

Effective Time Management and Avoiding Procrastination



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Procrastination

Procrastination is the tendency to prevaricate, delay or unreasonably postpone a task. It is a habit that affects everyone to a greater or lesser extent.

Common symptoms include:

- Regularly being distracted from work by non-work activities such as checking Facebook or emails;
- Leaving everything until the last possible moment;
- Constantly worrying about work but not getting anything done;
- Spontaneously performing tasks that you wouldn't normally be enthusiastic about, such as household chores;
- Feeling that nothing you do is good enough;
- A sense of pointlessness or hopelessness as you feel there is too much to do.

Time management and procrastination are related: managing your time effectively can help you to feel in control of your workload, increase your productivity and improve your confidence. As a result, you'll feel less inclined to procrastinate and able to enjoy a healthy balance between studying and other activities.

Time Management

The development of effective time management skills is an essential - though often overlooked - tool in helping you to achieve your academic potential. The skills you gain as a self-motivated, independent student are highly transferable and will stand you in good stead for whatever future career path you choose.

University life requires you to take ownership of your academic progression as never before. This should be an exciting and empowering experience, but it probably means that you'll have to manage more competing demands on your time:

- Lectures
- Assessed work
- Social Life
- Seminars
- Part-time work
- Practicals
- Exams
- Reading
- Independent living (cooking, washing, cleaning etc.)
- Sleeping

It's no surprise that most students will feel overwhelmed by all this at some point, but with a little thought and prior planning you can ensure that you get the balance right.

How can I improve my time management?

A weekly schedule

At the start of each week consider your academic and non-academic commitments and decide when you will devote time to studying.

Think about what you need to get done, and how you will fit tasks into your study periods. For example, if you have a spare hour in between lectures you might not get very far on a substantial assignment, but you can do some concise reading for your next tutorial.

One of the advantages of being a student is that you can be flexible! For example, would you prefer to condense your working week into four or five intense days, or spread your work out over the week?

There is no official recommendation of how many hours you should be studying each week, but if the total (including attending lectures, tutorials etc.) is less than the average working week of 35-40 hours then you're probably not doing enough.

Set Realistic Goals

When planning how to utilise your time it's important to identify:

Short term goals: what do you need to get done this week?

Medium term goals: when is my next essay due?

Long term goals: what do I need to be doing to prepare for exams?

By working steadily on large tasks like an extended essay or exam revision over a number of weeks or months you'll avoid stress and give yourself a better chance of producing your best work.



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How much time do I have?

Everyone has limited time available to them, so it is important to assign the right amount of time to each task depending on its value. For example, if you have four equally-weighted exams and a total of 80 hours to revise, you must fit revision for each exam into roughly 20 hours to ensure that you cover everything you need to.

What do I need to do?

Effective time management isn't only about the number of hours you study: think about how you can maximise the productiveness of your time.

Where should I study?

It's worth spending some time working out which type of working environment suits you best. Are you more productive in a comfortable, peaceful environment on campus, or do you prefer working in your own space at home?

Still having problems with Procrastination?

Inevitably, on some occasions your concentration may start to wander regardless of how well you've planned your time. If you find your concentration starting to wander:

Take a break. Don't confuse this with procrastination: a short break that enables you to return to your work refreshed is far more useful than persevering unproductively.

Alternatively, try switching to another task or activity rather than taking a break altogether: for example, if you have become distracted from reading try doing something different, like planning an assignment.

Break your time down into manageable chunks: not many students can work continuously for hours at a time, so don't set yourself up to fail.

Where can I get more help?

This leaflet only provides a brief introduction of the topics of time management and procrastination. For more information on what further resources are available online and who you can speak to at the University to help you please visit www.manchester.ac.uk/sgs.

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