

20 WAYS FOR PLAYING CATCH-UP

It happens to the best time planners and is a way of life for the worst ones. Being behind is one of the most challenging time management problems to resolve. It's important to realize that there aren't any secret formulas that will magically make things easier. Here are 20 suggestions for how to cope, gathered from students who've been there and survived. You may find some suggestions won't help; some might - you won't know till you try.



1. Our number one suggestion is to give serious consideration to getting help from the professionals that are here for you. Guelph offers a variety of services to help students who are behind, including learning and study advice, stress management, time management, and personal or academic counselling. Now is the time to find out about these services and use them. Don't assume that you don't have time; there can be a huge payoff for the hour or two that seeing someone will take. A good place to start is [Learning Services](#).
2. It's also important to get help with course content when you need it. Don't spin your wheels for hours trying to understand a concept or figure out a problem. Find out when your prof and/or TA is available and when help labs are open and use them. A note of caution - don't depend entirely on friends or roommates for help with your courses. While some of them may be excellent students and tutors and happy to help you out, others are not.
3. Taking the time to think about how best to use whatever time you have is more important than ever when you're trying to get out of a hole. To ensure that all available time is being used effectively, try using [highly-structured time planning strategies](#).
4. Another key strategy for getting back a feeling of control is to write down everything you need to do. See [Making a Task List](#) for details on how to do this effectively.
5. Prioritizing is one of the most critical aspects of managing time in a crunch situation. Once you've completed a list of everything you need to do, scrutinize each task to determine those with the highest importance. Ask yourself, "If I only have time to finish one thing on this list, what should it be?" Monitor yourself carefully to ensure you're doing the high priority tasks, and not easier ones which give a false sense of productivity. See [Making a Task List](#) for more information on prioritizing.

6. If you're behind in reading, a systematic approach to reading textbooks can help to maximize effectiveness. Check out our Fastfacts "[SQ4R](#)" or "[Learning from Textbooks](#)" for reading strategies.
7. When preparing for a test or exam, one of the unfortunate realities of being behind is that there simply isn't enough time to cover all the course material in the amount of detail that you could or should. You need to be selective about what to emphasize when studying and expect that your marks will be impacted as a result. However, if the decisions you make about what to concentrate on are informed decisions, rather than random guesses about what might be important, you can minimize the damage to your grade point average. Find out all you can about what is most important to know in the course. Dig out your course outline and review it, talk to students who've taken the course, get old tests and exams to determine what was emphasized previously, make attending review classes a priority, and most importantly, be aware of and listen for the information your instructor provides, obviously or subtly, about what to emphasize (i.e. skipping class is not an option.)
8. Remember the importance of [breaks and rewards](#), particularly when you're stressed. When under pressure many students make the mistake of working continuously for long hours because they feel they don't have time for a break. However, taking breaks increases your productivity, with the result that you'll get more done with less stress than the person who works non-stop.
9. Sleep patterns should be maintained as much as possible. Research has suggested that getting less than six hours of sleep impairs higher cognitive functions. Maintaining regular exercise and eating habits will help keep stress under control. Helping your body to maintain its peak performance will help your brain to do the same.
10. Be honest with your instructor about your situation. Sometimes, under certain circumstances, you can get an extension, but don't count on getting one unless your reasons for being behind are valid.
11. Use small pieces of time like waiting in line or riding the bus. Even 10 minutes can be put to good use.
12. Consider drastic action like dropping a course carefully. See your program counsellor for advice and input before making any changes to your program.
13. No matter how far behind you are, don't even consider dishonest tactics like plagiarizing, paying someone to do an assignment, or cheating on an exam. The university's response will be swift and severe.
14. A strategy that has met with limited success is to plan a special [reward](#) when you've finally caught up. Some students find this motivating; others find it just adds to their stress and guilt if they don't manage to accomplish all that they planned. Do what works for you. You can help make rewards effective and motivating by ensuring that the goals you set are realistic and attainable under the circumstances.

15. Even when you're frantically busy, set aside 30 minutes each day for yourself and make this time sacred. Use it for guilt-free, do something relaxing (or nothing at all) "sanity" time. A little pampering can go a long way during crunch times.
16. And when it comes to pampering, in many families nobody does it better than Mom or Grandma. If you can work at home or your grandparent's house, let family know that you need some TLC, but that you also need to get some serious work done while you're there. Be sure to use the travelling time to advantage if possible, and enjoy letting them cook, do your laundry, or whatever they can do to help.
17. If you can't travel to a family TLC weekend, this might be a good time to request a special "care" package from home. You could make it a reward to look forward to after a long hard week or weekend of catching up.
18. Misery loves company, and being behind is a major miserable situation to be in. If you've got a friend, roommate or significant other in similar straits, or even one who needs to get some work done, create a "catching-up" contract or pact with them. Plan times you'll both spend working and include a special reward together when (and only when) the work gets done. You might find it motivating (if it doesn't stress you out more) to know that if you don't keep on track you'll be affecting someone else. Your friend doesn't even have to be in the same city for this to work if you can get together to share the reward. Even an extra-long phone call can work.
19. Seek advice, tips and strategies from successful students in your academic program. Perhaps you could model their studying strategies and work schedules for finishing the academic requirements remaining in the semester.
20. When it's all over and you've finally caught up, take some time to analyze why you got behind in the first place. If you don't understand how it happened and what to do so it won't happen it again, there's an excellent chance you'll condemn yourself to the same fate next semester.