

Essential Student Skills: Time management

Introduction

Some students are able to study full time while other have to balance work and university. Some students are single and others have family commitments. Whatever your situation you need to manage your time so that you can get the most out of your course and leave time for everything else. In this section, we will learn about the fundamentals of time management.



'Clock alarm' - [Shutterstock](#)

Objectives

By the time you have completed this section of essential student skills you should be able to:

- Describe the three basic elements of time management
- Use lists and schedules to manage your time

Basics

There are three basic elements to time management:

- Prioritise
 - List the tasks you need to complete and rank them in order of importance.
- Analyse
 - Discover how and when you study best, what tasks you prefer, and what distracts you.
- Organise
 - Create a schedule that fits with your style of studying.

The rest of this section will take you through each of these elements in more detail.

Priorities

Start the process of managing your time by compiling a list of all your outstanding tasks.

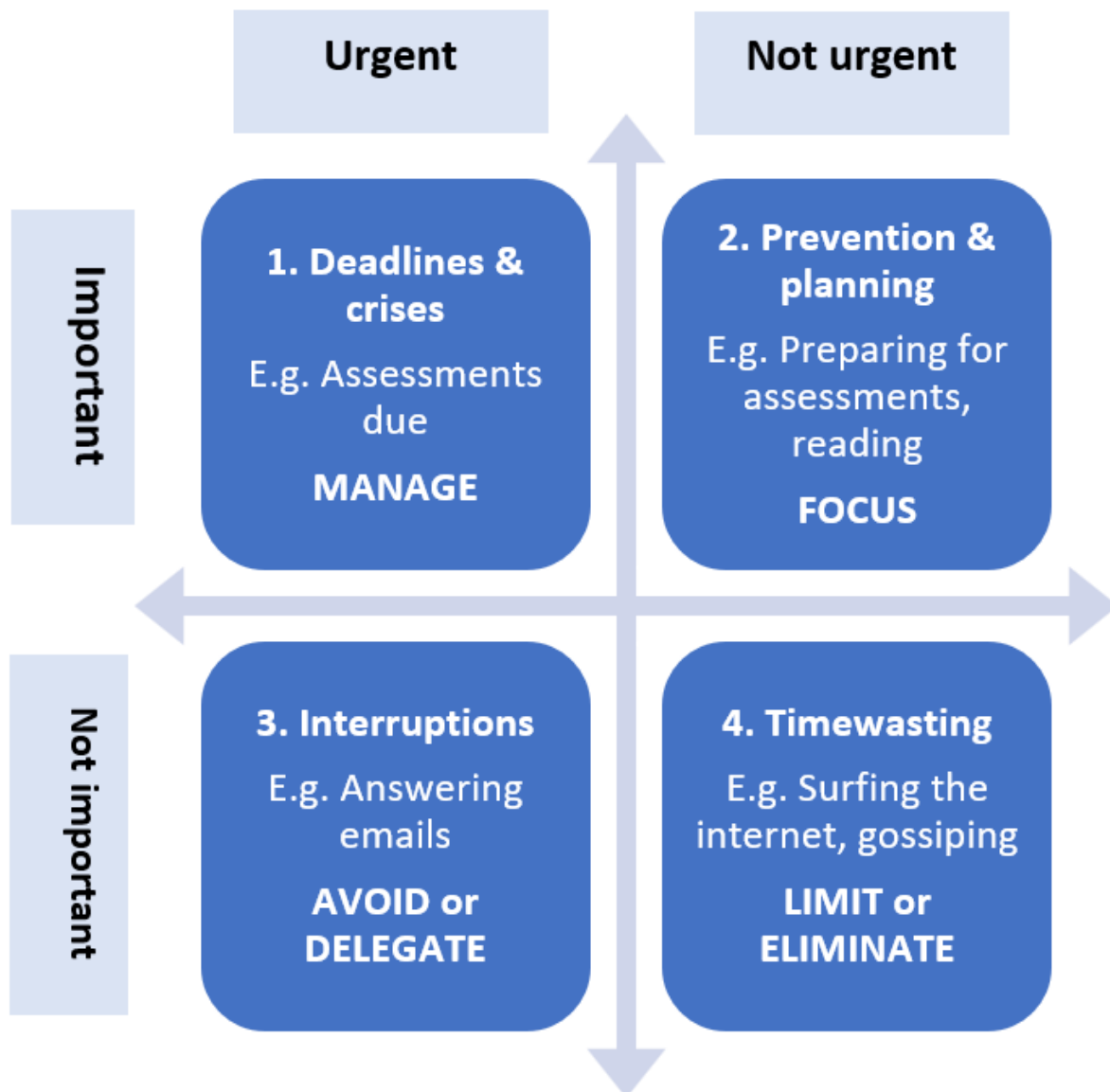
The **time management matrix** below can help you to categorise each task according to **urgency** (whether or not it needs to be completed quickly) and **importance** (whether or not it is of significance in your life!).

