

Study Skills Guide Series

STUDY SKILL 2: Time management

Learning how to manage your time pays dividends when studying for a degree. You'll feel more in control of your studies, you'll escape that unpleasant feeling of always trying to catch up, and you'll enjoy your course to the full.

Taking responsibility for how and when you study is one of the main differences between school and uni. Your lecturers and tutors will let you know what's expected but it's down to you to plan your study time, find the resources you need and meet deadlines.

When you reach the end of this guide, you will:

- **understand** your study habits
- **have a grasp** of what good time management is
- **have learnt** a range of techniques for setting goals and planning your study time
- **know how** to stay on top of your studies, keep motivated, and get support

TIME MANAGEMENT is the act of planning the amount of time you spend on activities, so you can achieve what is important for you.

The modern concept of time management has its origins in the work of the 19th century American Frederick Winslow Taylor, who aimed to improve industrial productivity.

A clock with three hands; a clock that sounds the hour twice – just two of the fascinating clocks we have chosen to illustrate this study guide on time management. All six of the clocks featured are to be found in university cities in the UK.

“ At uni, it's easy to get motivated and find the time to study because you've chosen a subject you're already interested in. ”

Matilda, first year chemistry student

The name Big Ben was first given not to the clock tower but to the Great Bell in the Elizabeth Tower at the north end of the Houses of Parliament in the university city of London. The bell was heard for the first time on 11 July 1859.

Credit: SANDEMAN'S NEW Europe



ACTIVITY 1: GET TO KNOW HOW YOU STUDY BEST

Understanding how you like to study is the first step to planning your time well. Here are six statements about study habits and preferences. For each of them, tick A or B, depending on which is closest to your own approach to studying, then read the feedback that follows.

Statement A	OR	Statement B
I like detailed instructions		I like to try things out for myself
I like to work on my own		I like to work with others
I like to do one thing at a time		I like to have several things on the go at once
I prefer everything to be tidy and organised		I can cope with things being untidy
I need the discipline of a set timetable		I can motivate myself to do things
I like to type and make notes on screen		I like to write and make notes on paper

Feedback

If you ticked mostly As, you are likely to be someone who responds well to clear boundaries, structure and timetables. If you ticked mostly Bs, you are probably more creative and spontaneous, and able to work with uncertainty or even chaos. You may have a fairly equal balance of As and Bs, suggesting you are adaptable and able to change your approach depending on the circumstances. Both have their strengths and weaknesses, but the most important thing is to understand what works for you.



The clock mounted over the entrance to the Corn Exchange in the university city of Bristol has three hands. The two big hands show the time in minutes, one of them Greenwich Mean Time and one of them Bristol time.

Credit: by Rodw at English Wikipedia [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

“ I always used to work in a muddle, and I honestly felt that suited me best. But when I tried to keep my desk tidy, I found it actually helped me study more effectively. ”

**Max, second year
modern languages
student**

THREE THINGS THAT MAKE A GOOD TIME MANAGER

- Being fully aware of the choices you make about how to use your time.
- Acknowledging the consequences of not acting on the choices you have made.
- Learning from experience and adapting how you manage your time.

ACTIVITY 2: HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?

How wide is the gap between how you think you spend your time and how you actually spend it? Here's a simple exercise to help you find out during your first term at uni.

1 When your timetable is settled and you've got into a bit of a routine, make a note of how you spend your time for one week.

2 Have a look at what it tells you. Are you surprised by what you see?

3 Decide on three things you can change so you manage your time better the following week.

MOTIVATING YOURSELF

Self-motivation is the drive that forces you to do things. You already know you're self-motivated because you're planning to go to uni. Self-motivation is what will get you studying once you arrive and will keep you going even when things get tough. Daniel Goleman, author of a number of best-selling books on emotional intelligence, identifies four elements that make up motivation:

- 🔴 **Personal drive** to achieve – the desire to improve or to meet certain standards.
- 🔴 **Commitment** to personal or organisational goals.
- 🔴 **Initiative**, which he defines as 'readiness to act on opportunities'.
- 🔴 **Optimism** – the ability to keep going and pursue goals in the face of setbacks.

“ I spend one hour at the end of each week going through the evidence I have collected for my professional practice portfolio. That way, I stay on top of it but don't feel I'm wasting time by doing it every day. ”

Chidike, first year nursing student

The clock by famous clockmakers G & F Cope on the 61 metre high dome of Nottingham Council House. From April 2011, the building, which overlooks the Old Market Square of the university city, has served as the chief Register Office for Births, Marriages and Deaths.

