

Tips for Time Management

Tips for Keeping Track of Tasks and Planning

Keep an agenda to plan out your time and schedule your time ahead of time in detail

- Google, iCal, Outlook calendar – can use a separate calendar for different projects
- Block off regular times for specific tasks
- Google goals (lets you set goals and it will suggest timeslots in your calendar to achieve these)
- Use “countdown” apps to keep track of large deliverable deadlines
- Schedule things 1-2 weeks in advance, especially if equipment is busy.
- Plan time for breaks!
- Consider using Evernote/OneNote to make a to do list for each day so you know where to get started in the morning (as this is a good time to work) and Sync calendar with this list.
- Review plan for next day the night before so less barrier to start work at start of the day or start of a new week.

Create task list and checklists

- Mark task lists with timing so you can identify things that will fit into short time windows
- Label urgent versus important tasks
- Shared checklists are good for collaborative projects so you can keep track of who is doing what
- Check off goals you achieve to highlight you are making progress!
- Allocate tasks to specific days
- If you use your email as a task list use the “snooze email” function to make an email re-appear in your inbox at a set time to remind you to follow up if someone has not completed a task (or an alternative alerting system so you remember to follow up)

Ensure you spend time on important priority tasks and not just urgent tasks

- Block off some time each week to work on important tasks.
- Avoid spending too much time on lower priority tasks. For example, only allow a certain time window for a task by starting later to avoid spending more time than you should.
- Figure out your priorities and ensure you are using your time to engage in priority activities (as opposed to believing you don't have time to do things that are important to you).
- Limit talks to 2-3 per week so need to prioritize most important
- Divide up larger tasks (like reading) into more manageable and tangible chunks

Tips for Using your Time Efficiently

Manage how much of your time you give to others

- Keep track of how much time you spend doing service for others and put a limit per week on this. When your time allocation is up for that week it is much easier to say no to someone (until next week) if they ask for help.

Allocate specific times in the day for specific types of tasks

- Check email only in certain time windows to avoid immediate response expectations
- Recognize when you are good at doing particular types of tasks (e.g. clearer head for writing in the morning or evening?)
- Estimate how much mental effort a task will take to understand if you can do it in fragmented time or not - allocate time depending on how much mental effort is needed

Complete tasks efficiently

- Turn off devices to avoid being distracted during tasks that require focus
- Avoid leaving tasks almost completed when possible (as it may be difficult to remember what needs to be done when you come back to it)
- While focusing on a specific task keep a pad of paper nearby. If a thought pops into your head that was unrelated to the task write it down on the pad as a reminder to think about it later.
- Use an app to record productivity

Avoid time fragmentation when possible

- Use “time boxing” to aggregate disruptions; for example, clump all meetings into one morning.
- Careful time planning with a list of tasks to be achieved will help avoid time fragmentation.

When you cannot avoid fragmented time plan ahead

- Practice completing large tasks by doing a little every day and getting used to working in 30 min intervals
- Before you stop working on a complex task, plan out the next section/action so the barrier to beginning the task again is lower.
- Understand what kinds of tasks you can do in fragmented time and what type of tasks you cannot. For example, complex decision-making is challenging, but photocopying something for your class is potentially easier.
- Assign times (or colour quick tasks) in your task list so when you have 15 mins free you can rapidly identify something you can do in 15 mins and complete it to make the best use of your time.

Keep track of your productivity

- Create a spreadsheet for things you want to get done each day and colour code to show how productive you've been in a given day: your heat map of productivity will give you a sense of progress each week, as well as an indication of whether you need to increase or decrease intensity.

Possible apps to help with time management and productivity

- Notion
- Evernote
- OneNote (free with Office 360 for U of T students)
- Trello
- Asana
- Focus timer