

# MANAGING TIME AND TASKS

University and TAFE units can be described in terms of the number of hours required for engaging with the weekly study material. This includes time for your readings, reflection, unit activities, and doing your assessment tasks. However, it is equally important to realise that there are additional workloads that you need to consider when managing your time.

Family and work commitments and other life factors will impact on your time and will influence decisions you make about scheduling your studies. Learning how to balance these factors and how to manage your time is critical for your success at university.

The following will help you develop your skills in effective time and task management.

Refer to the other sections of this guide for more advice on assessments and exams.

The Student Handbook also contains information on planning your study at [https://handbook.cqu.edu.au/homes/pys\\_overview/](https://handbook.cqu.edu.au/homes/pys_overview/)

## MAKE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT

Creating a time-based plan gives you something to work to. Start with a master timetable that covers all of the weeks in the University term. Make sure it is big enough to allow you to write or type into it. Fill in your assessment due dates, appointments, and block in study time by working back from assessment deadlines. This puts you on notice that you are taking your studies seriously. You are telling yourself that independent study time is as important as classes, job, family meals or other activities with fixed times. Next, prepare a weekly planner that focuses on the key tasks and activities. Include some flexibility and contingency time within your planner—for example, it is a good idea to aim to complete your assessment tasks a few days or more before the final deadline. Once complete, put your planner somewhere conspicuous—for example, on a wall near where you study, as the first page of your ring binder, or on the fridge so your family/friends can help you stick to your timeline. You can also use the electronic calendar in your mobile phone or computer to help with key tasks and timelines.

## GET ORGANISED

Be realistic about the time required to carry out tasks. A to-do list will help you to improve your task management. This can be prepared each evening after referring to your master timetable and weekly planner. It can be prepared on a notepad or on a computer or mobile device. It needs to be easy to carry around, so that you can record items as complete and make additions, as required. Your to do list can be as general, or as detailed, as you want. Its two main purposes are:

Use office software for task and time management, such as Microsoft's Outlook, at: [http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/best-practices-for-outlook-2010-HA102459562.aspx#\\_Toc283818141](http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/best-practices-for-outlook-2010-HA102459562.aspx#_Toc283818141)

1. To remind you to do things; attend classes, appointments, meet deadlines, draft assessment tasks, etc.
2. To set priorities for the key tasks that you will do that day.

## IDENTIFY YOUR TIME WASTERS

Use otherwise unproductive time such as when commuting or before an appointment to read or complete a small task. Further guidance on time management is available at: <http://www.studygs.net/schedule/>

Success is all about using your time effectively. We all get the same ration of 24 hours a day 7 days a week. It is up to us how we use our time. There are non-study time-wasters that can take up a lot of your time, reducing the time available for study time. Keep an hourly diary of your activities as a reality check to make you aware of your time wasters.

Then take steps to either avoid them, or to keep them under control. From the perspective of effective study, your time wasters might include:

- » Watching TV: be selective and plan your viewing.
- » Partying: this can also have impacts afterwards if you are tired the next day.
- » Browsing the web: this might include using social networking and online gaming sites, so you should set yourself strict limits.
- » Commuting: this can consume a great deal of time, but may be advantageous if you can make use of the time.
- » Work or sport: working or training for more than 15–20 hours a week can have a negative impact on full-time study. You might need to consider a part-time study load, or study across three terms.

## LEARN TO SAY NO

Further advice on effective study habits is available at: <http://www.studygs.net/shared/studying.htm>

Saying *no* to the less important things in your life is an important aspect of good time management. If you are tempted away from study by your friends or family, you need to use strategies to avoid temptation. Try putting a “Do not disturb” sign on your door/chair, or turning off your mobile phone. Try to study in a quiet place, where others know that you are not to be disturbed. Another strategy is to say to friends/family “I can’t come just at the moment, but I’ll be taking a break in half an hour, so how about a coffee and chat then?”. However, sometimes you just need to decline and say no to avoid breaking the flow of your study.

## SCHEDULE STUDY BREAKS AND REWARDS

It is important to make time for yourself. Break your study into chunks and work in short bursts, when your concentration will be at its maximum. After each burst of study, take a short break to help you assimilate the material and to avoid overload. Also schedule in rewards. For example, after a successful study session, reward yourself with something you like. You can even turn your time wasters into rewards, for example, by working on an essay and then rewarding yourself by watching a favourite TV program. After an exam or the submission of a major assessment task, try to schedule a larger reward, such as an afternoon with friends, a dinner with your family or whatever makes you happy.

## WORK WITH OTHERS

Collaborating with others who are taking the same units can be an effective way to study, and can help with your motivation. By making the commitment to be involved in a face-to-face or online study session, you are less likely to cancel, as the others are relying on your support. You can keep each other going and offer suggestions, advice and friendly support. Even finding out that others are finding a particular topic difficult can help you keep going and be successful.

Team work is a core graduate attribute at CQUniversity. To find out more, search “Graduate Attributes” on the CQUniversity search: <https://www.cqu.edu.au/search-cqu>

## START: FIND WAYS TO BEGIN

Usually, the hardest part of time and task management is getting started. Procrastination—putting things off—is all too easy. If you find yourself falling into some of the symptoms listed below, then you may need to work on avoiding procrastination:

- » Thinking about what you need to do, instead of doing it.
- » Planning for too long, instead of making a start.
- » Spending too much time on layout and presentation.
- » Rescheduling tasks in your mind - saying to yourself, I’ll just do one other thing before I start. Procrastinators often re-re-reschedule, letting TV, emails or mobile phones distract them from the tasks at hand. This is the opposite of using such items as rewards and it will have a negative impact on your studies, unless you recognise and deal with procrastination.

Find out more about how to avoid procrastination at: <http://www.studygs.net/attmot3.htm>

or at:

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/writing-the-paper/procrastination>

It is important to find a way to start your task and break down any initial barriers. If you lack motivation, try to picture yourself walking across the stage in your cap and gown at your graduation ceremony, with family and friends in the audience, clapping. Or, use the reward system described earlier.

## CONTINUE: FIND WAYS TO KEEP GOING

Once you make a start, it is important to keep going. Persistence is a quality that is vital to successful study, and to many other aspects of life. The motivational tactics described above can help you to keep going and be successful, as can effective time-management.

In order to persist and achieve success, it is important to think about tasks from a positive perspective. Try not to dwell on negative thoughts such as “I can’t do this because it is new and unknown” and focus on the positives like “I’ve tackled other new and unknown tasks before and have been successful, so I can do the same with this one”.

## ACHIEVE A HEALTHY BALANCE

Whether you are studying part-time or full-time, studying at CQUniversity requires a balanced lifestyle, with a timetable that combines study and healthy recreational activities. Schedule time for regular physical activity, or take time to pursue your personal interests whether they are social, cultural or religious. These can also be used as rewards, for example when I have finished that essay, I'll play tennis with friends. Overall, you need to sleep well, have a healthy diet and a positive outlook, to be happy during your time at CQUniversity. When you start to feel overwhelmed, talk to someone or focus on your future success and your recent achievements to help put things in perspective.

