

Time Management

Podcast

Hi, my name is Lara and I am talking to Karen Dellar. Karen is a Study and Learning Centre Advisor at RMIT University. She has taught internationally, in secondary and tertiary institutions and, from time to time, is a student herself.

Hello Karen.

PODCAST #1 Time Management & Procrastination

"I just always run out of time"

"I feel like I'm always trying to meet some deadline"

There are so many possible reasons for this...

First of all you have a whole lot of external factors.

Effective studying might be just a matter of physical and spatial organization. You need to have a quiet space that is dedicated to study. You can't study properly in front of the TV for example.

You can also spend a lot of time looking for papers or losing important notes if you don't have some system, or desk space, specifically for your study. As well as the physical space, you need to have a study routine built into your weekly schedule as well.

And Ask yourself: is your lifestyle crowding in on your study time? Some full-time students are just trying to do way too much... whether it is too much paid work, or too much social life or sport or hobbies. It's really important to have a balance in your life, but at some point you must learn to say NO to some things and sort out your priorities.

Secondly, there are the internal factors.....

This is about the way you manage study and your enthusiasm for what you are doing.

There are some ways to study that are more effective... and efficient... than others. If you are actually spending a lot of time studying...or trying to read everything then this is not a good thing. You need to think about more active learning processes. You might like to listen to our other podcasts to learn more about these. An important part of Active Learning is having clear goals to work towards. I don't just mean the long term goal of getting a degree although you do need to have these goals and keep them in sight. You also need to have short term goals. Something as specific as: "Today I will find three journal articles for my Business Management essay". Something you know you can go out and complete.

Your own motivation to do what you are doing counts for a lot even if you are motivated to do your course, you may be a terrible procrastinator which means that you put things off to start tomorrow, next week etc. until it is too late. And some people are able to start but may have great trouble finishing projects. So, lack of motivation to start or finish or to do well at all can be very undermining. Everyone experiences this to some extent at different times or in different areas of their life. So it's quite normal and very human. There are ways to help overcome it but if you feel that this is a serious problem affecting your life and your studies, you may want to talk to a counsellor.

Procrastination

"I'm a terrible procrastinator"

"I always put things off that I don't like doing"

If you are a procrastinator...and lets face it, many of us are, you need to identify WHY you are putting things off til later.

For many people, the simple answer is...that doing an essay is tedious and boring... and there dozens of other things that you would rather be doing. This may be true. My answer to this is, think of it as Investing in Future Enjoyment. How much more will you enjoy doing the other stuff if you have already DONE your assignment?

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And here is a twist...you might find... that if you do your assignment without the time stress that you usually put yourself under, you may find it interesting! And it might not be as painful as you were expecting it to be.

"Sometimes I just don't know where to start so I don't do anything until its too late"

You might be putting things off because you really don't know what to do, what the assignment question is asking or where to begin. Unfortunately this sort of information will not just come to you unless you go and find out.

You have lots of resources to use. If your classmates can help, then that is great. But it is possible that they may be confused as well. So please, don't hesitate to see your tutor or lecturer. They are there to help and they love to see students being proactive and trying to solve their problems before it is too late.

You can also make an appointment at the Study and Learning Centre to see an advisor. They are not always experts in your particular field, but they are very good at interpreting and analysing the question with you and giving you some steps to help you get started.

"I'm scared to start because I want to do a good job"

Some high achievers can be terrible procrastinators. It sounds strange... but... some students who are aiming for perfection can put off starting their assignments until they are at crisis point. Writing something down on a blank page can be really scary because it will never be as good as they hope or plan it to be.

Now aiming high is great, but If this sounds like you and you are consistently ending up in a mess because of it, you might want to talk to a counsellor. It helps to realize that you are a student, you are here to learn, therefore your work is not expected to be perfect at this stage and everything you do can be considered a work in progress. You could potentially spend years improving something and never move on to the next thing!!

The fact is if you start early, you have a lot more time to improve your work before you have to hand it in.

