule your day or week so full of work and study that you have no



*Celebrate when you finish a test or assignment!*



time at all for yourself, your family and friends, and your larger life.

- **Take inventory.** Pay attention to where your time goes. What do you spend your time doing? What things could be cut out in order to make space for studies?
- **Use a calendar planner and daily to-do list.** We'll look at these time management tools in the next section.
- **Use technology to your advantage.** Software and apps are available to help with organization and productivity. They can save you heaps of time. Check out Evernote, One Note, Stickies, Todoist, and Remember the Milk.

## Battling Procrastination

Procrastination is a way of thinking that lets one put off doing something that should be done now. This can happen to anyone at any time. It's like a voice inside your head keeps coming up with these brilliant ideas for things to do right now other than studying: "I really ought to get this room cleaned up before I study" or "I can study anytime, but tonight's the only chance I have to do X." That voice is also very good at rationalizing: "I really don't need to read that chapter now; I'll have plenty of time tomorrow at lunch...."

Watch this one minute video which demonstrates just how ridiculous procrastination is.

**Video:** "'Procrastination' Tales of Mere Existence" (length 1:21)



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=189#oembed-1> (#oembed-1)*

Procrastination is very powerful. Some people battle it daily, others only occasionally. Most university students procrastinate often, and about half say they need help avoiding procrastination. Procrastination can threaten one's ability to do well on an assignment or test.

People procrastinate for different reasons. Some people are too relaxed in their priorities, seldom worry, and easily put off responsibilities. Others worry constantly, and that stress keeps them from focusing on the task at hand. Some procrastinate because they fear failure; others procrastinate because they fear success or are so perfectionistic that they don't want to let themselves down. Some are dreamers. Many different factors are involved, and there are different styles of procrastinating.

Just as there are different causes, there are different possible solutions for procrastination. Different strategies work for different people. The time management strategies described earlier can help you avoid procrastination. Because this is a psychological issue, some additional psychological strategies can also help:

- Since procrastination is usually a habit, accept that and work on breaking it as you would any other bad habit: one day at a time. Know that every time you overcome feelings of procrastination, the habit becomes weaker—and eventually you'll have a new habit of being able to start studying right away.

- Schedule times for studying using a daily or weekly planner. Carry it with you and look at it often. Just being aware of the time and what you need to do today can help you get organized and stay on track (see next section).
- If you keep thinking of something else you might forget to do later (making you feel like you “must” do it now), write yourself a note about it for later and get it out of your mind.
- Counter a negative with a positive. If you’re procrastinating because you’re not looking forward to a certain task, try to think of the positive future results of doing the work.
- Counter a negative with a worse negative. If thinking about the positive results of completing the task doesn’t motivate you to get started, think about what could happen if you keep procrastinating. You’ll have to study tomorrow instead of doing something fun you had planned. Or you could fail the test. Some people can jolt themselves right out of procrastination.
- On the other hand, fear causes procrastination in some people—so don’t dwell on the thought of failing. If you’re studying for a test, and you’re so afraid of failing it that you can’t focus on studying and you start procrastinating, try to put things in perspective. Even if it’s your most difficult class and you don’t understand *everything* about the topic, that doesn’t mean you’ll fail, even if you may not receive an A or a B.
- Study with a motivated friend. Form a study group with other students who are motivated and won’t procrastinate along with you. You’ll learn good habits from them while getting the work done now.
- Keep a study journal. At least once a day write an entry about how you have used your time and whether you succeeded with your schedule for the day. If not, identify what factors kept you from doing your work. (Use the form at the end of this chapter.) This journal will help you see your own habits and distractions so that you can avoid things that lead to procrastination.
- Get help. If you really can’t stay on track with your study schedule, or if you’re always putting things off until the last minute, see an education advisor. They have lots of experience with this common student problem and can help you find ways to overcome this habit.

**Video:** “Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator” (length 14:03)



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## Time Management Tips for Students Who Work

If you’re both working and taking classes, you seldom have large blocks of free time. Avoid temptations to stay up very late studying, for losing sleep can lead to a downward spiral in performance at both work and school. Instead, try to follow these guidelines:

- If possible, adjust your work or sleep hours so that you don’t spend your most productive times at work. If your job offers flex time, arrange your schedule to be free to study at times when you perform best.