<p><i>Urgent and Important</i> Deadlines & crises E.g. Assessments due MANAGE</p>	<p><i>Not urgent but Important</i> Prevention & planning E.g. Preparing for assessments, reading FOCUS</p>
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<p><i>Urgent but not important</i> Interruptions E.g. Answering emails AVOID or DELEGATE</p>	<p><i>Not urgent and not important</i> Timewasting E.g. Surfing the internet, gossiping LIMIT or ELIMINATE</p>
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Also visualised as:



Time management matrix

In-tray exercise

Complete this 'in-tray' exercise

Put the tasks below in the order that you would complete them.

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1.
2.
3.
4.

Tasks:

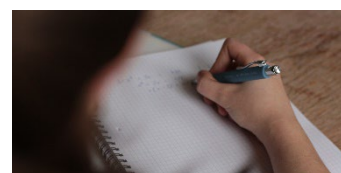
- Searching on the UHI library catalogue for readings that will help you with your essay which is due for submission in four weeks.
- Calling your best friend. You have three messages on your voicemail from them asking if you will help with their essay.
- Reading a chapter of your set text in preparation for your tutorial tomorrow.
- Going through your email inbox. You have 35 emails, some from other University staff, and some from your friends.

[Answers]

1. **Reading a chapter of your set text in preparation for your tutorial tomorrow.**
This is the most urgent and important task as it concerns your studies, and a lesson which is happening tomorrow.
2. **Going through your email inbox. You have 35 emails, some from other University staff, and some from your friends.**
Next you should quickly skim through your emails to check if there is anything that needs dealing with urgently; but don't try and reply to them all as this takes up too much time. Remember that emails from university staff can be about important matters such as fees and deadlines and should always be read.
3. **Searching on the UHI library catalogue for readings that will help you with your essay which is due for submission in four weeks.**
Don't be tempted to leave assessments until the last minute. Start your basic research at least four weeks in advance.
4. **Calling your best friend. You have three messages on your voicemail from them asking if you will help with their essay.**
Although you may want to help your friend, the phone call can wait until later in the day when you have dealt with your own work.

Analyse

The time of day that we work is very important. Unfortunately there is nothing you can do about having lectures first thing on a Monday, but if you are most alert in the evenings, perhaps that is when you should schedule the most work?



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- Find out when you work best - this is your '**prime time**'. Use this for difficult or important tasks
- Find out when you can work but not necessarily give tasks your whole concentration. Use this time to do things which are time consuming but do not need your best intellectual endeavours: Download course materials, surf the net or organise your notes
- Find out what **distracts** you and avoid it
- Find out what **helps** you work and replicate it

Think about your work pattern

Take a minute to think about your typical day. What time do you wake up? When do you feel at your most alert? What kind of activity blocks do you naturally work in (e.g. 30-minute bursts, 1 hour bursts, 10 minute bursts?) Jot these thoughts down and refer back to them when you go on to create a schedule.

Organise

Now you are ready to organise yourself so that your work schedule fits your preferred working style, and of course fits around the rest of your life!

- Try and group similar activities together – if you repeatedly change activity you will need at least five minutes at the start of each task just to get into the swing of it again.
- Try combining tasks – ironing and watching your favourite TV programme for example!
- Focus on the best or most effective use of your time right now. Shoddy work will have to be revised, but don't spend five solid hours creating a draft of a plan of an essay!



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Lists

One of the most effective tools for time management is the daily 'to do' list:

- Write down everything that you have to do that day
- Keep your list with you and check it regularly through the day. At the end of the day, cross out the tasks you have completed and put any outstanding tasks on the list for the next day.
- You may prefer to create a weekly rather than a daily list of tasks, but whatever you decide be realistic and don't give yourself too much to do.
- In addition to your daily or weekly list, keep a diary, planner or calendar in which you keep a note of longer-term tasks such as when any assessments are due, exam dates, field trips etc.

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Creating a realistic schedule

For example, your current schedule may look like this (note the wording, especially around the first lecture, and the late finish):

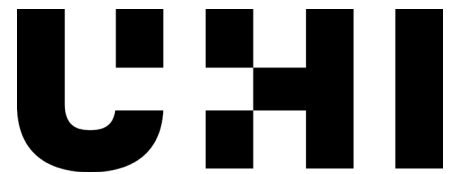
- 07:00 Wake up
- 08:10 Drive to college
- 09:00 First lecture – feel rushed, disorganised and tired, but better after quick coffee break
- 12:00 Have lunch
- 17:30 Finish classes for the day and go to the gym/play football
- 19:30 Have dinner
- 20:30 Work on essay due the next day
- 23:30 Finish

With this schedule, it is likely that you will start the day feeling sluggish and finish it with your brain too active to sleep properly. Hence you would then wake feeling tired again and the whole cycle would repeat itself.

