**Aim of this factsheet**

To provide information about becoming a more effective learner by improving your time management skills.

**Contents**

1. Prioritising your work  
2. Getting organised  
3. Dealing with common problems

**Do you manage your work or does your work manage you?**

Do you find all sorts of things to do rather than getting down to studying? This is called ‘avoidance’ or ‘procrastination’ and it is the enemy of getting things done. The only way to complete your work is to start it.

**1. Prioritising your work**

Working out which are your urgent, important and less vital tasks is crucial to time management. You may find that tools such as the Eisenhower Matrix (Price and Maier, 2007) help you to do this. This is a matrix that allows you to visualise which tasks are:

- Important AND urgent (these are your priority activities)  
- Important BUT not urgent (these are your important activities – be proactive with these tasks and plan ahead so that they don’t get out of control)  
- Not important BUT urgent (these are activities which may appear urgent, but are not – e.g. checking email)  
- Not important AND not urgent – this is where we can accidentally spend a lot of time! Activities might include checking social media, browsing the net and getting distracted or work habits that are less productive (e.g. extensive tidying of your workspace before getting on with the actual work).

**2. Getting organised**

- **Get your diary organised** – plan your week, month, semester in advance. Include exam dates, assignment deadline dates and lectures. Then put in any paid work you do, social clubs you belong to which take your time and also social and free time. Be realistic and thorough, but remember – once it is in your diary, keep to it!
• **Break down the work into realistic sections** – make a plan of the work you need to do and by when. Break down assignments into manageable sections and plan to achieve a specific goal in each session. This may take some time, but once you know what you need to achieve you can then start achieving it. Be careful not to be unrealistic.

• **Prioritise** – once you have your ‘things to do list’ you can then prioritise.

  **Recognise your avoidance strategies so they do not distract you** – do you find things to do rather than get down to work? If so you are not alone, but you must recognise your behaviour so that you can overcome it. If being at home provides too many distractions, it may help to find another location to do your work (such as the library).

• **Work Environment** – do not spend your whole study session tidying up your desk, finding files, finding pens, organising notes. This is part of avoidance. Having everything ready, tidy and organised when you are ready to work you will enable you to get straight on with it. Make sure your notes are filed in a way which makes locating specific lectures easy.

• **Give yourself treats** – for example, ‘I will finish the research for the assignment, and then I will go out.’ Even small treats work as a reward for being disciplined. This should help keep you motivated.

• **Allocate work, effort and time to areas with the greatest reward** – do not spend too long on tasks which do not take you forward. Check out what an assignment or task is worth and allocate time and energy accordingly.

• **Take control** – once you start planning and actively managing your time you start taking control of your work. Once you are in control you will start feeling more confident and increase your chances of success.

• **Learn to relax** – When you become stressed you can become anxious and things can take longer to achieve. Find out what relaxes you and plan it into your timetable. Do not feel guilty about having fun if you have earned it. Be sceptical about those who say they do not work as they may not be being entirely truthful, or it may be that they will not do well. Plan in your social time and do not be tempted to give this up unless things have gone totally awry.

• **Plan in some exercise** – This will help to keep you healthy and will get the endorphins flowing which will make you feel good. Go for lots of short walks and get fresh air, and plan in longer breaks for exercise.

**Treat studying as if it were a full time job**

The effort you put in now will reap rewards in the future in terms of satisfaction, grades and future work opportunities. You have made a conscious decision to attend university and with that decision comes commitments. You have invested money and time in pursuing a degree; it is in your best interests to make that decision work for you.

**Enjoy the studying, enjoy the learning**
You have chosen to study your subject which probably means that you find it interesting and/or useful to future work plans. Good time management skills will enable you to get the best from your study and will be required by your future employer.

### 3. Dealing with common problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find things to do rather than study</td>
<td>Get a space ready for study. Organise your work into <strong>small tasks</strong> that need completing – plan your time around completing the tasks. Reward yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find this module or assignment difficult/do not like it</td>
<td>It is only a small part of the qualification. Prioritise your time so that all of your assessments receive the appropriate attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is too much to do and I don’t know where to start</td>
<td>Make a list and prioritise. Break tasks into manageable chunks. Focus on one task at a time and reward yourself when completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My room is noisy with distractions</td>
<td>Organise a space where you can study, it may be the University library, local library, bedroom. Once you have a space keep it organised for studying Make the space like a ‘paid work’ space – you would not procrastinate at paid work so why with university work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of time on social media/playing computer games</td>
<td>Give yourself a set time to do these activities, but also give yourself a set time for switching off distractions and starting work. For example, I will check Facebook for 20 minutes until 7pm and then I will log out and start work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have issues and am concerned I will not be able to complete on time</td>
<td>There are many people in the university to help and support you. Talk to your tutor and/or Student Guidance as soon as you can. The Student Union may be able to advise you. Come to see Academic Skills staff in the university libraries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further Support

Student Guidance Advisers
support@staffs.ac.uk
Facebook: staffsunisupport

Student Union
Confidential advice and support at Stoke and Stafford sites. Please check the Student Union website for details and opening hours:

University Counselling Service
Confidential advice and support at both Stoke and Stafford sites.
counselling@staffs.ac.uk

Multi Faith Chaplaincy
chaplains@staffs.ac.uk
Facebook: staffsunichaplaincy

References and Further Reading


For an appointment or further advice:

Click: Academic Skills Online Resources
Call: 01785 353500
Email: academicskills@staffs.ac.uk
Visit: Skills Space, Thompson Library, Stoke / Blackheath Lane, Stafford / Shrewsbury Hospital

Please note that any information provided by the team is advisory only. No liability will be attached to the University, its employees or agents for any loss or detriment suffered by a student relying on the advice given.