- Try to arrange your class and work schedules to minimize commuting time. If you are a part-time student taking two classes, taking classes back-to-back two or three days a week uses less time than spreading them out over four or five days. Working four ten-hour days rather than five eight-hour days reduces time lost to travel, getting ready for work, and so on.
- If you can't arrange an effective schedule for classes and work, consider online courses that allow you to do most of the work on your own time.
- Use your daily and weekly planner conscientiously. Any time you have thirty minutes or more free, schedule a study activity.
- Consider your “body clock” when you schedule activities. Plan easier tasks for those times when you're often fatigued and reserve alert times for more demanding tasks.
- Look for any “hidden” time potentials. Maybe you prefer the thirty-minute drive to work over a forty-five-minute train ride. But if you can read on the train, that's a gain of ninety minutes every day at the cost of thirty minutes longer travel time. An hour a day can make a huge difference in your studies.
- Can you do quick study tasks during slow times at work? Take your class notes with you and use even five minutes of free time wisely.
- Remember your long-term goals. You need to work, but you also want to finish your university program. If you have the opportunity to volunteer for some overtime, consider whether it's really worth it. Sure, the extra money would help, but could the extra time put you at risk for not doing well in your classes?
- Be as organized on the job as you are academically. Use your planner and to-do list for work matters, too. The better organized you are at work, the less stress you'll feel—and the more successful you'll be as a student also.
- If you have a family as well as a job, your time is even more limited. In addition to the previous tips, try some of the strategies that follow.

## Time Management Tips for Students with Family

Living with family members often introduces additional time stresses. You may have family obligations that require careful time management. Use all the strategies described earlier, including family time in your daily plans the same way that you would include hours spent at work. Don't assume that you'll be “free” every hour you're home, because family events or a family member's need for your assistance may occur at unexpected times. Schedule your important academic work well ahead and in blocks of time you control. See also the earlier suggestions for controlling your space: you may need to use the library or another space to ensure you are not interrupted or distracted during important study times.

Students with their own families are likely to feel time pressures. After all, you can't just tell your partner or kids that you'll see them in a couple of years when you're not so busy with job and university! In addition to all the planning and study strategies discussed so far, you also need to manage your family relationships and time spent with family. While there's no magical solution for making more hours in the day, even with this added time pressure there are ways to balance your life well:

- Talk everything over with your family. If you're going back to school, your family members may not have realized changes will occur. Don't let them be shocked by sudden household changes. Keep communication lines open so that your partner and children feel they're together with you in this new adventure. Eventually you will need their support.
- Work to enjoy your time together, whatever you're doing. You may not have as much time together as previously, but cherish the time you do have—even if it's washing dishes together or cleaning house. If you've been studying for two hours and need a break, spend the next ten minutes with family instead of checking email or watching television. Ultimately, the important thing is *being together*, not going out to movies or dinners or the special things you used to do when you had more time. Look forward to being with family and appreciate every moment you are together, and they will share your attitude.
- Combine activities to get the most out of time. Don't let your children watch television or play video games off by themselves while you're cooking dinner, or you may find you have only twenty minutes family time together while eating. Instead, bring the family together in the kitchen and give everyone something to do. You can have a lot of fun together and share the day's experiences, and you won't feel so bad then if you have to go off and study by yourself.
- Share the load. Even children who are very young can help with household chores to give you more time. Attitude is everything: try to make it fun, the whole family pulling together—not something they “have” to do and may resent, just because Mom or Dad went back to school. (Remember, your kids will reach university age someday, and you want them to have a good attitude about university.) As they get older, they can do their own laundry, cook meals, and get themselves off to school, and older teens can run errands and do the grocery shopping. They will gain in the process by becoming more responsible and independent.
- Schedule your study time based on family activities. If you face interruptions from young children in the early evening, use that time for something simple like reviewing class notes. When you need more quiet time for concentrated reading, wait until they've gone to bed.
- Be creative with child care. Usually options are available, possibly involving extended family members, sitters, older siblings, cooperative child care with other adult students, as well as child-care centres. After a certain age, you can take your child along to campus when you attend an evening course, if there is somewhere the child can quietly read. At home, let your child have a friend over to play with. Network with other older students and learn what has worked for them. Explore all possibilities to ensure you have time to meet your educational goals.



*Precious family time. Balance it wisely with study time*

## Time Management Tips for Student Athletes

Student athletes often face unique time pressures because of the amount of time required for training, practice, and competition. During some parts of the year, athletics may involve as many hours as a full-time job. The athletic schedule can be grueling, involving weekend travel and intensive blocks of time. You can be exhausted after workouts or competitions, affecting how well you can concentrate on studies thereafter. Students on athletic scholarships often feel their sport is their most important reason for being in university, and this priority can affect their attitudes toward studying. For all of these reasons, student athletes face special time management challenges. Here are some tips for succeeding in both your sport and academics:

