

# Managing Your Time

## Introduction

You will already be aware of how important it is going to be to manage your time effectively during your programme of study. Time management is not just an issue that is important to your work; it is crucial to your daily life and well-being. You will no doubt have come across the Pareto Principle, more commonly known as the '80:20' rule. This argues that typically 80% of results are generated by 20% of effort and the remaining 20% of results are achieved from 80% of effort. So concentrate on the smaller percentage of inputs (which may be above or below 20% but is still a minority) that create most of your results, and reduce or eliminate those efforts that don't have a high pay-off.

By making use of some of the time management ideas that are offered here, you will be better placed to optimise your endeavours such that the time and energy you spend on tasks provides you with the best possible outcomes. Of course, there really is no such thing as 'time management'; what it all comes down to really is 'self-management' – managing oneself effectively!

The following pages offer you some simple, but effective, exercises that will help you to become more aware of how you manage yourself. There are no right or wrong answers, only honest ones, so if you do undertake the exercises, be honest with yourself.

## Logging activities

If you haven't already begun to keep an activity log for yourself, then there is no better time to start than at the beginning of your programme. Keeping a record of how you spend your time and documenting how you 'feel' at different times of the day, or even recognising your own procrastination behaviours, can be a tremendous aid to your studies.

Just jotting down the time of day and whether you are feeling energetic, alert, tired, bored etc, could be the clue you need to determine the best time of day for you to study or to be writing up your assignments or preparing a presentation. Of course undertaking this activity and being armed with the resulting information is not only useful as part of your programme, it is a useful life skill.

As part of that log, you should ensure you record those times that you stop for a coffee, or answer the phone, or open some mail, or even chat to a friend or colleague; all of these actions have implications for your time management. Once you have kept your records for about one week, spend some time analysing the results; you may be surprised when you find that much of your time is not spent on being as productive as you thought. A time record sheet has been provided for you later in this document.

## To-do lists

Some people find that when they first start keeping a to-do list and check back over it after a few days, it can be alarming to find that one of their most common daily tasks is to 'carry over' many of the tasks from the day before. Part of the problem is that if the list includes absolutely

everything, although you may be achieving many of the tasks, it can look as if you are achieving very little.

To-do lists need to include the important tasks first. Of course it is also necessary to prioritise in terms of urgency as well as importance, but at least you will be able to recognise that some of the tasks on the list are merely 'nice to do' and not 'need to do'. Of course, if there is a particular task on your list that needs to move up in priority of either importance or urgency, then it should do so. It's your list, so you can decide what is really important and what is not; the only person you will be kidding is yourself.

In summary, keeping a to-do list can help you to:

- remember to carry out all necessary tasks
- tackle the most important jobs first, and not waste too much time on the trivial ones
- reduce the stress factor that often accompanies the feelings associated with a large number of unimportant tasks

## Planning effectively

This is going to be an essential action if you are to complete all elements of your programme in the given time as well as juggle your work, social and home life. We recognise that many of these tips are common sense; why then, do we find ourselves fighting time?

Here are some steps that you can consider when planning more effectively.

1. Start by identifying the time you have to make available for your daily work. That sounds obvious, but many of us have different working hours, some may have shift work to juggle, some people work weekends. Of course some people choose to work long hours in order to impress those around them in the hope that it will enhance their future career prospects, so do be honest with yourself.
2. Next, identify and record those things that are essential elements of your job, the tasks that are possibly part of your performance appraisal, or that demand your time because of your position. For instance, if you are managing people, then you will no doubt have to make time for dealing with staff personal issues, or possibly training, coaching, delegating or mentoring others. Time for communicating across, down and up will also need to be scheduled in.
3. Refer back to your to-do list and include all your high-priority urgent activities as well as the essential maintenance tasks that cannot be delegated and cannot be avoided.
4. Having completed the previous three points, you can now allocate some contingency time into your record. If you have a job that involves a great deal of interruptions, you will naturally have to schedule in extra contingency time – assuming of course that you are not encouraging those interruptions! That might be a different issue for you to consider. According to some studies, managers get as little as six minutes' uninterrupted work done at any one time on average.

You should now be able to see what flexible time you have left. This is the time that you have available for achieving your own personal objectives and goals. Ideally, if you are being supported by your organisation you will be able to use some of this flexible time to contribute towards the goal of successfully completing your programme of study. Perhaps it allows you half an hour study time or presentation preparation time or even assignment writing time. It is yours to do with what you will – but use it sensibly!

## So how effective are you at managing yourself in the time you have available?

Completing this ten-point checklist may prove to be quite revealing. Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5, where

1 = completely untrue; 2 = partly untrue; 3 = neither untrue or true; 4 = partly true; 5 = completely true.

		1	2	3	4	5
A	I know the activities I perform best and invest my time in them accordingly					
B	I have specific written business and personal goals					
C	I set aside time each day to plan tomorrow's activities					
D	I prioritise all my work					
E	I know when I work best and arrange my schedule to suit					
F	I try to delegate to others whose competence I have developed					
G	I say no when I won't easily be able to meet a deadline					
H	As far as possible I work at each task until I have completed it					
I	Generally, I am a model of efficiency and organisation					
J	I get time to myself when I need it					

So how many did you score?

If you scored 30 or above, you're not doing too badly but there is room for improvement.

Below 30 and you had better start paying some real attention to the way in which you manage yourself.

20 or below and you are going to struggle to keep on top of your work and studies, so please, do think carefully about how you proceed and please try some of the exercises presented for you in this document.

## Time record sheet

Sheet no.						
Name						
Date						
Time record						
Daily analysis						
Activity	Start-finish	Duration	Interrupted -by whom -duration	Planned (P) Unplanned (U)	Analysis code (A, B, C, D)*	Comments and notes

\*A: I did the right thing at the right time  
 B: It would have been better to do this at another time  
 C: This need not have been done at all  
 D: I could have delegated this to someone else

## Further reading

Forster, M (2006) *Do It Tomorrow and Other Secrets of Time Management*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Williams, K & Reid, M (2011) *Time Management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.