"I start things but end up rushing to finish them at the last minute"

It is great if you can get the largest part of something out of the way. However, that last paragraph or final conclusion can sometimes end up being more difficult than you had thought it would be. So it is not a good idea to relax too early.

The responsible thing to do is: Set deadlines for an assignment over a period of time. Things like your essay outline must be done by date X and first draft must be done by date Y. Plan every phase of the assignment right up until it is completed. Plan to finish before the hand in date so you have some flexibility for unexpected emergencies.

PODCAST #2 Time Management Issues

"I feel so tired all the time, I never get around to starting things"

Some full time students just don't realize that their study is already their full time job. And they are just trying to cram in too much other stuff whether it is social life or paid employment. If you are staying up late with friends or staying up late to get your assignments finished, of course you will be tired. You are setting up a very bad pattern and it will be harder and harder to cope.

If late nights are not the reason, then look at diet and exercise habits. You've got to eat healthy food and you've got to play sport or go to the gym two or three times a week. If you sit studying all the time, your body and your mind will get slow and lazy. So, it is worth taking that three or four

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hours out of your week for exercise. You will be more alert and cope with your study requirements much more effectively. If you are dealing with lots of other personal worries, or if you are depressed or not motivated to be studying at all, these emotional issues can transform into physical tiredness. In this case, I strongly recommend that you seek help from a health professional and / or talk things over with a counsellor at the Counselling Service.

"There is just always something else to do"

As I've said before, if you are a full time student, then your course is like a full time job. And even when you have finished your degree.... and you start a job, it is not going to be any different. That job needs to be given priority.

Now if a student puts in a disciplined 40 hours per week into their study every week through the semester, they should be managing to do whatever they have to do.

Unfortunately, many students think that going to 10 or 15 hours of lectures and tutorials is all that they have to do. And then study like mad before the exam at the end of the semester. For some international students in their home country this may have been the way to do things. But in the Australian system, this is definitely not the way to succeed.

If your study time is being taken over by other things, you need to learn to say NO. You need to organize your social life around your job, not the other way around.

It is important to set aside times when you are not available for people's interruptions or phone calls. Your friends and your family need to understand that there are certain times set aside for your study and it is unfair if they encroach upon that time.

"Sometimes there is so much to do, I don't know what to do first"

It is helpful to understand that IMPORTANT does not mean the same thing as URGENT. Urgent means that it has to be done soon. IMPORTANT means that it has to be done well; or at least it has to be done.

You should first deal with things that are both IMPORTANT and URGENT. Like a 50% assignment which is due next week. Ideally you want to do important things before they get urgent. Something that is important, but not urgent might be - rewriting out your lecture notes clearly for studying at the end of the semester... Or finding some past exam papers at the library... Or buying a present for someones birthday next week. It must be done, but it can wait.

If something is NOT IMPORTANT and NOT URGENT – then I would askwhy are you doing it??
"I seem to spend all my time reading"

You need to stop doing this. At university level, you are given so much reading material. Nobody can be reasonably expected to read it all. Don't try!!!! You'll kill yourself. What you are expected to do is read selectively and actively.

You need to choose the books or articles that are relevant and important to what you need to know. Read with the purpose of getting some specific information. So skim and scan through the material. Look for key words, as if you are looking for names on a list. Read the first paragraph and last paragraph of a chapter. Read the first lines and last lines of paragraphs. If they are not relevant to your question, don't bother reading the middle.

Concentrate on reading certain sections and skip those that are not relevant. Do NOT read every single word printed on every page....just because you feel you ought to. This is reading without a purpose... and you probably won't retain very much of it anyway.

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"I'm scared to go to my desk...it is such a mess"
"I'm always losing things"

Organization issues can really hold you back. You need to get on top of sorting notes into files. It wastes so much time if you have to look for stuff that you have misplaced. Or worse still, you have to do things all over again.

This is partly habit. Get into the habit of putting things away in their right place.