- Realize that even if your sport is more important to you, you risk everything if you don't also succeed in your academics. Failing one class in your first year won't get you kicked out, but you'll have to make up that class—and you'll end up spending more time on the subject than if you'd studied more to pass it the first time.
- It's critical to plan ahead. If you have a big test or a paper due the Monday after a big weekend game, start early. Use your weekly planner to plan well in advance, making it a goal, for example, to have the paper done by Friday—instead of thinking you can magically get it done Sunday night after victory celebrations. Working ahead will also free your mind to focus better on your sport.
- Accept that you have two priorities—your sport and your classes—and that both come before your social life. That's just how it is—what you have accepted in your choice to be a university athlete. If it helps, think of your classes as your job; you have to “go to study” the same as others “go to work.”
- Use your planner to take advantage of any downtime you have during the day between classes and at lunch. Other students may seem to have the luxury of studying during much of the afternoon when you're at practice, and maybe they can get away with hanging out between classes, but you don't have that time available, at least not during the season. You need to use all the time you can find to keep up with your studying.
- Stay on top of your courses. If you allow yourself to start slipping behind, maybe telling yourself you'll have more time later on to catch up, just the opposite will happen. Once you get behind, you'll lose momentum and find it more difficult to understand what's going on in class. Eventually the stress will affect your athletic performance also.
- Get help when you need it. Many athletic departments offer tutoring services or referrals for extra help. But don't wait until you're at risk for failing a class before seeking help. A tutor won't take your test or write your paper for you—they can only help you focus in to use your time productively in your studies. You still have to want to succeed.



*Using free time wisely*

## Managing Free Time

Laura Vanderkam’s TED Talk helps with perspective on free time.

**Video:** “How to Gain Control of Your Free Time” (length 11:53)



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You must make time for the things that are most important to you. In order to make time, you may need to decide you will not do something else.

The ability to say “no” cannot be underestimated. It isn’t easy to say “no,” especially to family, friends and people that like you and whom you like. Most of us don’t want to say “no,” especially when we want to help. But if we always do what others want, we give others the power to control our lives, and we won’t accomplish the things that we want—the things that are most important to us.

Ask yourself:

- What am I doing that doesn’t need to be done?
- What can I do more efficiently?

Have you ever ordered an appetizer, salad, beverage or bread, then felt full halfway through your entree? In situations like this many people claim, “my eyes were bigger than my stomach.” This is also true with planning and goal setting. It may be that your plan is bigger than the day. Experiment with what you want to accomplish and what is realistic. The better you can accurately predict what you can and will accomplish and how long it will take, the better you can plan, and the more successful you will be.



### Exercise: Time Management Strategies

Research some software and apps that can help you with time management either by helping you be more organized (e.g. planning calendars with reminder notifications) or by saving time on course work (e.g. Evernote to help keep notes organized). Pick one or more that you think would be useful for your courses and try it out. Is it one that you will continue to use? Why or why not?

### Key Takeaways

- To develop strategies for managing your time, take an inventory of the things you spend your time on, and be realistic about how much time you can carve out for your studies.
- Plan your schedule with two hours of additional study time for each hour in class. Use your most alert times of day, break up large tasks into smaller pieces and stages, take breaks to help you stay focused, avoid distractions, and reward yourself for successful accomplishments.
- Procrastination has many different causes for different people but is a problem for most students. Different techniques can help you battle procrastination so you can get the job done.
- Use a semester calendar planner to mark out the big things on your schedule at a glance: exams, tests, important events, assignment deadlines.
- Use a weekly calendar planner to block out study times and plan well ahead for examinations and key assignments to achieve success in school.
- Use a daily to-do list along with your weekly planner to avoid overlooking even smaller tasks and to make the most of your time throughout the day.
- Students who work, live with family, or are athletes often face significant time pressures and must make a special effort to stay organized and plan ahead for efficient studying.

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## 7.2 Evaluating Scheduling Tools

### Calendar Planners and To-Do Lists

Calendar planners and to-do lists are effective ways to organize your time. Many types of academic planners are commercially available (check your university bookstore), are digitally available, or you can make your own. Some people like a page for each day, and some like a week at a time. Some use computer calendars and planners that they can access on their laptops or cell phones. Almost any system will work well if you use it consistently.

Some students think they don't need to actually write down their schedule and daily to-do lists. They've always kept it in their head before, so why write it down in a planner now? Some first-year students were talking about this in a study group, and one bragged that she never had to write down her calendar because she never forgot dates. Another student reminded her how she'd forgotten a preregistration date and missed taking a course she really wanted because the class was full by the time she went online to register. "Well," she said, "except for that time, I never forget anything!" Of course, none of us ever forgets anything—until we do.

Calendars and planners help you look ahead and write in important dates and deadlines so you don't forget. But it's just as important to use the planner to schedule *your own time*, not just deadlines. For example, you will want to capitalize on the fact that the most effective way to study for an exam is to study in several short periods over several days or weeks. You can easily do this by choosing time slots in your weekly planner that you will commit to studying for the test. You don't need to fill every time slot, or to schedule every single thing that you do, but the more carefully and consistently you use your planner, the more successfully will you manage your time.

