

# Organisation and Time Management A Guide for Students



**Dyslexia Services**

**2009**

[www.soton.ac.uk/edusupport/dyslexia](http://www.soton.ac.uk/edusupport/dyslexia)

## Contents

Being Organised .....	3
What stops you? .....	4
Personal timetabling.....	5
Planning for the year .....	5
Planning for the week .....	6
Time Management – an overview .....	8
How to make the best use of this time.....	8
Study Preferences .....	9
Motivation .....	11
Top 10 Time Management Tips .....	11

## Being Organised

It is hoped that this little booklet will give you a brief introduction to the skills involved in efficient time management and organisation. A list of books and websites where more information and advice can be found is on the last page.

At university you will have to organise your work for yourself which means you have to be self disciplined and use your time effectively. Success is not just about intelligence but about how you use the time available to you. Your ability to use your time well will prove useful not just for study but in your future career.

Planning your work in detail may seem like a waste of precious time, however, taking the time to organise will make your studying more effective and save time in the future. The purpose of organising your time is not to make you a slave to your schedule, but to free you from inefficient study and anxiety. The idea is to take control of the things you have to do; aim to organise your time by making things happen rather than having things happen to you. If the only thing that drives you is deadlines then you will always be chasing them!

**Take control of your time!**



Harold Lloyd's epic struggle [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

## What stops you?

Problem	Name	Solution
Do you find excuses to avoid beginning your assignment?	Procrastination	Reduce the task to smaller, more achievable chunks and add these to your daily timetable or to do list.
Do you find that you are being overwhelmed by the current crisis and have no time for routine work?	Crisis Management	Use priority lists to focus your attention and plan your time.
Do you find that you cannot focus on one single task? Do you start a task and then change to another thinking that this will be easier?	Switching and struggling	Again use your priority list to keep you focused and reduce the tasks to smaller, more manageable sizes so that you have a sense of achievement. This will encourage you to persist.
Do you get easily diverted from your work by the internet, television, telephones and friends?	Distractions	Find a quiet place to study such as the library. Turn off your mobile phone. Plan your leisure time so that you don't feel guilty when you take free time or resentful when you are studying.
Boredom, daydreaming, stress, guilt, anger and frustration reduce concentration.	Emotional Blocks	Planning your work to allow for short breaks between study and give you time to socialise or pursue your interests will help avoid these feelings. Reminding yourself of why you are studying and your end goal should help you focus.
Being unwell is unavoidable and can upset your schedule.	Sickness/ Family crisis	Try to build in a buffer of time in your planning particularly when it comes to revision or handing in your dissertation. Planning to complete your written work a week before hand in gives you emergency time and if all goes well, time to proof read.

In all of these cases, the first step is to recognise the problem and then proceed to address it. Being organised can go some way to avoid these difficulties.

Remember - time is like energy, it should not be wasted!

### **Personal timetabling**

The most successful system for students is to combine short term and long term planning, making a general plan for an entire semester and a more specific plan for two or three days at a time.

The best way to organise is the one that works for you and the following ideas are only guides to help you to find that way.

### **Planning for the year**

In the first week of your course you will be given a timetable of lectures, tutorials, workshops, etc. This is not the only timetable you will need and it is not complete in terms of the work you will need to do. It is very important that you attend all the timetabled sessions whether they are lectures, tutorials, seminars or workshops. However you will also need to allow time for personal study. There will be pressures and demands made upon your time throughout the course. You can plan for these by developing personal timetables based around the timetable of lectures; in this way you will maximise your chances of success.

To start your personal timetabling, draw up a long-term plan – you might find a wall planner helpful. This will give you an overview of the year ahead.

Use the course documents given to you in induction week, including:

- The syllabus for each element of the course,
- Reading lists
- Assignment schedule.

Be sure to include:

- Assignment hand-out and hand-in dates
- Special course weeks
- Work placements
- Term and semester dates
- Holidays
- Commitments to:
  - family and friends such as weddings, special birthdays etc.
  - your interest groups such as team practices, matches, theatre, rehearsals and performances etc
- Your exams and their provisional dates

Now you can identify the time available in which you can review and revise your work. You now have the luxury of choosing when and what to study because you have planned ahead.

## Planning for the week

You can now develop a weekly timetable, which will be more manageable.

Decide on how much time you want/need to study.

As a guide most full time university courses are considered to be the equivalent of an average working week i.e. 35-40 hours to include scheduled classes on campus and private study.

Using a table such as the one below, list your current course units, the grade you think you can achieve, and the number of study hours per week to earn that grade.

Unit	Grade	Study hours needed

Find out how much time you have to study.

