

# EFFECTIVE PLANNING

One of the best methods of using time effectively and controlling procrastination is to plan when you will do specific study tasks. If you've been using the "I do what I feel like doing when I feel like doing it" method of time management and would like to reduce the stress, procrastination and guilt that go with it, consider trying a flexible time plan like the one discussed below. Planning does not mean following a rigid, military-like schedule. Rather, it means making intelligent decisions about when it is easiest and most efficient to get your work done. Time management means working smarter, not harder, and a good time plan is the key.

This *FAST FACTS* discusses what to consider when planning when to do study tasks. You may find it helpful to consult the others in the series: "**Time Management: Making it Work for You**" and "**Making a Task List.**" To find out how to obtain more information on time management and other learning and studying issues, see the last section.

## Find Out How Much Time is *Really* Available

When only a few hours each week at college are spent in classes and labs compared to high school, it is easy to misjudge the amount of time which is actually available for studying. By making a master timetable of your weekly activities, you can not only get a realistic picture of how many hours are actually free, you can also plan work periods around other activities which you consider important and don't want to sacrifice for studying.

Using a standard class schedule form (or something similar) make a timetable of all your activities which are the same each week for the semester (sample on back). These include classes and labs, sleep, meals, traveling time, sports or fitness activities, part-time jobs, church activities, etc., but **not** study time. It is important to be realistic about how long these activities take. For example, leave seven to eight hours a night for sleep, even if you usually get along with six, and give yourself an hour for lunch and supper. Once this master timetable is complete, make a photocopy for each week in the semester.

## List Study Tasks

Most people use some method of recording what they need to do, if nothing more than jotting due dates on a calendar. To plan time more effectively, each week make a comprehensive list of study tasks which includes some time to work on major assignments. The tasks are then rank-ordered according to your priorities, and the amount of time needed to complete each task is estimated. These three important steps - list, prioritize and estimate - are a key element in time management. For a more detailed explanation of these steps, consult the *FAST FACTS* entitled "**Making a Task List.**"

## **Decide What to Do When**

Each week, using the task list and a copy of your master timetable, decide when you will do each task. Tailor the amount of detail in your time plan to your individual strengths, habits and preferences. Some students like to know what specific task they will be doing in each free hour. Others will list what needs to be done on a particular day, but not specify a time for each task. A few students can work successfully from a weekly list, but it's difficult not to procrastinate with this method because big, unpleasant or overwhelming tasks almost always get pushed to the bottom of the list.

When making these conscious, intelligent decisions about what to do when, consider your body's natural highs and lows. Plan to do priority tasks when your energy is high and your concentration is at its best. Save shopping, housework or physical activities for late in the afternoon or evening if, like many students, that's when you're normally tired.

When planning how to use large chunks of time, it's usually more efficient to alternate tasks or subjects, so that a three-hour period, for example, you would spend one hour each on three different subjects, rather than a marathon three-hour session on just one. One hour is only an example and may be too much or not enough for some tasks - the 'best' method is always what works best for you and the task and subject you're working on.

Plan frequent breaks, especially when you're under a lot of pressure. Your brain needs time to digest and process information; moreover, breaks relieve stress, help sustain motivation and provide a transition period when switching subjects. The guideline is about ten minutes per hour of study.

Each day, include at least one hour of "flexible" time in your plan. Flex time has several important functions. If you underestimate the amount of time something takes, flex time provides an extra hour to finish it without getting behind or sacrificing some other activity. Students struggling with procrastination can use flex time as a "safety zone" for doing work they've put off, or flex time can be used as a reward for sticking to your time plan - 60 minutes of guilt-free "do nothing" time can be a powerful motivator, particularly if you schedule it during the time your favorite TV program is on.

### **NEED MORE INFORMATION?**

**The Learning Center is one of the best sources on campus for advice and information on learning and study related issues. Courses offered, including College Academic Skills I and II, Basic Composition and Speed Reading, are designed to support the academic development of the student for college and beyond. The Center is staffed by a group of peer tutors from a variety of disciplines, and appointments are available with staff professionals for assistance in learning and writing skills.**

**THE LEARNING CENTER, 625-9373**

Special thanks to the University of Guelph

**MASTER TIMETABLE**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6-7 a.m.							
7-8 a.m.							
8-9 a.m.							
9-10 a.m.							
10-11 a.m.							
11-12							
12-1 p.m.							
1-2 p.m.							
2-3 p.m.							
3-4 p.m.							
4-5 p.m.							
5-6 p.m.							
6-7 p.m.							
7-8 p.m.							
8-9 p.m.							
9-10 p.m.							
10-11 p.m.							
11-12 a.m.							