But a planner cannot contain every single thing that may occur in a day. We'd go crazy if we tried to schedule every telephone call, every email, every bill to pay, every trip to the grocery store. For these items, we use a to-do list, which may be kept on a separate page in the planner, or on your daily calendar in your phone.

Realistically, you will likely need to think of your time management in three categories:

1. Semester schedule.
2. Weekly schedule.
3. Daily to do list.

### Semester Schedules

Semester schedules are a way to show all the important dates at a glance. It can be the whole semester on one page, or it can be the whole semester with a month per page. At any rate, you want to take a

bird's eye view of your schedule. You will have all important deadlines listed on this including mid-term and final exams, assignment due dates, and large project due dates. This will help you for quick referral when you need it and will guide your weekly planner. Always refer to your semester schedule when you start filling in your weekly calendar.

## Weekly Schedules

This is likely the most important planner to keep you on track and free from nasty surprises (like assignment deadlines that sneak up on you). You should refer to it daily. Check the example of the weekly planner form below. You can copy this page and try it out to see if it works for you. Alternately, you can download weekly planners from the internet. There are numerous styles available. Try one and you will find out whether the time slots are big enough for you or you'd prefer a separate planner page for each day. Different educational programs have different scheduling needs. Some are very consistent (e.g. regular class times and a quiz every Friday.) Others are a collection of courses with varying demands and assignments creating a varying schedule from week to week. Fill in the planner form below for next week or try a few different ones to see which you prefer. First write in all your class meeting times; your work or volunteer schedule; and your usual hours for sleep, family activities, and any other activities at fixed times (like kids' piano lessons or your soccer games). Don't forget time needed for transportation, meals, and so on. You don't need to necessarily write these on your planner, but you do need to consider them as you plan other activities to have enough time in between activities. Your first goal is to find all the blocks of "free time" that are left over. Then you can schedule your study and assignment blocks in these.

Remember that this is an **academic planner**. Don't try to schedule in everything in your life (only the fixed non-negotiable things)—this is to plan ahead to use your study time most effectively.

Next, check the syllabus for each of your courses and write important dates in the planner. Use red ink or a highlighter for these key dates. Write them in the hour slot for the class when the test occurs or when the paper is due, for example. You may want to write any deadlines for your second week in the margin to the right. You need to know what's coming *next* week to help schedule how you're studying *this* week.

HOURS	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
6–7 AM							
7–8							
8–9							
9–10							
10–11							
11–12 PM							
12–1							
1–2							
2–3							
3–4							
4–5							
5–6							
6–7							
7–8							
8–9							
9–10							
10–11							
11–12 AM							
12–1							
1–2							
2–3							
3–4							
4–5							
5–6							

### *Weekly Planner*

For example,

You have a short paper due on Friday. You determine that you'll spend ten hours total on it, from initial brainstorming and planning through to drafting and revising. Since you have other things also going on

that week, you want to get an early start; you might choose to block an hour a week ahead on Saturday morning, to brainstorm your topic, and jot some preliminary notes. Monday evening is a good time to spend two hours on the next step or pre-writing activities. Since you have a lot of time open Tuesday afternoon, you decide that's the best time to reserve to write the first draft; you block out three or four hours. You make a note on the schedule to leave time open that afternoon to see your instructor during office hours in case you have any questions on the paper; if not, you'll finish the draft or start revising. Thursday, you schedule a last block of time to revise and polish the final draft due tomorrow.

If you're surprised by this amount of planning, you may be the kind of student who used to think, "The paper's due Friday—I have enough time Thursday afternoon, so I'll write it then." What's wrong with that? First, college and university work is more demanding than many first-year students realize, and the instructor expects higher-quality work than you can churn out quickly without revising. Second, if you are tired on Thursday because you didn't sleep well Wednesday night, you may be much less productive than you hoped—and without a time buffer, you're forced to turn in a paper that is not your best work.

Consider a number of options for your weekly planner. In many ways it is a matter of personal choice according to your needs. Some prefer a small book planner which you can pop in your bag and take everywhere. You can purchase new ones every year. Others prefer a large spiral bound paper planner that they keep open on their counter for constant referral. Yet others prefer to have it on a digital scheduler so that can access it from anywhere on their phone or laptop.

You decide.

## Daily To-Do Lists

People use to-do lists in different ways, and you should find what works best for you. As with your planner, consistent use of your to-do list will make it an effective habit.

Some people prefer not to carry their planner everywhere but instead copy the key information for the day onto a to-do list. Using this approach, your daily to-do list starts out with your key scheduled activities and then adds other things you hope to do today.

Some people use their to-do list only for things not on their planner, such as short errands, phone calls, email, pick up highlighter pens, and the like. This still includes important things—but they're not scheduled out for specific times.