Fill in the amount of time spent each week (approximately) on the following activities:

	Hours spent:
Attending university	_____
Meals	_____
Sleeping	_____
Travelling	_____
Household activities	_____
Socialising, sports etc	_____
Relaxing	_____

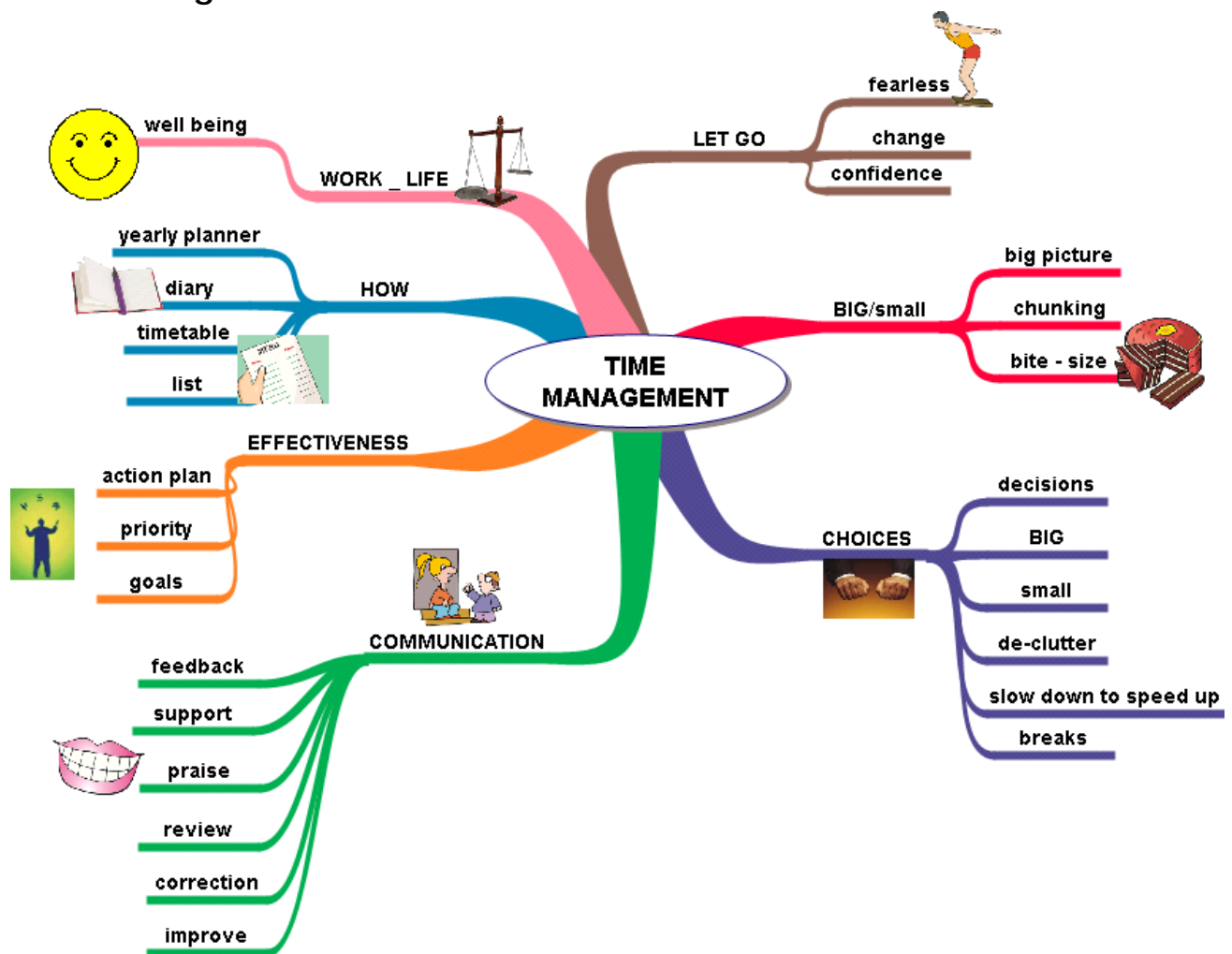
Fill these in on a **timetable for the week**, such as this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							
9pm							
10pm							
11pm							

Using this sheet, work out the total number of hours you have left for personal study.

Hours for personal study: \_\_\_\_\_

## Time Management – an overview



## How to make the best use of this time

Priority setting checklist:

- Make a list of everything you need to do
- Identify the most urgent task on the list
- Highlight urgent tasks in one colour and items that can wait in another colour
- Work out how long you should spend on each task. (How long does it really take you to read a journal, plan an essay?)
- Think about items that depend on other people, e.g. research visits, IPLs, collaborative presentations

### Remember:

It is best not to leave assignments to the last minute when:  
 Library books are already on loan  
 Empty workstations are difficult to find  
 Expert advice from tutors is hard to obtain.  
 Assignment dates are final deadlines. There is no penalty for handing in an assignment before the specified hand-in date!

