

Time Management for Research Students

David Rowland
Student Support Services
336 51704

Getting Focused

- What time management issues are giving you concern?
- What have you learned about time management that you wished you'd known when you started?



Some Issues

- Dealing with large blocks of unstructured time.
 - Transition from undergraduate studies to research.
- Juggling all your commitments (e.g. family and studies)
- Procrastination.

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Learning from others

- The “life cycle” of a PhD or Research Masters varies from discipline to discipline.
- Talk to other PhD students, postdocs and your supervisors about their experiences and knowledge of the typical/ideal life cycle in your discipline.
- Use this to make your own long term plans and goals. (E.g. How long is the final write-up likely to take?)

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Seven Secrets of Doctoral Success*

- Maintaining a close relationship with a supervisor.
- Writing up as you go along, showing work and meeting short term deadlines.
- Being realistic on the quality of the PhD.
 - It doesn't have to be Nobel Prize winning stuff!
- Saying 'no' to distractions.
- Keeping office hours (i.e. treating uni like a 9-5 job with some evening and weekend work as well).
- Seeking help when needed.
- Confidence that “you can do it”.

* Results from research by Hugh Kearns & Maria Gardiner, Flinders University.

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Writing Tips

- Write up thoroughly as you go along as:
 - this will save a lot of time with the final write up;
 - it will help you develop your academic writing skills;
 - the notes that are meaningful today will be gobbledegook in a few weeks time.
- Write around missing information. Run with your ideas while they are fresh in your mind; the details you can look up later.
 - You can use placeholders such as: <Put Jones' argument about X here>; <Explain the subtleties of Y here>.
- Use mind maps/concept maps to get things sorted out. A useful approach if you feel like you're just chasing ideas around in your head without being able to settle on a plan.
- Write in blocks, but don't finish at the end of one. Before taking a break, write down some dot points on the next section(s). It's easier to come back and finish something off than to start something new!

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A Weekly Planner

- Useful for those who have to juggle several commitments on top of their studies (e.g. students with children).
 - The more things you have to do the more organised you have to be.
 - E.g. chefs in a restaurant need to think a lot about the timing of tasks so that all meals on an order are ready at the same time.
- May also be useful for those who have to book lab time.

TIME	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
7-8							
8-9							

...

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Monthly Planners

- Use a word processor to draw up a table.
- Put in all deadlines (e.g. abstracts for conferences, confirmation report, when ordered stuff is due, ...)
- Use to manage workload and plan when things need to be started by.

WEEK	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
25/7-31/7							

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5/9-11/9							
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Your Daily Plan

- Your daily plan should be based on your weekly and monthly plan.
- A daily "To Do" list written in your diary is one way of keeping a track of what you want to do each day.
- Matching "size of task" to "chunks of time available" is one way of allocating tasks to times.
- Big tasks are *ideally* done in big blocks of time to minimise time lost to "getting going" and then packing up.
- Build some variety into your day to help maintain interest and energy levels.
- Having more than one project/task on the go at any one time is helpful if there are hold-ups in one task or you just need a "change of pace".

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When you feel that you don't have enough time for everything



- Prioritize
- Get better organised (it takes time to make time)
- Improve your skills (i.e. get more efficient)
- Try to eliminate "time thieves"
 - fatigue
 - interruptions
 - too many stop/starts
 - procrastination
 - can't find things



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Prioritising

- Use a weekly planner to do a time audit to see where your time is really going.
- Then see if some things could be dropped (are you over committed?)
- Or if you could do some things more efficiently.

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Time Management Matrix for Setting Priorities

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects meetings	I II preparation prevention values clarification planning relationship building true re-creation skills development
Not Important	interruptions, some phone calls some mail, some reports some meetings many proximate pressing matters many popular activities	III IV trivia, busywork some phone calls time wasters "escape" activities irrelevant mail excessive TV

■ S.R. Covey, A.R. Merrill and R.R. Merrill, "First Things First," (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994).

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Getting Better Organised

- Developing logical filing systems as not being able to find things wastes lots of time
 - for electronic data
 - for paper data
 - for references
- Dating work or putting version numbers on things
- Project management (making sure that the right things get started at the right times so that you're always productive – e.g. time for ethical clearance, for ordered goods to arrive ...)

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Gantt Charts (<http://www.smartdraw.com/examples/gantt/index.htm>)

Task	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Needs Analysis								
Prelim Design								
Project Approval			© Jan 5					
GUI designed + created								
Programming								
Alpha testing								
Documentation								
Beta testing								
Final QA analysis								
Web site design								
Release								☺

Skills Development

- Reduce stress and frustration later by taking some IT and library skills courses.
- E.g. Endnote; Advanced Word; Statistical software



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Procrastination

- Everyone does it from time-to-time
 - Frequently checking email
 - Surfing the net
- What's important is whether or not your procrastination is leading to undesirable outcomes (e.g. greater stress, missed deadlines, ...)
- To address your procrastination, you first need to know why you are procrastinating.
- So why do people procrastinate?

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On the Importance of Persistence

- Most PhD students struggle, at least for parts of their theses. (I did!)
- This may lead to feelings of, "Am I good enough to do this?" (Yes, I wondered that.)
- These negative feelings can lead to procrastination and ultimately to people quitting.
- If you can learn to cope positively with set backs and "wandering lost in the wilderness" for periods of time, there is a very good chance you will finish successfully.
- Remember, as Thomas Edison said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." And as Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favours the prepared mind."

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How to overcome procrastination?

- With better time management skills
- With a better understanding of what its personal or emotional meaning is for you
- By ensuring you have the right equipment and/or information to help in doing the task
- So, spend time on planning, but *limit it!*

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What are you going to do differently?

SMART GOALS

You are more likely to achieve a goal if it is SMART:

- **Specific** (i.e. "Make notes on the strengths, weaknesses and 'how to' of some relevant methodological procedures" rather than just "do some reading on methodological procedures".)
- **Measurable** (i.e. answer some questions; make notes from references ...)
- **Acceptable** (you are hardly likely to achieve a goal if you really don't want to)
- **Realistic** (i.e. you're unlikely to achieve 20 things in a one hour break between lectures)
- **Time frame specified** (i.e. by this time, not "whenever")

On the basis of today's workshop, write at least one SMART goal regarding how you intend to manage your time better in the future.

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Further Information ...

- For further information on time management and succeeding at uni, why not visit:

PhD: First thoughts to finished writing:

<http://www.sss.uq.edu.au/linkto/phdwriting>

and look for "Time management" under the "Info" button.



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Further information ...

Motivation and Procrastination

- *Psychological Self Help* by Clayton E. Tucker-Ladd:
<http://www.mentalhelp.net/psyhelp/>

CHAPTER 4 Behavior, Motivation, and Self-Control

General

- S.R. Covey, A.R. Merrill and R.R. Merrill, "First Things First," (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994).
Gatton [BJ1581.2 .C66 1994](#)
- *Time Management* by Randy Pausch:
<http://www.cs.virginia.edu/helpnet/Time/time.html>

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