Although we call it a daily list, the to-do list can also include things you may not get to today but don't want to forget about. Keeping these things on the list, even if they're a low priority, helps ensure that eventually you'll get to them.

Start every day with a fresh to-do list written in a special small notebook or on a clean page in your planner. Check your planner for key activities for the day and check yesterday's list for items remaining.

Some items won't require much time, but other activities such as assignments will. Include a time estimate for these so that later you can do them when you have enough free time. If you finish lunch and have twenty-five minutes left before your next class, what things on the list can you do now and check off?



Finally, use some system to prioritize things on your list. Some students use a 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C rating system for importance. Others simply highlight or circle items that are critical to get done today. The below figure shows two different to-do lists—each very different but each effective for the student using it. ()

Do — Weds

Read A+P Ch 4 before class

Math 9-10 —then do probs.

for next class

Eng 11-12

History Study group at <sup>meet</sup> lunch — Coramons? **12:15**

**A+P 1-2 today!!**

Need new parking sticker!

Start Eng. paper —

brainstorm topic

Gym for an hour?

Bookstore — printer cartridge

ATM — cash

answer Dad's e-mail

Work at 4 — call Pat after

Weds to do

9-10 math

11-12 Eng

1-2 A&P

read A&P ch 4 before class (A)

12:15-1 History study group

4- go to work

---

do math problems after class (A)

go to gym to workout (C)

need new parking sticker (A)

brainstorm Eng. paper (A)

topic

get printer cart. — bookstore

answer Dad's e-mail (B)

ATM cash (C)

Call Pat after work (A)

Examples of two different students' to-do lists. Use whatever format works best for you to prioritize or highlight the most important activities.

### Exercise: Scheduling Tools

Research some different types of scheduling tools. They could be paper (yearly planners) or digital (e.g. One Note, Stickies, Todoist, Remember the Milk). They could be self-designed or downloaded from the internet. Maybe you use one already. List pros and cons of three types of scheduling tools. Evaluate which ones you think would work best for you while you are doing your post-secondary studies. Decide which tool you will use for three types of planning:

1. Semester at a glance
2. Weekly planner
3. Daily to-do lists

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## 7.3 Setting Goals

### Set Realistic and Specific Goals

Some people are goal-oriented and seem to easily make decisions that lead to achieving their goals, while others seem just to “go with the flow” and accept what life gives them. While the latter may sound pleasantly relaxed, moving through life without goals may not lead anywhere at all. The fact that you’re taking courses now shows you already have the major goal to complete your education.

A goal is a result we intend to reach mostly through our own actions. Things we do may move us closer to or farther away from that result. Studying moves us closer to success in a difficult course, while sleeping through the final examination may completely prevent us from reaching that goal. That may be an extreme case, yet still a lot of students don’t reach their goal of graduating. The problem may be a lack of commitment to the goal, but often students have conflicting goals. One way to prevent problems is to think about all your goals and priorities and to learn ways to manage your time, your studies, and your social life to best reach your goals. Consider these four students:

1. To help his widowed mother, Yuxi went to work full time after high school. Now, a few years later, he’s dissatisfied with the kinds of jobs he has been able to get and has begun taking computer programming courses in the evening. He’s often tired after work, however, and his mother would like him to spend more time at home. Sometimes he cuts class to stay home and spend time with her.
2. Becky has just been elected president of her student union and is excited about planning a major community service project. She knows she should be spending more time on her reading assignments, but she feels her community project may gain her contacts that can help her find a better job after graduation. Besides, the project is a lot more fun, and she’s enjoying the esteem of her position. Even if she doesn’t do well on her courses, she’s sure she’ll pass.
3. After an easy time in high school, James is surprised his college classes are so hard. He’s got enough time to study for his courses, but he also has a lot of friends and fun things to do. Sometimes he’s surprised to look up from his computer to see it’s midnight already, and he hasn’t started reading that chapter yet. Where does the time go? When he’s stressed, however, he can’t study well, so he tells himself he’ll get up early and read the chapter before class, and then he turns back to his computer to see who’s online.
4. Sachito was successful in cutting back her hours at work to give her more time for her business classes, but it’s difficult for her to get much studying done at home. Her husband has been wonderful about taking care of their young daughter, but he can’t do everything, and lately he’s been hinting more about asking her sister to babysit so that the two of them can go out in the evening the way they used to. Lately, when she’s had to study on a weekend, he leaves with his friends, and Sachito ends up spending the day with her daughter—and not getting much studying done.

What do these very different students have in common? Each has goals that conflict in one or more ways. Each needs to develop strategies to meet their other goals without threatening their academic success. And all of them have time management issues to work through: three because they feel they don't have enough time to do everything they want or need to do, and one because even though he has enough time, he needs to learn how to manage it more effectively. For all four of them, motivation and attitude will be important as they develop strategies to achieve their goals.

