Time management

All manner of things get in the way of our academic work. It is easy to ‘put it off’. This is a common phenomenon known as ‘activity avoidance’. Humans do it for various reasons, but it needs to be recognised for what it is and overcome.

Sort tasks into categories

There are four categories.

a. **Important and urgent**: these tasks must be done now otherwise there are serious consequences

b. **Important but not urgent**: these tasks must be done otherwise there are serious consequences, but you have time to complete them. They need consideration but can wait.

c. **Not important but urgent**: These tasks need to be done, but the consequences aren’t great if the deadline is missed.

d. **Not important and not urgent**: these are the task that can be postponed indefinitely without any noticeable consequences.

University Academic work starts of as ‘Important but not urgent’, but quickly moves into the ‘Important and urgent’ category.

Important and Urgent tasks.

Ideally you would not have tasks that are important and urgent. Ideally these tasks would have been completed when they were important but not urgent. However, if you find yourself with tasks in this Important and Urgent category here are some tips;

- Do something: at university producing something is better than producing nothing.

- Do not worry about grades or marks or producing a wonderful piece of work if there is no time for this.

- Even though time is short, it is still important to organise yourself to decide on priorities, then, once you have a clear idea of what needs to be done you can start.

Important but not urgent tasks.

University work comes into this category. Often students have what seems a long time to complete a piece of work. This can lead to procrastination, which then leads to tasks becoming urgent. To stop tasks moving from ‘not urgent’ to ‘urgent’ here are some tips:

**Prioritise your work** - what needs to be done and by when? Work backwards from the hand-in date, so you have a very clear list of tasks to complete with a deadline for each task.
Get organised – create a workspace, be clear about when you will be working, if it means working intensively for a few days so be it, however, if you have longer you might prefer to spread tasks over a longer period of time.

Recognise your avoidance strategies – when your timetable says it is time to work you must work. Do not let other tasks or events distract you. Get 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 things can take longer to achieve so plan relaxation time in your timetable. Do not feel guilty about having fun. If time allows, plan social time and do not be tempted to give this up unless things have gone totally awry.

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 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

Not important but urgent tasks

These are tasks that can wait because the consequences from not doing them are not important. Things like hair appointments, it may be booked up for a specific time, but it doesn’t matter if you miss it. These tasks have to be done but can wait a while.

Not important and not urgent tasks

Ignore these tasks till you have time. If you miss going to the gym (usually) there are no consequences of this. If you do not do your washing for a day or two, it usually does not matter.

Remember

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 interests to make time management decisions which work for you.

Support
If you are struggling with motivation and the work doesn’t interest you, or you feel that you cannot cope please do seek advice from your tutors or specialist people. Information can be found on university web pages.