

Planning a study timetable

Follow the steps below to plan your study timetable:

1. Fill in sleeping and eating times:
 - a. Be regular about this. The lack of a routine schedule for eating and sleeping is sometimes used as an excuse for not studying. For you to be in control you need to train your body to keep efficient eating and sleeping habits. You can do this by deciding what time you will get up, what time you will eat your meals, and what time you will go to bed (at least on the week days). This also helps to reinforce the idea that study is a 'job'.
2. Build in your regular commitments (eg work, travel, family, child care, sport, classes):
 - a. Make a list of these first - do you work, travel to university each day? Do you attend meetings, play sport, go to church? Do you need to clean, shop, cook, pick up/care for children? Don't under-estimate the amount of time and effort you spend on these regular commitments.
 - b. It might even be helpful to make a timetable of how you used your time last week, (putting in everything from when you got up to when you went to bed), to help you work out how much time you spend on these activities.
3. Build in family and friends' time:
 - a. This way you can ensure minimum disruption to your personal life with maximum time to study. This also allows you to discuss your commitments with your family and friends.
 - b. Understanding your study needs will be a vital aspect in their support, and remember you will need a consistent system of encouragement and support.
4. Include relaxation and exercise time:
 - a. Make exercise a regular part of your timetable. Some form of exercise/relaxation is necessary to develop good positive attitudes. You will find it easier to stick to your timetable if it includes time for socialising, sport, leisure, exercise or whatever your favourite form of relaxation is.
 - b. A balanced lifestyle is important. Also a semester is a 'long haul', and you need this time to prevent stress, to avoid 'burn out' and to pace yourself.
5. Now, what blocks of time are left for study?
 - a. Which times you put down for study depends on your own habits to a large extent. You should plan to find at least 8-10 hours per week, all up, for each unit you study.
 - b. But be realistic and honest with yourself. If you have a favourite music or television programme and know you cannot resist listening to or watching it, include it in your timetable. You are the one who has to keep to your timetable so don't put down study at impossible times.
 - c. Keeping to your timetable plan will get easier the longer you continue with it. Eventually it should become a habit, part of your everyday routine.
6. Do you need to evaluate your priorities?

- a. Check your study hours - if you do not have enough (within the guide of 8-10 hours per unit) you will have to find them somewhere, or change your study commitments. You are the one in charge, the one responsible.
 - b. You have to arrange the situation so that you maintain your sense of purpose and, your commitment to achieve your university goals.
7. Arrange your 'study' to increase the effectiveness of your learning:
 - a. You can start doing the hard work of preparing for exams right from the first week of semester if you take advantage of the idea that you only need 4 or 5 'practices' or active repetitions of information to place it in your long term memory. Organise your study sessions by working around your tutorials and lectures to build in this step:
 - i. Schedule a preview session not more than 12 hours prior to each lecture and tutorial (1/2 hour should be fine).
 - ii. Go to the lectures and tutorials and take notes.
 - iii. That afternoon or no later than that night, schedule a session where you can review your notes (1/2 an hour should be enough).
 - iv. Schedule a weekly revision session for each unit. (You need to spend 1-2 hours per week reviewing all your reading, lecture and tutorial notes for each unit). Colour code your units (with all the preview, review and revision times) to help balance and organise your study and to make your timetable easy to read.
8. Keep in mind the time of day you are most alert (are you a morning or evening person?):
 - a. A good strategy is to plan your study to fit in with your mental and physical peaks.
 - b. Experiment to see if you are most alert in the mornings or evenings and try to do your study then. If you are tired and have to study, try starting out with an easier task, for example, writing out a bibliography or putting your files in order. You might find that the sense of achievement gained from completing these tasks can build up your motivation to go on to the harder tasks.
9. Work out the demands of assignments:
 - a. On your semester calendar list your assignments, colour coded with their weighting and due dates. This will help you plan your weekly timetable to accommodate your assignments, even if two or three are due on the same week.
10. Include flexibility:
 - a. You will need some time allocated as spare study time to cater for the unforeseen circumstances which will interrupt your usual routine.
11. Plan each session and set realistic and achievable study goals:
 - a. Plan each session so that specific tasks can be achieved. For example, summarise three pages or code part of a computer programme.
 - b. Start the planned task as soon as you sit down. Try the 'half-hour goal' which includes that important review time. What did I just read? What was the main idea? Do a quick mind map revision summary. It is the practise of material

that is important for checking your learning so that you can tell whether or not it has reached your long term memory. This review is important too as a 'reward' for completing work. Remember that 'every long journey starts with a single step'.

12. Keep in mind your learning style:
 - a. Your personal learning style will affect the way you choose to spend the day. Plan around your strengths, weaknesses and demands placed on you by family, friends, commitments etc.
13. Include a weekly planning session:
 - a. Spend some scheduled time on Sunday or Monday planning your timetable for the coming week, taking into account the specific demands of that week, both social and academic.
14. If your timetable is not working, if you are not following it – change it!
 - a. If you find you cannot get up, or go to sleep, or study at the times planned, change the timetable so that it will work. It should, in fact, be regularly revised and updated.
15. Discuss your timetable with your family and friends:
 - a. Let your nearest and dearest know when your study and free times are. When people know that you are studying they might let you get on with it.
16. Only study for as long as you are effective:
 - a. If you study for three hours but can only remember one hour's worth, you have in fact wasted two hours. You should study only for as long as you are fully productive. Take a short break after $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour or whatever fits your concentration span. Two to five minutes should be enough to restore you to full efficiency - do some relaxation exercises, walk around the room, have a drink of water! The 'half-hour goal' helps you to do this too.
17. Build 'rewards' into your timetable if you have trouble concentrating or 'getting on' with study:
 - a. Rewards are important incentives for increasing motivation, so use them to help you keep to task.
 - b. When you decide what tasks you want to complete in each session also decide on the reward for satisfactorily completing the task. For example, an hour's relaxation might be the reward for reading an article, a picnic might be the reward for completing an assignment.
 - c. Work it the other way around as well. If the task is not satisfactorily completed then you should not reward yourself. And, if you do not keep to your plan then you should deprive yourself of a reward.