It all begins with setting goals and thinking about priorities.

As you think about your own goals, think about more than just being a student. You're also a person with individual needs and desires, hopes and dreams, plans and schemes. Your long-term goals likely include graduation and a career but may also involve social relationships with others, a romantic relationship, family, hobbies or other activities, where and how you live, and so on. While you are a student you may not be actively pursuing all your goals with the same fervour, but they remain goals and are still important in your life.

Goals also vary in terms of time. Short-term goals focus on today, the next few days and perhaps the next few weeks. Mid-term goals involve plans for this school year and the time you plan to remain in post-secondary. Long-term goals may begin with graduating from your program and everything you want to happen thereafter. Often your long-term goals (e.g. the kind of career you want) guide your midterm goals (getting the right education for that career), and your short-term goals (such as doing well on an exam) become steps for reaching those larger goals. Thinking about your goals in this way helps you realize how even the little things you do every day can keep you moving toward your most important long-term goals.

#### Author's Story

A young woman came to me for education advising to discuss her career and educational goals. In her appointment, she was very excited to be talking to me about her goals. She beamed at the thought of establishing goals and taking steps to move towards them. She explained that she recently started dating a man who asked her about her goals. She realized that she didn't have any. She realized that no-one had ever asked her that before. She said that in her family and among her friends, no one ever discussed goals with her. No one expected anything of her. No one ever talked about long-term planning. She realized that the lack of goal-setting in her life had meant she felt no control of her future. The prospect of taking charge and moving in a direction that she had some influence over was really exciting to her!

— Mary Shier, College of the Rockies

Write out your goals in the next exercise. You should literally *write* them down, because the act of finding the best words to describe your goals helps you think more clearly about them. Follow these guidelines:

- **Goals should be realistic.** It's good to dream and to challenge yourself, but your goals should relate to your personal strengths and abilities.
- **Goals should be specific.** Don't write, "I will become a great musician"; instead, write, "I

will finish my music degree and be employed in a symphony orchestra.”

- **Goals should have a time frame.** You won’t feel very motivated if your goal is vaguely “to finish university someday.” If you’re realistic and specific in your goals, you should also be able to project a time frame for reaching the goal.
- **You should really want to reach the goal.** We’re willing to work hard to reach goals we really care about, but we’re likely to give up when we encounter obstacles if we don’t feel strongly about a goal. If you’re doing something only because your parents or someone else wants you to, then it’s not your own personal goal—and you may have some more thinking to do about your life.

#### Exercise: Personal Goals

Take out a piece of paper and write down your short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. Be sure to consider all areas of your life—consider *everything important* that you want to do between this moment and old age. (While you might aim for three to eight goals in each section, remember that everyone is unique, and you may be just as passionate about just one or two goals or more than eight.)

- Short-term goals (today, this week, and this month)
- Mid-term goals (this year and while in college or university)
- Long-term goals (from post-secondary graduation on)

## Priorities

The question of priority is really a question of what is more important *at a specific time*. It is important to do well in your classes, but it’s also important to have a social life and enjoy your time off from studying. You shouldn’t have to choose between the two—except *at any given time*. Priorities always involve time: what is most important to do *right now*. Time management is mostly a way to juggle priorities so you can meet all your goals.

When you manage your time well, you don’t have to ignore some goals completely in order to meet other goals. In other words, you don’t have to give up your life when you register for college or university—but you may need to work on managing your life more effectively. Time management only works when you are committed to your goals. *Keeping your eyes on the prize* will help you succeed.

“Obstacles are things a person sees when he takes his eyes off his goal.”

— E. Joseph Crossman

Managing time well comes down to two things. One is identifying (and then prioritizing) goals and the

other is having the discipline to be able to work towards accomplishing them. We all have the same amount of time in a day, week, month and year, yet some people are able to accomplish more than others. Why is this? Often, it is because they are able to set goals, prioritize them and then work on them relentlessly and effectively until they are complete.

#### Key Takeaways

- Goals should be realistic, specific, and time oriented, and you must be committed to them.
- Goals can be organized into short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, each related to each other.
- Setting priorities helps keep you focused on your goals but doesn't determine how you use your time at all times.
- Planning, the essence of time management, is necessary to stay focused and continue moving toward your goals.

#### Exercise: Goal Setting

1. Look back at the four students described at the beginning of the section. Each of them is experiencing some sort of problem that could interrupt their progress toward their goals. Think about each student and write down a solution for each problem that you would try to work out, if you were that person.
  - a. For Yuxi:
  - b. For Becky:
  - c. For James:
  - d. For Sachito:
2. How did it feel to articulate your short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals?

