

Organising Your Time

Study Tips

For all students the efficient management of time is essential to successful completion of University study. Some courses have fuller timetables than you experienced in secondary school. Other full time students, who have recently completed secondary studies, will notice the large amount of unstructured time and the need to work out a routine and determine which activities will take priority. Part-time and other students will experience the difficulties of coping with competing commitments and finding sufficient time to complete all the requirements of tertiary study, together with work and/or family commitments. Making the most of the time available is easiest if you know yourself, your needs and the situations in which you work at your best, and use some form of plan to facilitate the creation of the most appropriate conditions for yourself.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR STUDY HABITS AND NEEDS?

The following are starters for thinking about how, when, and where you operate at your best:

- What is the length of your concentration span, does it vary with the subject you are studying, the time of day or other factors?
- Do you have times of the day or night at which you are able to cope better with more complex problems than at other times?
- Where do you do your best work, and what are the conditions which enhance your learning ability?
- What are your major time wasters and how do you use them to avoid unpleasant study tasks?
- What other regular commitments do you have and which of these are essential or important to you?
- What types of leisure activities do you find most enjoyable and do you prefer short regular activities (1-2 hours) or longer less frequent leisure times (whole days)?

WHY HAVE A PLAN?

For many people a plan is associated with a highly structured weekly timetable in which all their free time is committed. A more effective way of operating may be to have;

- A year planner on which you indicate when major assignments, tests, exams and holidays occur. This provides an overview at a glance of the year ahead and allows for long term planning of study and leisure.
- A weekly, fortnightly or monthly schedule showing all regular commitments including classes, work, and other sporting, social or family commitments. This allows you to determine the amount, positioning and size of the chunks of free time remaining.

HOW CAN YOU USE THE 'CHUNKS' OF FREE TIME?

Identifying the size of the bits of time and matching them with appropriate tasks can facilitate the effective use of time. For instance;

- A small 'chunk': up to 2 hours can be used for routine tasks such as checking a list of references, getting books from the library, reading a chapter for a tutorial, reviewing a previous lecture, or contacting teaching staff.
- A medium 'chunk': 2-4 hours may be used for doing a set of problems reading for an assignment and so on.
- A large 'chunk': more than 4 hours may be divided into smaller bits or may be used for preparing a larger, long term assignment, or project.

WHY WRITE A LIST OF TASKS TO BE DONE?

Many students carry around an unstructured list in their head of assignments and other tasks to be completed and for some this works well. For others it is more helpful to commit the list to paper and to assign a difficulty rating and an anticipated time required for completion.

- The difficulty rating allows you to plan to do the task at a time which is most suitable to you and your working style
- Estimating the time allows you to plan when during the week you can fit it in (a useful rule is to work out the time and then add 1/3, as we often underestimate the time needed e.g., time - 1 hour and 30 minutes, allow 2 hours).

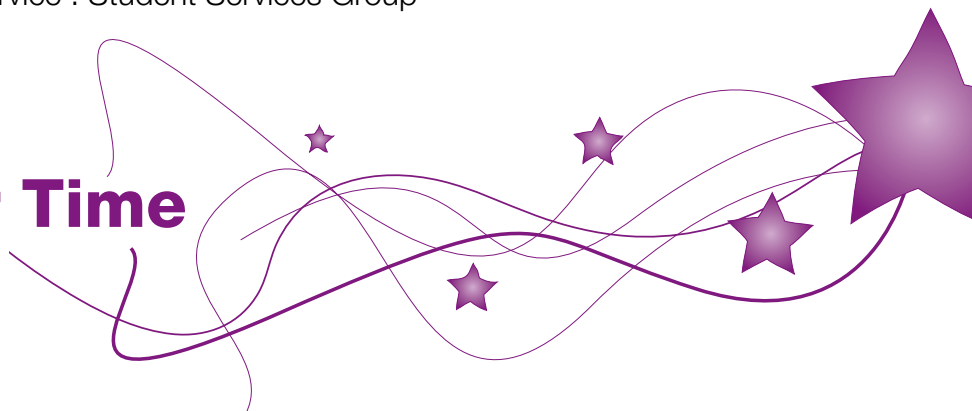
HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH LONG-TERM TASKS OR LARGE ASSIGNMENTS?

As you progress through your course such tasks will become more frequent, hence developing an effective strategy early is useful. These projects can usually be broken down into the following sections;

- choosing and defining the topic
- identifying resources and references
- collecting resources and data
- reading and selecting material and note-taking
- organising the material
- writing or presenting the material
- rewriting or editing

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Each section can be allocated an approximate time and a deadline set for each section by working backwards from the main deadline for handing in. It is important to be flexible and to avoid last minute rushes by beginning the early sections as soon as possible after receiving the assignment.

For example: a 3000 word essay is due in 5 weeks time

Week 1: Read and understand the question. Gather appropriate articles and books.

Week 2 and 3: Read the material and take notes.

Week 4: First draft. Have a friend read it and discuss the ideas with the Lecturer or Tutor.

Week 5: Final draft completed and hand-in the essay

LOOKING AND FEELING THE PART

A type of 'study uniform' seems to develop for some students as they develop a study routine. It may consist of a favourite track suit, a head band, or another piece of clothing in which they feel comfortable. The 'uniform' may develop a strong association with study behaviour and may;

- be effective in promoting a positive attitude and thus concentration
- act as a sign to others in the household that you do not wish to be disturbed

If you think it will work for you try it!

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Having objects in the study environment that remind you of previous successes may also facilitate persistence. There may be previous assignments, certificates or even trophies that boost your confidence and remind you of your abilities. Past successes are your achievements - so use them to assist present mastery.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE LACKING MOTIVATION?

It is common for all students to have peaks and dips in their motivation and to find some subjects easy, and others difficult and less interesting. If you experience a decline in your momentum ask yourself if it is:

- related to one subject, if so then ask yourself why and seek assistance from teaching staff.
- related to the course as a whole, if so then re-examine your long term goals, and perhaps talk it over with your year co-ordinator.
- related to a personal or financial problem, if so then take time out to talk it over with friends, your family, or a counsellor.

Unresolved worries may preclude you from performing at your best and waste valuable time and energy. It is best to seek assistance so that they can be meaningfully resolved and the appropriate energies directed towards your course work.

Assistance in this area and many others can be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service.

The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you to explore your concerns, both personal and academic.

Finally, should it be required, the counsellor can refer you to other staff, such as Careers Counsellors, or the Study and Learning Centre, who are able to provide you with additional professional assistance.

The Counselling Service can be contacted at the following locations between 9am and 5pm:

City Campus	Tivoli (Bourke St)	Brunswick	Bundoora
Building 43	Building 108	Building 514	Building 202
54 Cardigan Street	Level 4	Level 2	Level 3
9925 4365	9925 4365	9925 4365	9925 4365

You can also find further information and resources to assist you in your studies on our website at www.rmit.edu.au/counselling

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