With a little planning (and some effort!) it is possible to revise your daily routine to the following:

- 06:00 Wake up
- 06:30 Gym / early morning swim, avoiding morning traffic
- 08:30 Arrive at college – awake and energised - with time to spare to get a coffee and read over the previous lecture notes
- 12:00 Quick lunch followed by half an hour in library doing background reading
- 17:30 Finish college and go straight home
- 18:00 Have dinner
- 19:00 Complete tasks of the day – practical write ups etc. that you didn't manage in morning
- 21:00 Finish and relax, read etc,

With this revised schedule you will have to get up earlier, but you will start the day more alert, get home earlier, eat earlier and finish earlier so you get a better night's sleep and have more time to relax.



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Weekly timetable

Complete the interactive timetable

Here is a blank weekly planner for you to organise. Fill each day of the week by writing in activities into the different parts of the day. We have given you **possible options** but everyone has different activities and commitments, so there may be other activities in your life that aren't listed as examples.

Possible daily activities

Breakfast	Classes	Kids activities	Work	Weekly shopping	Dinner	Study time	Gym
Lunch	Visit Family	Down time	House chores				

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early AM							
Mid AM							
Late AM							
Early PM							
Mid PM							
Late PM							
Early Evening							
Late Evening							

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Fitting study around your life

- Dedicate some time most days for reading (e.g. on the bus or after tea)
- Have a dedicated place to study or keep all your materials in one place
- Use time spent waiting or travelling to read or plan. If you drive or cycle you could download a podcast which is relevant to your course and listen to it as you travel
- If you are also working part time, remember that work should always fit round your studies. Explain to your employer at the beginning that you can only work, say, for two nights a week. Stick to this or you may be expected to do it again and your studies will suffer.
- Tell friends and colleagues that you are doing your course, and that there will be times when you won't answer the phone, come out etc. When people see that you are serious they are usually considerate.
- If you have children, explain to them that you are doing a course, even if they are quite small. This will reinforce the importance of study to them, but do also make time to play with them etc.
- Avoid commitment TV such as soaps. Record programmes that you really want to watch and save them up for when your weekly tasks are complete.
- Eat properly and rest effectively so that you spend more time performing well.

Organisation

Listen to three students talk about how they organise their week.

- **Audio: Student 1**

Average week of student 1 (66 seconds)

[Download a transcript of this audio/recording](#)

“Well I have at the moment, I have two classes or two days that I go in, so I'm in for a full day on Monday and I have 3 modules, and then I go in on a Wednesday around 10 and I have one module and my modules at the moment are on the VC. We have 1.5 hours class of each of them so I have 4.5 hours on a Monday and 1.5 on a Wednesday. And basically I spend my time before the classes reading up - finding out what the tutor wants me to know ahead of the class, so that I can contribute in the class and then I go to each of my classes, write down all of my notes, and then I will look at them, and then certainly look at them again before I go to the following week. I'm pretty leisurely actually, up until I'm really starting to get ready for my assignments and really start to research

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and work on those. And most of the classes, I think, are quite leisurely that you can read up a bit, go in, have a discussion with your tutor, and then cogitate over it for a while, until you are coming up to the next week and then you start accumulating the knowledge you need to work on the assignments.”

- **Audio: Student 2**

Average week of student 2 (31 seconds)

[Download a transcript of this audio/recording](#)

“I was doing four modules a term, so I had four video conferences a week. There was reading required for each, because although there was a taught element in the course, there was also a great deal of discussion as well and we had to be prepared for it.

A lot of my week was spent reading for the video conferences and on top of that, working for 2 assignments each semester as well, for each of those, so that was 8 assignments a semester.”

- **Audio: Student 3**

Average week of student 3 (45 seconds)

[Download a transcript of this audio/recording](#)

“I have VC lectures on a Thursday and a Friday morning so the rest of the time I’m at home to study. I just try and study during the day, when the children are at school so that I’m still about for them on an evening. The VC lectures are an hour and a half hour long each. I tend to try and get all of the weeks work done before, It probably takes me about 10 hours once I’ve waded through all the reading and I take lots of notes and everything like that. I would say that it’s about right, it’s about what I expected. I’m full time so I expected to be studying 40 hours a week. Sometimes it’s a bit less, sometimes it’s a bit more, it certainly gets more when essays and exams are due. I very very quickly realised that I couldn’t work full time and

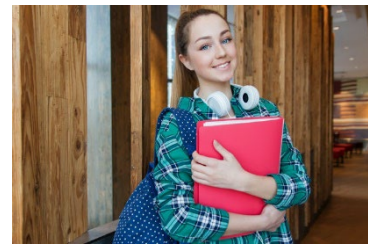
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[study full time. Although I do miss my job, I really miss my job - I made the right decision."](#)

Conclusion

This section has highlighted the importance of good time management and introduced you to various techniques that you can use to manage your time effectively.

Time management is one of the cornerstones of being an effective, and happy, student, so do try and use some of the strategies outlined in this section. You will reap the rewards later on!



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Library resources

Don't forget that your partner college library may well have copies of books related to time management. Check the [online catalogue](#) to find out; or use [MultiSearch](#) to extend your search to eBooks and online journal articles.