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## 7.4 Creating Personal Schedules

Now it's time to create your own personal schedule for the next few months. Consider the courses you're taking, even if it's just this one. Consider your personal time commitments that are non-negotiable, and those that are negotiable. It is important to be realistic about the time required from everything from personal hygiene (bathing, shaving, putting on make-up, doing hair, etc.) to eating (including meal preparation), to working on courses. As you work on your time management, you will become much more aware of how much time you actually spend on these things.

Be realistic about the amount of time you'll need to devote to your studies. Remember that for every hour spent in class, you should plan an average of two additional hours studying outside of class. Make sure to schedule these time periods in your planner! These times change from week to week, with one course requiring more time in one week because of a paper due at the end of the week and a different course requiring more the next week because of a major exam. Make sure you block out enough hours in the week to accomplish what you need to do. As you choose your study times, consider what times of day you are at your best and what times you prefer to use for social or other activities.

Don't try to micro-manage your schedule. Don't try to estimate exactly how many minutes you'll need two weeks from today to read a given chapter in a given textbook. Instead, just choose the blocks of time you will use for your studies. Don't yet write in the exact study activity—just reserve the block. Next, look at the major deadlines for projects and exams that you wrote in earlier. Estimate how much time you may need for each and work backward on the schedule from the due date.

As you put together your schedule, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Studying is often most effective immediately after a class meeting. If your schedule allows, block out appropriate study time after class periods.
- Be realistic about time when you make your schedule. If your class runs to four o'clock and it takes you twenty minutes to wrap things up and reach your study location, don't figure you'll have a full hour of study between four o'clock and five o'clock.
- Don't overdo it. Few people can study four or five hours nonstop, and scheduling extended time periods like that may just set you up for failure.
- Schedule social events that occur at set times, but just leave holes in the schedule for other activities. Enjoy those open times and recharge your energies!
- Try to schedule some time for exercise at least three days a week.
- Plan to use your time between classes wisely. If three days a week you have the same hour free between two classes, what should you do with those three hours? Maybe you need to eat, walk across campus, or run an errand. But say you have an average forty minutes free at that time on each day. Instead of just frittering the time away, use it to review your notes from the previous class or for the coming class or to read a short assignment. Over the whole term, that forty minutes three times a week adds up to a lot of study time.

- If a study activity is taking longer than you had scheduled, look ahead and adjust your weekly planner to prevent the stress of feeling behind.
- If you maintain your schedule on your computer or smartphone, it's still a good idea to print and carry it with you. Don't risk losing valuable study time if you're away from the device.
- If you're not paying close attention to everything in your planner, use a coloured highlighter to mark the times blocked out for really important things.
- When following your schedule, pay attention to starting and stopping times. If you planned to start your test review at four o'clock after an hour of reading for a different class, don't let the reading run long and take time away from studying for the test.

## Semester Schedules



*Some prefer using paper for their semester at a glance.*

Use the tool you chose in Chapter 7.2 Evaluating Scheduling Tools and create a semester schedule if you haven't already. Remember to include all important dates such as mid-term and final exams, assignment and project deadlines, practicum time periods if applicable, and application and course registration deadlines for next semester. Also include important personal events such as a wedding you are attending, or your mom visiting town. The semester schedule offers a visual picture of how your semester looks overall. You can see your particularly busy times. If you are taking several courses, you can merge all the big course events onto one schedule so you can see when you have two big assignments due on the same week. You may wish to use colour to indicate different

classes, or to distinguish between your academic events and personal events.

This semester-at-a-glance schedule should be either one page or a month per page. A single page is useful if there aren't very many important dates to note, or if you are only doing one course. A single page can be posted on the fridge or permanently displayed on your study work space. A month per page is useful if you have several courses with varying deadlines. The semester schedule is the easiest and quickest to set up.

## Weekly Schedules

Put together a weekly schedule for the upcoming week or two using the tool you chose in Chapter 7.2 Evaluating Scheduling Tools. Start by recognizing the difference between fixed-time and flexible-time. Fixed-time includes things that have predetermined schedules such as face-to-face classes, labs, doctor's appointments, soccer games, and assignment deadlines. Mark these on your weekly schedule first. Next put in your flexible-time commitments. These include things such as outside-of-class study times, pre-reading before class, review time after class, completion of assignments, and working out.

Make sure to put in your high priority items first. Once you have these things scheduled in, reasonably put in any other lower priority items that you think you can manage. Remember to leave room for meals, personal hygiene, sleep, and (limited) social time. Once you start using weekly schedules regularly, you'll notice you can schedule some things well in advance, and others the week prior. This way your weekly schedules are always a work in progress.

## Daily To Do Lists

Put together your daily to do list for today or tomorrow. Review and use the strategies listed in Chapter 7.2 Evaluating Scheduling Tools as you put it together.