## Set yourself mini-goals

Then you can always do something and feel good when it is completed.

- Break assignments into short tasks such as 'read pages 20-24'; 'make notes on chapter 1'; 'write first paragraph of essay'.
- Set a realistic start and finish time for each mini-task.
- Put the mini-goals for each day into a diary that you always keep with you and tick them off when completed. (Very satisfying!)
- Make the mini-goals as specific, realistic and measurable as possible.

You can record your time table in many ways to suit your preferences; yearly planner, diary, calendar, paper template of your own design, outlook calendar, electronic diary, mobile phone, list etc.

[www.lexdis.org/](http://www.lexdis.org/) has many ideas from students about how they organise and manage their time.

When you have completed your time table place it somewhere you can see it! On the fridge door for example, and refer to it daily.

## Study Preferences

Before finalising your study time consider your study preferences.

Do you have a fixed place to study?

Yes  Where?

No

Find somewhere quiet, the library or a room where you will not be distracted by your phone, the internet, family, friends and the television. Decide early in the course where you study best.

- Choose a place that will help you get into the right frame of mind.
- Surround yourself with only the things you need.
- Choose a place where you won't be distracted.
- Avoid facing into a room or looking out of a window.
- Try facing a blank wall or even better a notice board with your weekly time planner and visual notes on it.
- Use the library or empty classrooms.
- Don't get too comfortable - sit (or even stand) so that you can remain awake and attentive.
- On the other hand, make sure you are sitting properly if you use a computer.

If you are travelling regularly by bus or train, you can use the travelling time for study.

Do you prefer to study in short bursts with lots of breaks or to settle down and concentrate for a few hours?

Remember that effective study takes place in short bursts: your brain is like a muscle; ask it to do too much at a time and it will start to hurt!

- Most people's concentration span is between 50 and 20 minutes. Working for longer than 50 minutes will mean you lose concentration and are less likely to absorb information.
- Take a short break of up to 10 minutes in every hour – stand up, move around, get a drink. Organise your time to suit yourself but take regular breaks to keep refreshed and interested.

Do you have any best time of the day when you like to study e.g. late at night, early morning? Keep more challenging tasks for your best time of the day. Be kind to yourself and save easier tasks for when you are feeling less perky!

Do you have any plan or strategy which helps you decide what to study each day e.g. daily review of lecture notes, research for an assignment?

Yes

No

If yes, what is your strategy?

Use your priority checklist to keep you on track.

Be realistic and allow yourself some free time – try to keep one complete evening and one complete day away from studying every week. If you find that your completed timetable has not left you with enough time for studying then you need to cut down on the amount of time allocated to other activities.

#### **To summarise:**

- Plans ahead – do not leave everything to the last minute, remember assignments need research time, so start early.
- Prioritise – do not do the easiest task first, but the one that really needs to be done first.
- Set objectives which are reasonable, and make sure that they are somewhere you can see them.
- Chunk large tasks into manageable sub-tasks and set target dates for each sub task
- e.g. for an assignment: initial plan, research, research evaluation, plan, draft copy, final copy
- Keep your weekly time planner somewhere visible.
- Try doing the most difficult things when you feel at your best
- Remember the unexpected always happens, so be flexible – don't get angry when plans have to change. You are in control!

Finally: Save time and avoid last minute panics by recording references and colour-coding your notes as you go along.
---

## Motivation

Many of the points in this booklet are concerned with motivation and the will to work.

You may find an active learning style will help to motivate you.

Being organised increases the will to work: you should feel more focused and in control.

Try the PSR approach...

- Purpose: identify the aim of the task and why it is important
- Strategy: identify how the task can be best organised and carried out
- Review: identify whether your strategy worked and your studying has been successful

## Top 10 Time Management Tips

- Be aware of your learning preferences and work with them.
- Get off the phone!
- Notice how others distract you.
- Agree with housemates or family about your study time.
- Stay off the Internet.
- Learn to say no!
- Hang a "Do Not Disturb!" sign on your door.
- Ask "How did I just waste time?"
- Ask "Would I pay myself for what I'm doing right now?"
- Congratulate yourself for the work you have achieved.

For further information and ideas on managing your time look at these websites:

[www.lexdis.org/](http://www.lexdis.org/)

[www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)

For further reading:

Hargreaves, S. (2007) Study Skills for Dyslexic Students, London, Sage.

Price, G. and Maier, P. (2007) Effective Study Skills: Unlock your potential, Harlow, Pearson.

Buzan, T. (2000) Use Your Head (2nd Edition), London, BBC.

Cottrell, S. (2009) The Study Skills Handbook 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Basingstoke, Macmillan.

AND FINALLY: book a tutorial with a member of the Dyslexia Services team who will be happy to talk you through your own personal time management crisis.