



Time Management Self-Assessment & Planning

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Overview

Time management is one of students' most frequently reported challenges. At Harvard, the volume of work, high personal expectations, demands of extracurricular activities, and the many opportunities on campus leave students with the press of daily choices as to how to spend their time. Use this handout as a way to begin to acknowledge ways in which you feel good about your planning techniques, to clarify the areas where you'd like to improve, and to identify new strategies you might try. Also, take this opportunity to consider whether you're spending time on what's most important to you rather than on what keeps you busy or on what must get done (and is not so important to you). Allow yourself the chance to take charge of your life rather than feel driven by deadlines and daily pressure.

Common Dilemmas Related to Time Management Strategies

- I've tried making a plan, but it doesn't work because I'm not good at estimating the time a task will take; often a task takes longer than I expect.
- If a paper is due April 2nd, I can't get myself to work on it much before that date. Self-imposed deadlines just aren't convincing to me.
- I have too much to do and just not enough time to do it.
- I always feel tired, busy and feel as if I'm not making progress.
- I'm not sure if my issue is time management or procrastination -- or maybe both.
- My sleep schedule is off, and that keeps me from staying on track.
- I have trouble saying "no" and that's why my schedule is disrupted.

These dilemmas are important, and ones to consider discussing in depth. Time management is about using skills and tools, such as scheduling and breaking tasks into small pieces. But, even more so, time management requires choices, discipline, flexibility, questioning oneself, and being honest about what gets in one's way. You might know all the best time management techniques, yet not make use of them effectively, lose or forget to look at your to-do list, etc. Combining knowledge of good tools with personal exploration is often a good path to making life more manageable and enjoyable. This handout will give you the chance to begin this process.

To make the best use of this handout, we encourage you to take a few minutes to write responses to help you think through these issues.

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The Way I Do Things Now

One error to avoid in considering making changes to your time management strategies is to think that *everything* you're doing is not working. Consider the ways in which your current style is both helping and disrupting you.

To help you think about this, respond to these sentence prompts:

The main advantages of the way I manage my time now are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The main disadvantages of the way I manage my time now are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Consider a Change to Make

Below are a few of the most frequently recommended time management strategies from students. Based on the thoughts you've recorded above and these recommendations or other ideas you have, consider something you might like to try:

- ◆ Keep a calendar with your weekly commitments, and regularly assess when you have time available for work, exercise, friends, extra-curricular activities.
- ◆ Make lists of your tasks, and break these tasks into small pieces. Be realistic about how much work you can complete in a given amount of time.
- ◆ Clear time each day (like 10-15 minutes) to make a plan and make adjustments to your expectations for your goals that day.
- ◆ Don't expect you'll be able to work for a 6-hour stretch. Work in smaller chunks of time, like 1 to 2 hours, and be concrete about the work you plan to do in that time, such as "read chapter 12" or "write a paragraph on ___ for this paper."
- ◆ Depending on your optimal level for noise and light, the kind of chair and atmosphere, etc., find a place to work that is most conducive to your work style. And, plan to work at a time of day that's good for you (don't plan a lot of work in the morning if you're not a morning person).

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- ◆ If you're having trouble getting started on your work, try using the 10-minute rule: commit to working for 10-minutes without stopping. Many times, just getting started in this way can help you become engaged in the work.
- ◆ Conduct regular assessments about how you're doing. Try to be honest and clear with yourself about why something hasn't worked. For example, "I didn't feel like working today because I was tired." If your mind is drifting, write down right away why you're having trouble concentrating so you can understand better the steps to take, e.g., "I'm tired," "I'm bored," "I don't understand this," "I'm lonely," "I'm afraid I'll fail." Understanding your ambivalence about working allows you to sort through what's holding you back and help you make a choice about your next step and seek assistance.
- ◆ Don't give up on time management strategies if they don't work perfectly! Assess what isn't working and why.

Based on these suggestions or other ideas you have, put below a change you'd like to incorporate into your life:

If I could change one thing about my time management strategies, I would

Make a Plan for Inevitable Challenges

Time management often works best if you assume the plans will need revising. Life happens: a paper takes longer to write than expected; a friend might suddenly turn up for a visit; you found out a fabulous speaker is on campus; a new deadline surfaces; an illness or injury occurs; a family member is in need. Planning for the inevitable is a good way to help oneself stay on track. Knowing yourself can help you think about how you might get side-tracked and what you'll do if and when that happens.

When something comes along that disrupts my original plan, I will:

Next Steps

Consider talking with a Bureau academic counselor to tailor a time management plan for you and to examine your specific challenges.

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Select Time Management Resources

- ◆ Check the Bureau of Study Counsel's website for links to articles and handouts at <http://bsc.harvard.edu>, and click on "Online Study Skills Resources." Here you will find materials produced by the Bureau and links to websites at other universities.
- ◆ Allen, D. (2001). *Getting things done: The art of stress-free productivity*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- ◆ Ben-Shahar, T. (2009). *The pursuit of perfect: How to stop chasing perfection and start living a richer, happier life*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- ◆ Burka, J. B., & Yuen, L. M. (1983). *Procrastination: Why you do it, what to do about it*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- ◆ Covey, S. R., Merrill, A. R., & Merrill, R. R. (1994). *First things first: To live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- ◆ Emmett, R. (2000). *The procrastinator's handbook: Mastering the art of doing it now*. New York, NY: Walker & Company.
- ◆ Fiore, N. A. (2007). *The now habit: A strategic program for overcoming procrastination and enjoying guilt-free play*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.
- ◆ Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (1994). *Driven to distraction: Recognizing and coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from childhood through adulthood*. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- ◆ <http://www.calnewport.com>. A website with many articles and suggestions for time management and effective studying by MIT post-doctoral associate, Cal Newport.
- ◆ Free services to create to-do lists and manage priorities can be found at <http://www.toodledo.com>, <http://www.tadalist.com>, <http://www.voo2do.com>, <http://www.rememberthemilk.com>.
- ◆ Investigate online tools to limit your Internet usage and monitor the way you spend your computer time. Check out for Mac: <http://visitsteve.com/made/selfcontrol/>; <http://getconcentrating.com/>; Mac and Windows: <http://www.macfreedom.com>. For Windows: <http://manictime.com/bb>. Other applications include: <http://www.rescuetime.com/>, <http://minutesplease.com/>, <http://klok.mcgraphix.com/klok/downloads.html>.

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.

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