Here are some more tips for effectively using your daily to do list:

- Be specific: “Read history chapter 2 (30 pages)” —not “History homework.”
- Put important things high on your list where you'll see them every time you check the list.
- Make your list at the same time every day so that it becomes a habit.
- Don't make your list overwhelming. If you added *everything* you eventually need to do, you could end up with so many things on the list that you'd never read through them all. If you worry you might forget something, write it in the margin of your planner's page a week or two away.
- Use your list. Lists often include little things that may take only a few minutes to do, so check your list any time during the day you have a moment free.
- Cross out or check off things after you've done them—doing this becomes rewarding.
- Don't use your to-do list to procrastinate. Don't pull it out to find something else you just “have” to do instead of studying!

Notice that your long-term goals should drive your mid-term goals, and your mid-term goals should drive your short-term goals. Your daily to-do list will have many more things on it that are life necessities, such as bill payment deadlines and grocery shopping, but the daily list will also have those things that will help you achieve your short-term goals; and these will move you closer to achieving your long-term goals. For example, a long-term goal may be to become a registered nurse. Then a mid-term goal could be to complete the prerequisite courses for the program and achieve higher scores than the grade cut-offs from last year's admissions. Then a short-term goal may be to study for the final exams coming up next week. The daily to do list may schedule in study time for each course you are currently taking. This is essentially breaking up goals into small steps by dividing them among your semester schedule, your weekly planner, and your daily to do lists.

### Exercise: Creating Personal Schedules

Create three personal schedules as referred to above using the tools you chose in Section 7.2 They can be

handwritten on paper or saved on digital software, or all three can be different formats. Set them up so they will work for you.

1. Semester at a glance
2. Weekly planner
3. Daily to-do list

Once you have established a system of scheduling, it is a good idea to review how well it is working for you and if any changes need to be made. Try answering these questions after using your weekly planner for a few weeks.

#### Exercise: Reviewing Schedule Plans

At the end of each day or week, spend a few minutes reviewing your planned schedule and writing answers to the following questions. What do you notice about your study tendencies?

1. Did you usually get as much, more, or less schoolwork done as you had scheduled for the day? If you got less done, was the problem due to scheduling more time than you actually had, or not making effective use of the scheduled blocks of time?
2. List the steps you will follow to make your scheduling process work better next week.
3. What other things did you do repeatedly during the week when you should have been studying?
4. What were the most common distractions (people or other interruptions) during the week when you were studying?
5. List ways you can control your study space to avoid these activities and prevent these distractions next week.
6. Do you see a pattern in the activities you least enjoyed and had difficulty getting started on?

Use your information to help you adapt your scheduling and study times.

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## 7.5 Chapter Review and Activities

### Key Takeaways

- It's important to have short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals that are specific, realistic, time oriented, and attainable. Goals help you set priorities and remain motivated and committed to your educational success.
- Planning ahead, and then following your plan, is the essence of time management.
- Organize both your space and your time to develop the best study habits.
- Learning strategies to stay on track, avoiding distractions of people and technology, and preventing procrastination will pay off, not only in college or university but also in your career thereafter.
- Use a semester at a glance, an academic weekly planner, and a daily planner to schedule blocks of time most efficiently. Start well ahead of deadlines to prevent last-minute stresses and problems completing your work.
- Because many students have significant time commitments with work, family, athletics, or other activities, time management techniques are among the most important skills you can learn to help ensure your success.



#### Exercise: Chapter Review

1. Describe the characteristics of well-written goals.
2. How can you prepare for unplanned interruptions while studying?
3. After you have created your weekly planner with study periods for the week, you may still have difficulty using that study time well. List additional time management strategies that can help you make the most of the time that you do have.
4. If you find yourself procrastinating, what can you do to get back on track?

Randy Pausch was known for his lecture called “The Last Lecture,” now a bestselling book. Diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer, Pausch passes along some of his ideas for best strategies for uses of time in his lesser-known lecture on time management. Could there be someone better suited to teach about time management than someone trying to maximize their last year, months, weeks and days of their life?

Note this video is one hour and sixteen minutes. It is optional as it is long. However, it’s full of great strategies, goal-setting ideas, and ways to think about time management.

**Video:** “Randy Pausch Lecture: Time Management” (length 1:16:21)





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://opentextbc.ca/studentsuccess/?p=201#oembed-1> (#oembed-1)

The first step to succeeding in your courses is to be committed to your education. You’ve been motivated to start post-secondary education—now you need to keep that motivation going as you target specific goals for success in your classes. Much of this has to do with attitude and managing your time effectively.

In fact, time management skills can make the difference between those who graduate from college and university and those who drop out. Time management is actually all about managing yourself: knowing what you want, deciding how to get what you want, and then efficiently and effectively getting it. That applies to fun things, too. In fact, you may want to think of the goal of this chapter as not just managing your time for studying but ensuring that even as you do well in your studies, you’re still enjoying your life while in university.

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