

Time management

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An opinion

I think that almost every student we admit is intellectually capable of enjoying their degree and getting at least a 2i...

...and that poor time management is *the* main reason why many don't.

That's why we offer this (experimental) talk: to prompt you to think about time management.

Easy way out: design the degree course so that you don't need to develop time management skills.

Wouldn't work: couldn't do final year project on that basis.

Employers like graduates because they have learned TM.

We're trying to make the learning process less painful.

Acknowledgement

Not all university *staff* are good at time management.
Sorry. That's how it is.

Important is not the same as Urgent

Important: large benefits accrue from doing this

Urgent: if it is to be done at all it must be done soon

Make time for important things, even if they aren't urgent.

Don't get bogged down in things which are urgent but not important.

Really common problem

1. Student ignores a subject (except maybe for attending lectures) until an assignment is almost due.
2. Then starts working on the assignment, without checking understanding of course material.
3. Can't do it. Spends many hours in lab. Gets distressed. Maybe plagiarises. Maybe submits late.
4. Now another coursework deadline looms and the cycle repeats.
5. Student ends up not even attending lectures, too busy doing coursework
6. Low marks on coursework because of lack of real understanding; lower marks in exam; no real learning.

“But I have to...” Really? What will happen if you don't?

Single biggest Inf2 problem: students spending many many hours on coursework because it's “compulsory”, to the exclusion of other kinds of learning.

It's *your* learning. You drive it.

Coursework practicalities

Inf2 coursework is worth 25% of the overall mark, and to pass you have to get at least 25% on it.

New this year: **no late submission** without good reason: and even if you have good reason, it may be better to submit what you have and let it go.

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$$10\% \times 25\% \times 25\% = 0.625\%$$

which is *less than half* the value of getting *one* extra multiple choice question right in the exam.

Know your goals

What are *your* main goals for your time at university?

Keep track of all your roles

E.g. mine include:

- ▶ Inf2C lecturer
- ▶ Inf2C tutor
- ▶ UG3 course organiser
- ▶ Director of Studies
- ▶ Researcher on ... project
- ▶ ...

Going through the list helps stop domino effects.

Get it out of your head

- ▶ onto paper
- ▶ into your PDA
- ▶ into a file
- ▶ whatever works for you, provided you don't lose it!

“It” includes things you have to do, places you have to be... anything you'd otherwise have to remember. The idea is to stop you having to waste brain cycles going through the list of things you have to remember.

Then make small to-do lists

Personally I find a single mammoth To Do list overwhelming. I keep a full record of all I must do, but actually work from scrappy bits of paper.

It's satisfying to have a list short enough that you actually will tick it all off!

E.g.

- ▶ write down 7 things to do in the next few days.
- ▶ ring the most important
- ▶ see if there are any urgent things that will prey on your mind if you don't do them first: consider carefully!
- ▶ make sure you get to the ringed thing.

If the same items recur on your lists, ask why. Are you avoiding them? Or are they actually not important enough to do?

Does your subconscious know best?

The thing on your mind (call it A) is usually **but not always** the right thing to do next.

Why usually? Because your subconscious may well be right; and because it's hard to concentrate on B while worried about A.

Why not always? Because it may be better to clear the decks so that you can concentrate better on A on another occasion. E.g., A is hard but you only have 30 mins now, or, if you do B now in the lab now you can spend tomorrow at home all day working on A.

Work expands to fill the time available...

...if you can't beat this tendency, make it work to your advantage.

E.g., if something is not very important and you feel it should only take 2 hours, spend up to 2 hours on it **and then get rid of it** – send it off, submit it, whatever. Sometimes using deadlines to enforce this can be good.

E.g., you have two deadlines:

- something important/hard, 10 days from now
- something unimportant/easy, 7 days from now.

Do *not* spend the next 7 days on the easy thing! Decide when to start it, and work on the hard thing till then. Or even, submit the hard thing first.

Know your patterns

I'm not a morning person. I find it hard to do research, or anything important that requires long focus, before about 2pm.

Therefore, in the morning I try to “clear the decks” of all the things I can do then, leaving afternoon and evening free for important stuff.

(Of course, fixed commitments e.g. lectures get in the way!)

Your patterns may be different, but try to work with them.

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3. Can work on whatever needs to be worked on - good, so now work out what that is!

Look at the website of the Centre for Teaching Learning and Assessment,

<http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk>

– it offers study advice appointments, Procrastination Workshops, etc.

Arrange with a friend to do week planning together and report progress to one another?

Keep a diary or a timesheet?

(Plan to give a talk on time management :-)

Consider reading a good book

There are zillions of books on time management and related issues: see the TLA centre for recommendations, the Library, bookshops...

Main thing is to pick one whose tone you like. One I like:

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

by Stephen Covey.

Use second year to practise

Third year is much, much harder. Second year doesn't affect your final mark: all you have to do is pass the hurdles. Use it to make mistakes and learn what works for you. Get to the end of the year confident that you can take in your stride everything the year threw at you.

Summary

- ▶ Remember: important is not the same as urgent
- ▶ Be proactive
- ▶ Know your goals
- ▶ Keep track of all your roles
- ▶ Get it out of your head
- ▶ Make lists
- ▶ Know your patterns
- ▶ Ask for help
- ▶ Consider reading a good book
- ▶ Use second year to practise