

COPING WITH MULTIPLE DEADLINES

HELPFUL IDEAS

Managing the workload through a period of close, multiple deadlines is a challenge for even the most experienced time manager. While many of the strategies suggested in [Playing Catch-Up](#) will apply to this situation, but here are a few more ideas to help with getting through this tough time.



- You'll be better prepared to deal with a period of multiple deadlines if, throughout the semester, you keep a long range view of the work coming up. Knowing what's coming is essential to implementing proactive strategies to help you get through crunch times. Invest in a wall calendar that shows the whole semester at once, and be sure to keep it up to date with deadlines and exams. You should also have a semester calendar that's small enough to carry with you with the same information. Sometimes these are included in time planners - an excellent investment if you don't already have one. Free semester calendars are available at the Learning Commons in the Library. One of the worst situations to find yourself in is to suddenly realize that you've got a couple of major things due next week, but don't have enough time to really do anything strategic about it.
- A long range view allows you to see early in the semester if your exams are close together. In this case, regular weekly review sessions, right from the beginning of the semester, are an excellent strategy, particularly for courses which are information based (i.e. intro courses and/or science courses in which there is simply a lot of factual data to learn). Integrating weekly reviews into your study routine can help to cut down on the time needed before an exam to relearn material from earlier in the semester that may have been forgotten.
- Gear up for the crunch time both physically and psychologically. Look after your body by maintaining regular sleep, exercise and eating patterns. Use all the stress management techniques you know of, and/or learn some new ones to help get you through.
- If and when you need it, don't hesitate to seek and ask for encouragement, reassurance and moral support from family, friends or professionals at your university. Roommates may be going through rough times themselves, so they may not be the best source of solace, although there's something to be said for commiserating with those in the same boat. It's also a good idea to warn partners, friends, floor mates and family that a tough time is approaching. They are likely to be more understanding and supportive if they understand why you're hibernating with the books.

- Be cautious not to do easy but unimportant tasks to give yourself a feeling of productivity - focus energy on your priorities.
- And last but not least, don't forget practical preparation like stocking up on groceries and doing your laundry ahead of time. There's nothing worse than running out of milk or clean underwear in the middle of a crunch time!

GETTING AN EARLY START

This method can be very effective for periods when you're facing multiple deadlines and have several projects going on at the same time. Get a short, easy start on the project. Define the topic and scope of the project as soon as it's been assigned, do some preliminary research and consultation, and then let the ideas "stew" for a couple of days while you work on something else.

By introducing the ideas into your subconscious and getting started with the creative process, you'll probably be surprised at how much time you end up thinking about the project, and how ideas will occur to you about it, often when you're doing something completely unrelated to it.

Part of the beauty of the creative process is seeing connections between things which appear to be totally unrelated. This notion was parodied in the movie "Ace Ventura Pet Detective," when Ace was trying to discover the connection between Ray Finkle, the psychotic football kicker, and Lois Einhorn, a missing hitchhiker. When his dog lies on a picture of Ray Finkle and the dog's fur surrounds Finkle's face like long hair, Ace realizes that Ray IS Lois Einhorn.

It's useful to review your preliminary ideas and notes from research every few days just to keep things stewing in the back of your mind, and it's important to jot down notes on new ideas or connections that have come to you during the stewing period so you don't forget them. When you're ready to start the project in earnest, you'll have a major head start in thinking with little investment in time. Starting early and revisiting the project periodically are the key to making this strategy work effectively.

SHORT IMMERSION PERIODS

Another strategy that can work well when dealing with multiple deadlines or extended projects is to encourage yourself to become "engaged" early with upcoming projects through very short, periodic, immersion sessions. These sessions will not only provide a break from your current work, they'll help get ideas for the next project "stewing" in your subconscious and keep stress under control because you'll know that you've at least got a start on the next project(s).

Set aside a defined period of time - say one hour in an evening (yes, right in the middle of working on the current assignment) when you will immerse yourself in the upcoming project - an intense, focused spurt of work. You might be brainstorming, adding to an idea file, browsing on the Web, reviewing professional literature or projects on the same topic, consulting with a more experienced student, a faculty member, TA or someone working in the profession, or just sitting in a quiet spot and focusing on the topic.

Immersion sessions should be an active pursuit of inspiration or ideas, rather than passively waiting for your muse to speak. You might try two or three sessions like this each week until you're ready to focus completely on the upcoming project. Always keep a notebook with you so you can write down ideas about future projects whenever you get them.

A common problem students experience with this strategy is that they get behind on their main task because they've gotten "on a roll" with the immersion period. You may have only set aside an hour to get immersed in an upcoming project, yet once you start writing/reading/surfing/talking you become submerged, and look up at the clock to see it's been 2 hours instead of one! To cope with this, it's important to include flexible time in your daily time plan to allow for unexpected delays due to bursts of energy and productivity during immersion periods (see Flexible Time handout for more information).

Working around multiple deadlines can be one of the most challenging time planning situations you'll face at university, but by using strategies like short immersion periods and getting an early start, you can increase your chances of surviving with your sanity and grade point average intact.