

TIME MANAGEMENT INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

When you think about “time management,” what comes to mind? The word “management” implies taking an active role in choosing how time is used, as opposed to just letting things happen or allowing others to plan. It also implies that there is a degree of decision-making involved, which can include setting goals and priorities, manipulating resources, monitoring progress, and taking responsibility for the outcome.



We can't change or alter time - every day has the same number of hours, every hour the same number of minutes, so the term “time management” isn't really an accurate term for this skill. Time management really means self management — we manage ourselves to make the most of time. Time is a static phenomenon, yet minutes may seem to crawl by during a long wait in a line-up, and somehow weekends pass all too quickly. The inconsistencies in our perception of the passage of time are very indicative of the connection between time management and things like motivation concentration). That's why time management is closely connected with learning and study issues at the university level. It's probably the single most important skill necessary for success at university. How you use your time has a major impact on your academic accomplishments, satisfaction, and stress level.

CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

University students are particularly vulnerable to difficulties with time management, and it's useful to understand the reasons why this is so:

- Despite its importance in university and beyond, many high schools don't formally address time management; so many students arrive at university knowing little, if anything, about it. Consider the notion that the only difference between a high school student and an entering university student is the two months between June of Grade 12 and September of first semester.
- Many university students find they spend relatively few hours each day in classes and labs. This relatively unstructured learning environment is different from the way that the school day is organized in most high schools. Students must discover how much structure they need to work effectively, and must create most of that structure for themselves, according to their needs and the demands of their courses.

- University students are expected to be more independent and "self directed" when it comes to learning and studying than they were in high school. Instructors give less direction about what work to do. Students must usually decide for themselves what work to do, what is most important, how much to do, and when to do it.
- Some high-school students spread their university-level courses out over two years or more, sometimes combining a part-time course load with a job to get the highest marks they can. A full-time university course load can come as quite a shock, one for which these students are not well prepared.
- Even new students who have done a full-time course load may find that the amount of work, and therefore the amount of study time expected of them, is very different from high school. Once the semester is underway, readings, assignments and labs may pile up faster than they can be completed. The precipitous nature of Guelph's 12 week semester exacerbates this problem. It's not unusual to feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work, particularly at peak times in the semester.
- Other students miss the satisfaction and relief that they felt in high school when they were "finished" all there was to do; in university, that feeling usually doesn't come until after the last exam has been written at the end of the semester.
- Because many university students study, live, and play in the same environment, setting the boundaries of "work" vs. leisure time is a challenge.
- In the university environment, particularly in residence, there is usually something more enjoyable to do than studying. Many activities compete for a limited number of hours in a week and studying can all too easily get pushed to the bottom of the list. Some students struggle semester after semester to find the right balance between studying and socializing.
- The term "peer pressure" takes on a whole new meaning on a university campus. At no other time in students' lives are they surrounded by literally thousands of people so close to their own age. Not only are there lots of interesting things to do, there are also lots of interesting people to do things with, particularly in residence. The best intentions can be thwarted by a need to fit in and be accepted by new friends.

EFFICIENCY

Efficiency in time planning refers to issues of planning and structuring time. It boils down to whether you are making intelligent, thoughtful, informed decisions about what tasks to do and when it is easiest and most productive to do them.

To use time efficiently, you need to take a proactive, flexible and strategic approach to planning and managing your workload, with the goal of getting the work done with minimum pain and maximum effectiveness. Efficiency also implies an appropriate balance of work and leisure time.

For details on strategies for working efficiently, see the documents in the "Planning Your Time" section.

EFFECTIVENESS

While efficiency looks at how strategically you're planning your time, effectiveness is concerned with how well you're using the time you have. Does the quality and quantity of the work you accomplish in a given period justify the amount of time you've spent? Are you being productive or wasting the time you have?

Some students are good at planning time efficiently - they have schedules and to-do lists galore, but when they sit down to do the work, they accomplish little. Other students work effectively when they do study, but because of procrastinating or poor time planning, are always behind, always cramming, and always doing things at the last minute.

For strategies for improving effectiveness, see the documents in the "Staying on Track" section.