

Tips for Successful Time Management

Counselling Service Tip Sheet



Use a Weekly Planner

A weekly planner allows you to keep track of your different responsibilities, and schedule your time appropriately to meet those responsibilities, including your study. It is important to remember that most of the time that you will require for your university studies will occur outside of lectures and tutorials. Follow these steps to use your weekly planner effectively:

1. Think about all of the different things that require your time or attention during a week such as:

- Uni classes (lectures/tutorials)
- Study time (reading, assignment prep)
- Paid/voluntary work
- Travel time
- Family commitments
- Sporting commitments
- Shopping
- House work
- Library
- Sleeping
- Socialising
- TV
- Gardening
- Exercise
- Personal grooming
- Walking the dog
- Hobbies

2. Put essential and non-flexible commitments into your planner first (e.g. classes, work shifts, family and sporting commitments etc.). Make sure that you are realistic about how much time you allocate

for these activities, taking into account travel time, how long it takes to get ready and so on.

For example:

- You know that it takes 30 minutes to travel to uni. Make sure you include this time allowance in your planner.
- Your child has a 60 minute swimming lesson and you know it takes 20 minutes to get there, 20 minutes to get home and at least 10 minutes either side to get them ready and then cleaned up. Make sure you block out an appropriate amount of time (e.g. at least 2 hours) in your planner.

3. Once you have scheduled in all of your 'must-do' commitments, you will see how much time you have left to do your uni work. Think about a full time study load as equivalent to a full time job, that is, about 37-40 hours a week. This includes class time, reading, assignment prep etc. This is the amount of time for study that you should be thinking about until you know how much actual time you need for your

course. Some units or courses demand more time than others.

4. Work out when you study best during the day and the week. This is when you should tackle your more demanding units, assignments, practice etc. Identify other times that are good for less challenging activities like going to the library to find books and journals, photocopying etc. Schedule these activities into your weekly planner so that you can clearly see what time is allocated to what study task.

5. Remember that it is generally not possible to fit in all the things we would like to do in a week. You will need to prioritise what you need to do in order to ensure that you have enough time to make it happen.

6. Make sure that you schedule in some relaxation or down time into your schedule. Not every cell in your planner needs to be allocated to an activity.

7. If you cannot fit all of your 'commitments' into your planner, then you will need to re-think how much you have taken on and make changes as appropriate.

	Date of each semester week																
Date	23/02	02/03	09/03	16/03	23/03	30/03	06/04	13/04	20/04	27/04	04/05	11/05	18/05	25/05	01/06	08/06	15/06
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mid semester break	8	9	10	11	12	13	Study week	Exams	Exams
Unit A				Ass 10% 20th							Ass 20% 7th						Exam 70% Pass
Unit B					Test 20% 28th						Test 20% 6th		Proj 60% 19th				N/A
Unit C			Essay 30% 12th									Essay 30% 15th					Exam 40% Pass
Unit D							Test 10% 10th						As 50% 20th				Exam 40% Pass

Figure 1. Example Semester Planner

8. Be realistic about how you are allocating your time. For example, if you know that you cannot concentrate when you are tired, do not schedule a regular study session after a long day of work/uni/family commitments.

9. Some people like to have very fixed schedules, while others like a more flexible approach. Whatever your preference, ensure that you have regular blocks of study time. Depending on the nature of your commitments it may be necessary to review your planner every week to account for changing shifts etc. If this is the case allocate some time each week to prepare your planner for the coming week.

10. A weekly planner is only useful if you follow it. Once you have put it together make sure that you put it somewhere where you can easily, and frequently, refer to it.

Use a Semester Planner

A semester plan is a record of important dates for the semester related to your study. It allows you to keep track of what pieces of assessment are due and how much they are worth at one glance. It can help you to manage your time more effectively by allowing you to identify your peak study load times so that you can make sure that you have plenty of time to get all your assignments done. Follow these steps to use your semester planner effectively:

1. Write the date that each week of the semester commences. Take note that there is usually a non-teaching week mid-semester, which usually does not have a 'teaching week number'.

2. At the start of each semester, you will be given a unit outline for each of your units, which should detail what pieces of assessment are required for that unit, how much they are worth and when they

are due. Put this information into your semester planner. Write the exact date that they are due.

Figure 1 shows an example planner for Semester 1, 2009, which illustrates:

- For Unit A this student has an assignment worth 10% due on the 20.03.09 (week 4), an assignment worth 20% due on 7.05.09 (week 10) and an end of semester exam worth 70% which he must pass to pass the unit.
- For Unit B he has a test worth 20% on 28.03.09 (week 5) and 6.05.09 (week 10), a project worth 60% due on 19.05.09 (week 12) and no end of semester exam etc.

Make sure each unit adds up to 100%, including exams. Note whether or not you must pass the exam to pass the unit. Some units also allocate some marks to tutorial attendance - be aware if any of your units do.

3. From this overview you can see when your busy times are going to be. Use this information to determine when you will begin work on a piece of assessment. For example, with five pieces of assessment due within a three week period (weeks 10-12), it would be sensible for this student to plan to begin work on some, or all, of these pieces of assessment several weeks before they are due. These start dates can be marked on the planner.

4. Knowing how much each piece of assessment is worth will help you to determine how much time to spend on it. For example, it doesn't make sense to allocate three weeks to prepare an assignment worth 20% and only one week to prepare a major project worth 60%.

5. List other important dates and activities

on your semester planner.

- Find out the financial and academic penalty dates for the semester (from ECU website) and put these into your planner. This will let you know when you need to make decisions about withdrawing from units.
- If there are important events coming up (e.g. a wedding, family visit) put these into your planner. This helps help you identify if you have assessment due around that same time, so you can plan to start it earlier.

6. Once you have completed your semester planner:

- Put it somewhere where you can see it easily (e.g. above your regular study area, taped to the front of your main study folder). It's of no use to you if it's hidden under a pile of papers or tucked into the back of a diary.
- Refer to it frequently so that no piece of assessment just 'sneaks up' on you.
- Use it in conjunction with a Weekly Planner to see the "bigger picture" and to set smaller, achievable goals.

References

More information is available from:

- Counselling Tip Sheet: Balancing Life and University
- Counselling Tip Sheet: Study Tips
- Counselling Tip Sheet: Managing Stress
- Counselling Tip Sheet: 20 Strategies to Overcome Procrastination

Acknowledgements

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Please note that this tip-sheet provides information and guidance only - it is not a substitute for professional counselling and support.

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