Managing time

Most students lead busy lives attending classes, studying, preparing for and taking exams, completing assignments and writing research papers. In addition, you may have a job and/or family responsibilities which require your time and attention. You also need to take care of yourself by resting and taking part in recreational and social activities. In order to meet all your commitments and maintain a balanced life, you will likely need to:

- Step 1: Set goals
- Step 2: Determine if you have enough time available
- Step 3: Record deadlines and commitments
- Step 4: Break large tasks into steps
- Step 5: Plan time to complete tasks

Step 1: Set goals

Setting goals helps you accomplish what is really important to you and keeps you motivated. You can set long-term, mid-range and short-term goals. Long-term goals are the major targets of your life and usually have three- to five-year horizons. Mid-range goals typically span one to three years. Short-term goals move you toward each mid-range and long-term goal and are usually accomplished in a month to a year.

In order to set goals, it’s helpful if you spend some time thinking about and writing down what you hope to accomplish in the important areas of your life. Write down your long-term, mid-range and short-term goals, if possible, for each of the following categories: school, work, relationships, self and other.

Your goals may change as your circumstances change. Periodically re-evaluate and revise your goals to achieve a balance in your life and to reflect your current priorities.

Step 2: Determine if you have enough time

Once you have a clearer idea of your goals, determine if you have enough time available to achieve them. Use one or both of the following methods to figure out if your plans for the semester are realistically achievable:

Complete a time analysis

Each week has 168 hours (24 hours per day X seven days per week). Analyze how much time you spend in an average week on sleep, meals, chores, exercise, transportation, work, family responsibilities, classes and studying. Look at the following example of a time analysis:
Hours per activity in a seven-day week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chores</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note in the example the student has 15 hours of classes. Generally speaking, you should study for twice as many hours as you spend in classes. For example, if you spend 15 hours per week in classes, you should set aside 30 hours per week for studying. Studying refers to activities such as reading your textbook, preparing for classes, reviewing class notes and working on assignments. However, the amount of study time per course will vary depending on various factors, such as the difficulty level of the course material, the importance of the course to you and number of assignments.

Also note that in the above example, 150 of the 168 hours in a week are committed to various activities and 16 hours are flexible time. Flexible time is important so you can deal with unexpected pleasant events such as being given tickets to a hockey game or unpleasant events such as getting sick. You can trade time in some circumstances, for example delaying beginning an assignment and go to the game.

Without flexible time, you may find it difficult to compensate for those hours you lose when you are sick. Also, sometimes things take longer than you anticipated. With flexible time, you can catch up with your textbook reading even though your research paper takes longer than you expect.

Ensure you have enough flexible time to easily juggle commitments and avoid stress caused by a too tightly planned schedule. Without this time, you may not be able to keep working towards all your goals, and you may have to reexamine them, prioritize them and postpone the less important.
Complete a weekly timetable

Another way to estimate if you have enough time for all your commitments is to complete a weekly timetable. A weekly timetable shows the rhythm of your week — the days that are particularly busy and the days when you have more flexibility.

To create a weekly timetable, fill in all the commitments and activities you do on a regular basis showing when you do them and how long they take. Consider when you typically:

- Go to bed and get up
- Eat
- Work
- Attend class, labs and tutorials
- Travel to and from college and work
- Volunteer
- Spend time with friends and family
- Exercise

All the remaining time slots are periods of time that you can use for studying, completing assignments and doing other activities. Remember you need twice as many hours for studying as you spend in classes. Check that you have enough flexible time to deal with unexpected events.

Step 3: Record deadlines and commitments

If you know what you want to do and feel confident that you have enough time to accomplish your goals, you are ready to plan how to get everything done. To reach your goals, you need to be aware of everything that must be accomplished during the semester and important deadlines. The semester calendar enables you to see at a glance all of your major commitments and allows you to prioritize your time and plan how you can fit in study time with your other commitments.

Use the following steps to create a semester calendar:

- Obtain a calendar, ideally a four months at a glance calendar. You can purchase a reusable one.
- Gather all your course outlines.
- Record due dates for tests, term papers, class presentations, projects and lab reports on the calendar.
- Add to the calendar appointments, holidays, family celebrations and any other personal commitments.
Step 4: Break tasks into steps

Some tasks, for example term papers and class presentations, require you to take many steps to complete them over a period of several weeks. To do an effective job, you need to break these tasks into steps:

- Think of the steps needed to complete the task
- Write these steps down on an action plan
- Assign a deadline for each step
- Record the deadline for each step on your calendar

Step 5: Plan time to complete tasks and activities

Now that you have completed a semester calendar, you can start planning what you need to do and when to do it by using a list of things to do. When you write down what you want to do and when, you are more likely to complete it, less likely to forget to do something important and be able to keep track of what you have or have not accomplished.

If you reward yourself when you complete an important task, you are more likely to stick to your plans. For added incentive, you can show your list of things to do to a friend or relative.

To create a list of things to do, first

- refer to your semester calendar to check what needs to be done in the next few weeks
- write down the tasks or activities you need to do in the next few days
- prioritize these tasks and decide when you have to or would like to do them, completing all your high priority tasks first.