It is partly having a place to put things as well. Get a filing cabinet, some document covers, boxes.... whatever you need to sort out a system. The time this takes will be more than worth it.

The same goes for your computer. Put your files into folders with names that tell you what is in them and keep them in an ordered directory.

PODCAST #3 SETTING GOALS and MAKING PLANS

"I just study when I get around to it"
"I have no set timetable"
"My study routine is very haphazard"

You definitely need a routine. And if you establish routines, you are more likely to stick to them. I myself was studying a language last year. I would do a lot of my study in the mornings. I got into a habit of getting up early, mainly to miss the traffic. But this meant that I was at work 2 hours early. So I spent that time doing my own study. It was quiet. There were no distractions. Early in your day is the best time for doing concentrated learning. It worked really well and I was very pleased with my results.

So... identify those chunks of the day when you can get a lot done, and choose a place to go to use that time. And just do it!. Make a regular appointment with yourself. You owe it to yourself to keep that appointment. You can have that latte with your friend later.

"I make lists and use my student diary"
"I try to follow some timetable but it is hard to stick to it"

The tools you have for time management are:

- Your yearly planner,
- your weekly diary and
- your daily to do list.

Early on, get a semester or yearly planner from the university to display on your wall at home. Mark in the major hand in dates for your assignments. Mark in the exams and tests. You could even colour code these for different subjects. Mark in important personal dates such as a friends wedding or weekend holidays because you will want to plan around these too.

You should also plan out more than just the final hand in dates. You should set some deadlines for yourself along the way things like, having the first draft of an essay completed. Display this planner above your desk so that these things are looking you in the eye and deadlines don't creep up on you and give you a nasty surprise. You should also have a weekly timetable. Pencil in your lectures and tutorials. Pencil in times for travelling and jobs and eating and sleeping and exercising. These need to be done too. Then identify where the gaps are in your day. Hopefully there are a few chunks of two to three hours in your week. You can even get a lot done in one hour gaps too if you put your mind to it.

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Try to stick to your timetable as far as possible. Of course, things come up that you don't expect week to week. The car breaks down. The cat gets sick. This is life. So your plan needs to be flexible. But some plan that is half kept to is better than no plan at all.

And then, your daily to do list is like a wish list of things you would like to get done. So, you need to prioritize them of course so that the most important and urgent things DO get done.

There will always be things don't get done and get carried over until the next day. But as I said, it is much better than having no plan at all.

"Assignments just seem so big, I don't feel like I'm achieving anything even when I'm doing something"

When you set yourself something to do, don't write something like "Do Essay".

You need to break the task down into steps or smaller goals. The longest journey is always made up of individual steps. And when you write these down these smaller goals, they need to be SMART.

That means:

S for Specific
M for Measurable
A for Action oriented
R for Realistic, and
T for Time guided.

Now, a specific goal would be a very exact one, like "I will draft the first paragraph of my essay" or "I will read and make notes on Chapter 3".

Measurable means that you can easily say if it is done or not.

Action oriented means that you need to set goals with obvious outcomes like write or produce something.

If you set a goal that tells you to Study or read something without making notes, it is hard to know whether you have done it or not.

Realistic means that you need to set a goal that is actually possible to do within the time frame that you are giving yourself. For example, you can't make notes on a whole text book in one night. So there is no point writing that down for yourself.

If you set your goals using the SMART guidelines, you will feel like you are getting somewhere because you can tick them off as you complete them and this gives you a great sense of satisfaction.

And when you do achieve your set goals, no matter how small, remember to reward yourself with a chocolate biscuit or reading a magazine or 10 minutes playing with the dog. Whatever it is you look forward to.

Thank you for your attentive curiosity in listening to this Podcast. I hope you have found it helpful. And remember that there are more resources on the MAPP website, on the Counselling Service website and on the Study & Learning Centre website. And of course, you are always welcome to attend the MAPP workshops, or come and speak to a counsellor or a learning advisor in person.

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