Managing Your Time Effectively

In this post, we will explore what time management means and how you can use simple strategies to manage your time more effectively.

# Introduction

Whether you have a small amount of time in which to get many tasks done or you are finding it difficult to get motivated, effective time management can help you achieve your goals.

# **What do we mean by Time Management?**

To manage your time is simply to use your time effectively or in a productive way in order to achieve your goals.

Managing your time effectively might mean different things to different people. You might like to try different techniques, depending on your commitments at a particular point in time.

Time management involves a cluster of inter-related skills:

* Prioritising and re-prioritising tasks.
* Organising your time effectively.
* Planning how you will use this time effectively to complete the tasks.
* Keeping track of your progress.
* Understanding how and when you work best.
* Maintaining your focus and motivation.

You are likely to be practising some of these skills but possibly not all. When we are under a lot of pressure with our workloads, we often skip the planning stage. However, this step — more than any other — will help you make the most of your time, track progress and keep you feeling motivated.

**Tip:**You may already know your main challenge when it comes to time management. Keep reading this post to find out what skills you could build upon by using some simple tips and strategies.

# Why is it important to manage your time?

Managing your time, deciding upon priorities and planning accordingly can be some of the most difficult skills to improve. You have constant demands on your time and attention and it can often be difficult to identify exactly what your priorities should be, especially when there is so much to be done.

However, the benefits of improving your time management skills can make a huge difference to you by :

* Reducing your stress levels.
* Increasing your productivity.
* Achieving a balance between study, life and social activities.
* Increasing your feelings of control, motivation and confidence.

Like any other skill, time management can be learned and practised. In the rest of this post, we will explore some useful strategies you can use to take control of your time.

You may also want to take a look at [this post](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/top-tips-for-time-management-video-resource-9d467df0989a) from the Library Student Team where they outline their own time management challenges and how they addressed them.

# Effective strategies for time management

## 1. Organise and prioritise

Before you can start ticking off tasks and being effective with your time, you need to have a clear understanding of everything you need to achieve. The first step is to get organised and prioritise your tasks. Here are some simple strategies you can use to help you with this stage:

* **Write a to-do list:**This may seem basic but until you have a list of everything you need to do, how can you prioritise what needs doing first? If you prefer to use simple to-do lists, try making them for each day to ensure they are up-to-date and you are writing down tasks which are achievable within the timescale you are working to. You may find it helpful to include personal tasks like doing your laundry, as this will help you to estimate the amount of time it will take to complete everything more accurately.
* **Create an Urgent/Important matrix:**An urgent/important matrix can be very helpful if you find it difficult to prioritise or feel your list of tasks is becoming a bit overwhelming. You can find out more about how to create an Urgent/Important matrix by downloading [this handout](https://education.library.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/handouts/revision-urgent-matrix.docx).
* **Schedule time to do the things you usually avoid:**This could be tasks in your daily routine like washing or ironing or managing your email. If you spend time dreading or avoiding these tasks, chances are you normally end up doing them at a time which is not ideal and increases your overall stress. It is also worth considering how much time you spend on these tasks and whether it is possible to split them up into more manageable chunks. Breaking larger tasks down and doing small amounts on a more regular basis can help combat the urge to procrastinate, making you more efficient.

## 2. Plan your time

It can be tempting to skip the planning stage if you are feeling overwhelmed, but the danger of not planning is that you may spend hours editing your work near the deadline, if you haven’t worked through things in a logical way. Here are some simple strategies for planning your time:

* **Use a calendar or diary to block out your time:**This might sound very simple as you probably use a calendar regularly already. However, you are probably not using it to its full potential. Block out time in your calendar to complete tasks as well as social activities. You can colour code each block of time to see quickly how much time you have allocated across your study and social activities.

**Tip:**Don’t forget to allow time for reading and making notes on what you have read.

* **Create an assignment/revision plan:** Work backwards from your deadline to see how much time you have to complete each stage of the work. Give yourself smaller deadlines to complete each component e.g. searching, reading, writing, editing and proofreading. Try to be as detailed as possible so you don’t forget things like referencing.

**Tip:**If you decide at this stage to use a reference management tool to store records of your sources, you will save lots of time not having to do this manually as the end.

If you are creating a revision plan, why not check out [this resource](https://education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/packages/assessment-support) to help you create your plan.

* **Create a Kanban board:**The board is a simple tracker and one that you can continually refer to as tasks arise. You can use it to move you through discrete tasks and gives you a view of what you have achieved, which supports your motivation. A Kanban board has the following three areas: what you have to **do**, what you are **doing**and what you have **done.**You can include extra sections for those things ‘on hold’, such as a group assignment where you are waiting on someone else before you can do your next task. This strategy works best when you combine it with a task management tool like the free web app, Trello. In Trello, you can create three or more separate lists of tasks. As you complete smaller items, you can move them from the “what I have to do” list to the “what I have done” list.

**Tip:** It is important to use tools you are already familiar with – learning a new tool will require time, so save this until you know about what works for you.

## 3. Maximise your ability to focus

Once you know what you need to do and have a plan for when you will achieve those things, it’s time to focus on getting your tasks done. To help you be even more productive during this time, there are a couple more things you might want to consider having a strategy for. Take a look at our examples below:

* **Plan for or remove distractions:**You may have a plan which accounts for all your tasks but have you considered whether each task is being completed in the right place or indeed at the right time of day? Considering when noisy housemates might be home and having strategies like music/headphones to deal with that is really important. Have a friend who calls you at a certain time of day? Try planning tasks for that time you can do while you’re on the phone, such as washing or tidying up.
* **Include time for breaks and exercise:**To be productive, you need to be well-rested and ready to focus. In your plans, make sure you include regular breaks and time to get some exercise, even if this is just a short 20 minute walk. This time is important to allow you to organise your thoughts and will actually help you feel more in control and get more done.
* **Understand why you procrastinate:**We all procrastinate in one way or another. However, if we want to learn how to manage our time more effectively, it is helpful to try and understand our procrastination behaviour and the reasons behind it. Rather than simple laziness, procrastination usually occurs when we experience unpleasant emotions when faced with a particular task. Take a look at [this resource](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/counselling/procrastination-cycle/story_html5.html) to understand more about procrastination and [this resource](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/counselling/procrastination-strategies/story_html5.html) to learn how you can overcome it.