

The 5 minute guide to managing your time at university



Make it visible

Carry a diary or pocket planner and write in all deadlines and meeting dates as you get them. Transfer them to a wall planner, along with other significant dates like tutorials, meetings, exams, birthdays, social events. Or use a simple term planner grid. This makes your busy times instantly visible.

Get yourself organised

Use a simple system - for instance, buy a box file for each module and use it for lecture notes, reading lists, notes from reading, essay titles, small books etc. Keep on top of referencing by including author, title, year and page number as you make notes from books, journals and other resources.

Learn to prioritise

Work out what really needs to be done now (e.g. coursework deadlines, preparing for seminars) and what can be left till later (e.g. extra background reading, rewriting lecture notes). It's often better to spend time on thinking about what you've just read rather than reading one more book.

Be better informed

Regularly check your email, mailboxes, any course VLEs and noticeboards. Don't waste time worrying if you're uncertain about anything – ask people who know (for instance your tutors, dept secretaries, study advisers, course reps).

Plan to get started

Have a plan for the times when you can't get going. Make a list and start with easy tasks to get you underway. Break down large tasks into small targets. If you're worried that you still haven't read enough, write a first draft anyway and fill in gaps later.

Stay motivated

Plan something to look forward to when you finish a piece of work (a computer game, long 'phone call, gym session, chocolate bar etc). Keep your ultimate goal in mind – to get the degree you deserve.

Know yourself

Think about when you study best (morning, afternoon, evening). Decide your best times for study in advance – keep times when you're less academically focused for other activities (paid work, shopping, fitness, socialising etc).

Keep focused

Emails, texts and bored friends can eat up your study time. Mute the 'phone, close the email, and decide a time when you can tell friends and family that you'll be free.

Have a life

You shouldn't need to study 24/7, and if you try to you'll resent your study time and (worse) make yourself ill. Plan the times you're going to study, and when you're not. Keep time free for fun, friends, family, fitness...and sleep!

Expect the unexpected

Printer cartridges always run out five minutes before your deadline, cars have special sensors which detect when you're late and break down... Build 'emergency time' into your study schedule – if you don't need it, it's extra time for you.