

## Effective Time Management

Time is the most important resource for university students. Throughout your university study years, you will be required to dedicate a large portion of your time for preparing for lectures and labs, attending classes, completing assignments, working on projects in addition to independent study time. You will need effective time management skills to be able to balance the demanding nature of university life, and your personal life.

There are three steps you can take to improve your time management skills:

1. Step 1: Understand how you spend your time through a time audit strategy
2. Step 2: Plan: Craft a schedule
3. Step 3: Prioritize your time

### Step 1: Understanding your time

It is easy to think that time you are not at university attending lectures is 'free time' that you can use for studying. However, you probably spend a lot of time doing day to day activities like: commuting, meal prepping and eating, exercising, socializing, and even using social media. We often times don't really know how much time we consume performing these activities. Being aware of how you spend time is the first step for effective time management.

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*Did you know that on average, college students spend 4.5 hours on phones and in some studies 8 to 10 hours? Check your device for screen time to know how much time you spend on your phone.*

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### Time Audit

We all have a general sense of how we spend our days, but how much time does it really take us to do our day to day tasks? A time audit is an activity that allows you to answer this question by closely monitoring how you spend your time. During an audit ask yourself:

- How am I actually spending my time?
- How important are the things I spend my time doing?
- Do I prioritize studying? Family commitments? Other activities?
- What activities distract me or waste my time?

### Time Audit Methods:

There are several strategies that you can use to perform a time-audit:

- [30-minute time audit](#)

In this strategy, you stop every 30 minutes and note down your activities, by the end of the day you would have a very detailed time audit to help you understand your time.

- [Daily time audit](#)

In this strategy, you stop at the end of the day and look back at all your day's activities, being as granular and detailed as possible.

- [Weekly time audit](#)

In a weekly audit, you look at your week as a whole and start detailing how you spent it as much as you can.

Download one of the time-auditing templates [Time-Auditing Template](#), [Task-Time Tracker](#) or create your own.

Once you complete the time audit

Pause and reflect on the below:

- a. Your perception of how much time you spend on a task or activity, versus actual time you spend.
- b. Categorize your tasks, what kind of tasks do you spend most of your time doing?
- c. Is there anything you can change to improve your management of time?

Download [\(Time-Auditing Template\)](#)

## Step 2: Planning

There are two methods of planning:

- Macro Planning: Semester-long Plan
- Micro Planning: Weekly and Daily Plans ([Download A Weekly Planner & Reflection Template here](#))

Macro Planning using Calendars

You can use an electronic calendar like outlook calendar, or google calendar, or you can use a paper calendar. While developing your Macro Calendar make sure to factor in: *“Non-negotiables” or commitments you cannot miss like:*

1. Your assignment deadlines
2. Your examinations
3. Projects' deadlines
4. Personal and social commitments (e.g. a wedding you will be attending, travel plans with your family)

Your macro plans can help you see the bigger picture based on which you can plan for short-term events or activities. Knowing your exams will be in February, will help you think ahead about when to revise the content you learned throughout the semester, when to schedule your travel plans etc.

Micro Planning tools:

You can use weekly and daily calendars to plan your weeks and days, but always consult your macro-calendar to plan ahead.

[\(Download Micro Plan Template and Reflection Tool\)](#)

Other tools for *micro* planning

1. To do lists: Make sure your to-do lists are realistic, it's better to have 4 items on your to-do lists than 20 that will end up making you feeling overwhelmed.
2. Daily Highlights: Pick 1 thing to achieve on a given day, this is your daily highlight. The rest of activities or tasks can be started after you achieve this 1 priority.
3. Time Blocking: Block time on your calendar for each of the items on your plan and make sure to move on from it once the blocked time ends.

Set SMART Plans

Your micro plan needs to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound).

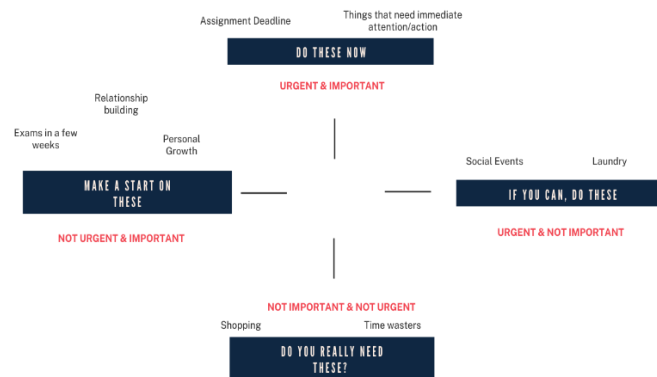
- "S": plan specific topics, chapters or activities to complete
- "M": ensure that you have a way to measure reaching this goal (e.g. take a quiz).
- "A": set a goal that is achievable given your circumstances (how much can you study in the 3 hours you have left in your day?)
- "R": set a realistic goal (if you are a morning person, studying at night might not work for you, so it would not be realistic to say I'll study after 11 pm.)
- "T": estimate the time that it will take you to complete your task or goal, while doing this make sure that you account for:
  1. Time for rest/ breaks
  2. Recreation
  3. Wellbeing (nutrition, physical activity and more)

Instead of I'll study English today- opt for a SMART plan "I'll complete the readings for lectures 1 and 2 (specific), and use them to develop an outline (measurable) for my upcoming assignment from 5 to 7 pm tonight. *Make sure the time you pick for following your plan is good for you, and sufficient for completing your planned task.*

Step 3: Prioritize your time

There are many ways to prioritize your use of your time. One of these is Covey's Grid which is also known as the Urgent-Important Matrix. This tool helps you categorize the actions and tasks you want to do into 4 categories:

1. First: Urgent and Important tasks  
These are tasks you need to prioritize, start working on them right away. An example is an assignment deadline due on the next day.
2. Second: Important but not urgent  
These are things that are important to you, like your exams that will start in 2 months or relationships that are important to you. You should make a start at these next.



3. Third: Urgent and not Important  
These are tasks that have to be done, like laundry or grocery shopping for example, but they are not exactly 'important'. If you can, do these. If some of these can be delegated, done electronically or in any way that can save you time, opt for saving time.
4. Fourth: Not urgent and not important tasks  
These are tasks you should avoid doing or at least ask yourself "do I really need to do these?"

[Download Covey's grid template here](#)

#### Step 4: Reflect

Whether you decide to do this on daily basis, weekly basis or even every semester.

Reflection on your plans can be a helpful way to improve your time management skills.

Ask yourself:

1. What went well and why?
2. What did not go well and why?
3. What changes can I make to improve my time management?

You can use this [reflection sheet here](#) or you can make your own.

## Step 5: Make Changes

The final step in the process of effective time management is making changes based on your reflections.

Ask yourself: What 'realistic' changes can I make to improve my time management skills?

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*Tip: make 1 or 2 improvements and stick to them rather than setting unrealistic goals.*

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## Reality Check

While planning for studying you need to stay realistic about:

- how much you can get done
- where, when, how and with whom you study
- distractors (isolate study time)

You also need to remember to include time for:

- dealing with distractors
- socialization activities
- wellness and meaningful activities

To learn more about Effective Time Management – check out our self-paced online module ([Effective Time Management](#)), for more information about Academic Success Skills please enroll in our self-paced course Academic Success on the E-learning: Engineering, ICS, Energy Engineering, Arts & Design - Enroll [here](#) BAEPS, MMC, law, Arts & Humanities - Enroll [here](#) Dentistry, Pharmacy, and Nursing- Enroll [here](#), or visit our [Academic Success Skills](#) Page.