Credit: by mattbuck (Own work by mattbuck.) [CC BY-SA 2.0], via Wikimedia Common



ACTIVITY 3: HOW TO PRIORITISE

Finding there aren't enough hours in the day to do all the things you need to do? An important first step is to accept that you can't do everything. Next, make some decisions about the things that are really important, those that are less important, and those that really aren't that important. Here's how:

- 1 Make a list of all the study-related things you need to do – reading, attending lectures, or borrowing books and articles.
- 2 Mark up each item with an A for **really important**, B for **less important**, and C for **not that important**.
- 3 Work down the list and get rid of all the Bs by deciding whether they are really As or Cs.
- 4 Finally, work through the As, marking them 1 for the most important, 2 for the next most important and so on.
- 5 That's it! You've prioritised your time. Now get started on task A1. Only start on the Cs if you have time left over.

Here's the marked-up to do list of a first year music student:

- Complete counterpoint score **A**
- Select piece for adding viola melodic line **C**
- Annotate second movement of Mahler's 3rd symphony **B**
- Revise Bach chorale harmonisations **A**
- Plan for essay on development of the symphonic form **A**
- See what Judith Weir scores are in library **C**
- Read Kelley Tatro's article on punk and screaming in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol 58, No 3 **B**
- Write review of 'Love for Three Oranges' for department blog **B**
- Prepare for next month's masterclass **B**

“ I make lists on my phone, rather than in a notebook. It makes me feel more in control of everything as I have my phone with me all the time. ”

Carmel, first year economics student



The Exeter Cathedral Astronomical Clock is thought to date from around 1484. The moon and the sun revolve around the earth, the relative positions of the planets as understood by 15th century astronomers. Some say the Devon university city clock was the inspiration for the nursery rhyme Hickory Dickory Dock.

Credit: Karl Borg

ACTIVITY 4: SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

Goals give you something to aim at, a regular sense of achievement, and motivation to start a study session. Here's how to set realistic study goals for yourself.

- 1 List what you need to do and your target date for completion. Set targets that take account of times when you will be unable to study, such as weekends away or visits from friends or family.
- 2 Check your goals to make sure they are **achievable** (you know you will be capable of

meeting them), **reasonable** (if you set goals you cannot meet, they will reduce your motivation rather than increase it), and **sufficient** (your goals must ensure you achieve what you want to achieve).

- 3 Once you've set your goals, record them in a way that works for you. You could put them in a free app, into an electronic or paper calendar, or onto a spreadsheet or wall chart.

THREE THINGS TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR STUDY GOALS

- Take a load off your mind by drawing up a **timetable**. You will feel more in control when you can see what you've already done and what's coming up.
- Break your study goals down into smaller steps using an **action plan**. You will find smaller steps are easier to achieve than one big overall goal.
- **Reduce interruptions.** Visitors knocking on the door, your smartphone in front of you, the TV on in the background – all of them will stop you studying.

The Trinity clock in the university city of Cambridge was replaced in the early eighteenth century. Ever since then, it has been notable for striking the hour twice, first on a low note (the so-called 'Trinity' chime) and then on a much higher one (the 'St John's' chime).

With thanks to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College for permission to reproduce this image.



ACTIVITY 5: FIVE-FOR-FIVE

About to go out for the evening? Waiting for a meal to cook? Lying awake in the middle of the night worrying about the studying you haven't done? Here's a simple way to get on top of things when you feel they're getting on top of you.

Grab a piece of paper and set aside five minutes to do these five things at speed:

1 Take stock – jot down things you already know about a subject you are about to study, to underline that you have a head start.

- 2 Make a summary** of something complex you have studied recently, to consolidate your studying.
- 3 Write questions** about a topic you have to study and are keen to know more about, to show yourself that your motivation levels are high.
- 4 Test yourself** – perhaps on something you feel relatively confident about, to boost your confidence.
- 5 Revisit** by having a quick look at something you have already studied, to remind yourself how much you already know.



'Under the clock' at Glasgow's Victorian Central Station has been a popular meeting place for generations of travellers. There are two mainline rail terminals in the Scottish university city, with Victorian Central Station being used by 33 million passengers each year.

Image courtesy of Glasgow Central Station

“ Best place to study? For me, it's the library. I wasted a term of my first year trying to study in halls until my tutor made the obvious suggestion! ”

Alexei, second year history student

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

There's no shortage of books on time management. You can find them online and in public libraries and bookshops, as well as in the library at your uni.

FIVE WAYS YOUR TUTORS CAN HELP YOU WITH SELF-MOTIVATION

Be proactive as soon as you get to uni by building up a good relationship with your tutors. Ask directly for their feedback and use it to help you improve. There are lots of ways you can involve your tutors. Here are the top five ways they can help:

- 1 Encourage you to get going – and keep going.
- 2 Talk through ways for you to tackle your essays and coursework.
- 3 Comment on your essays and other coursework once you have written them.
- 4 Help you identify your strengths and make the most of them.
- 5 Suggest ways you can improve your work and contributions in seminars and tutorials.

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