



Scheduling 101:

A Guide to Constructing a More Manageable Schedule

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Have you ever heard yourself say...

I just can't seem to keep up with all of my class work.

I always wind up cramming for exams.

Once I do the things I have to, I don't have time to do what I want to do.

I can make a schedule for myself, but I usually throw it out or ignore it.

There are few skills more important to being a successful college student than managing one's time. All the same, most students struggle with time management when they arrive at college, especially if their high school experience was highly structured by teachers and parents. At Harvard, you have to figure out not only how to attend classes and labs but also how to study, hold a job, participate in extracurricular activities, and keep up with family and friends. Managing all of these activities can be quite overwhelming, which is why it's crucial to try out some new approaches.

These suggestions are meant as a start toward your new time management approaches. We suggest you also consider setting up a meeting to discuss these ideas with a Bureau academic counselor. We can help you create a schedule that suits your particular situation, as well as assist you in avoiding some of the classic pitfalls in time management.

Create a Typical Week Schedule (see last page of this handout for blank example)

Simply put, planning sets you free. You can actually *gain* time by organizing your time, completing activities more efficiently and learning to use time that normally slips away from you. Also, you will be less likely to forget activities that you put into a written plan.

1. Sit down with a blank full week schedule broken down hour by hour:
 - o Be sure that you're including all of the following in your schedule: sleeping, eating, time in class, work, travel, prep, breaks, friends, extracurricular activities, laundry, regular commitments, exercise, family, daydreaming, recreation, etc.
2. Schedule fixed blocks of time first (those things that are already scheduled)
 - o in-class time; job time; lab time
3. A usual rule of thumb is to schedule two hours of study time for each in-class hour.
 - o Plug your study times into your schedule using your most alert times of the day.
 - o You may need to adjust the two hours of study time per hour of class time formula.

4. Schedule self-care activities (sleeping, eating, exercise)
5. Schedule flexibility into your schedule (DO NOT BOOK EVERY HOUR)
 - The unexpected *will* happen, so you need to plan for it!
 - Allow time for running errands and completing tasks that just come up.
 - Give yourself permission for time to relax.
6. Schedule fun activities into your schedule and remember to include time for your friends and family.

Make sure to come back and modify this schedule after creating it. Some students do best with a detailed weekly schedule; some do better with a more simplified list of things to do; and some people prefer something in between. It's usually helpful to be very detailed in your first sketch, but it's even more important to revise this schedule to fit your actual life, if it is going to be an effective plan for living.

Create an Assignment Calendar

Whereas the Typical Week Schedule above is designed to help you organize your week, the assignment calendar is important for organizing your academic workload. It can help you to avoid forgetting projects until the last minute, decrease cramming behavior, and generally live a less stressful academic life.

Here is one approach:

1. Gather all of your syllabi and sit down with either a paper or electronic calendar listing the months of the semester.
2. Start by recording all of your exams dates (small and large exams). Then, looking at the material to be studied, determine when you would realistically need to begin studying in order to best prepare for the exam. List the begin date as well as other study dates on the calendar prior to the exam date.
3. Next, list the due dates of your other major projects (e.g., research papers, presentations). Break down these projects into smaller, more manageable units. For example, you might break down a major paper into developing a topic, doing library research, outlining a paper, writing a first draft, revising, composing a final draft, and so on. List the dates on your calendar when you will begin each of these tasks.
4. List the due dates for your reading assignments on the calendar. Some students feel less need to schedule time to read, but later they may find themselves cramming to catch up.
5. You may find it helpful to indicate distinct tasks by some method such as color coding different academic projects. You might also add other semester-long activities here, such as thesis work or extracurricular projects.

When to study...

- Schedule manageable study sessions with regular breaks. Everyone's attention span is different. Some students like working for an hour and then they'll take a brief break, maybe 10 minutes. Other students prefer to work for much smaller increments (e.g., 10 minutes) or much longer stretches.

- Figure out your best time of the day to study – when are you most awake and able to tackle the most difficult material?
- Use to-do lists to prioritize the most important activities to complete each day

Where to study...

- Find several locations on campus. Be mindful that your room might *not* be the place most conducive to studying. Many students report that dining halls or secluded spots in the library are good locations. Explore the campus, your house, and the various libraries to find spots that suit you.
- If you hope to work in your room, speak with your roommates about studying styles, noise levels, and interruptions.
- Some people like having a certain amount of noise around them, perhaps from music or in a coffee shop. Get to know yourself and what works best for you.

How to cope with distractions and staying on track...

- Arranging study partners and/or study groups can be very helpful. Even if you're not studying *with* the person, having a partner with whom to study can help you stay motivated during your allotted study time.
- Attend to your attention – if you find yourself consistently losing concentration, notice the internal and external factors that might be affecting you. Awareness of what gets in your way goes a long way towards helping you focus better.
- Negotiate with yourself when you feel pulled to do something else. For instance, you might need to say “no” right now to a friend, but maybe you can get together later as a reward for completing your task.
- Needless to say, electronic devices of all sorts provide many ways to distract us. Consider turning off these devices if you don't need them. Use them as rewards. Check your email or other online messages at designated times rather than keeping them open while you're trying to work.

Good luck in scheduling your schedule. Remember, no one always does everything when it is supposed to be done: life is never so neatly arranged. Cut yourself some slack at times when you are not able to live up to your time scheduling. Remember that perfect time management is not a realistic expectation. Time management is always a work in progress.

Bureau academic counselors are available to consult with you about this topic or other things that might be on your mind. Call 617-495-2581 or stop by at 5 Linden Street to schedule a time.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6-7 am							
7-8 am							
8-9 am							
9-10 am							
10-11 am							
11-12 pm							
12-1 pm							
1-2 pm							
2-3 pm							
3-4 pm							
4-5 pm							
5-6 pm							
6-7 pm							
7-8 pm							
8-9 pm							
9-10 pm							
10-11pm							
11-12 am							
12-6 am							

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