

Time Management

Many students find it difficult to deal with the flexibility that college life presents. Most high school students have never had to face how to manage their time because secondary school education is a very structured environment where most of their decisions are made for them. In addition, they live at home under the supervision of their parents, and do not have to worry about scheduling many of the more mundane activities in life: cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, household chores, etc. Although many students opt to live on campus or at home during their first year, there are still many other activities that demand their time, such as socializing, sports, clubs and hobbies. For many it is the first time that they have to prioritize their activities on their own. It is little wonder, then, that the inability to manage time is one of the causes for failure or a decline in performance for many college students.

Most students begin their academic careers with little understanding of how demanding college life can be. They have yet to realize that the academic rigors of college life have little in common with their high school days and many wind up seriously behind during their first semester, facing failure for the very first time in their lives. It may be surprising, but roughly forty percent of undergraduate students never finish their degrees (both in the United States and Italy). Close to half of the students that you start your first year with will never receive a diploma. Succeeding in college is not a given and a considerable part of the problem is time management. However, if you consider your college career as exactly that, a career, you will find that the road to success is a lot smoother. Approaching college like a job will also help you prioritize the other activities in your life because college comes first. It's the reason why you are investing time and money.

The Dangers of Poor Time Management

In many senses, college is just like a job, with schedules, deadlines and performance evaluations. It differs from most jobs in that there is an amazing amount of flexibility. In fact, unlike a normal job, attendance is not obligatory for many of the classes, and students have the option of staying out late at night, skipping classes and digging themselves big holes that is difficult to climb out of. Since final exams are upwards of three months after the start of the semester, there is a feeling that there is always plenty of time to catch up later, creating a tendency to procrastinate, which affects approximately twenty-five percent of students in chronic form. This is one of the signs of poor time management and

may reflect a fear of failure on the part of the student, lack of motivation and uncertain priorities.

Poor time management leads not to poor academic performance for a number of other reasons as well. Students who cannot manage their time correctly, often find themselves overloaded in crunch periods, such as when they have midterms and final exams. This can result in a lack of sleep because they are trying to catch up. Insufficient sleep cheats the body and reduces the brain's ability to process information, adversely affecting performance. Poor time management can also affect your diet. Having a well-balanced schedule includes allotting time for proper nutrition. When time management breaks down, so does your diet. Regular meals are often replaced by snacks that are high-fat, high-sugar foods. Irregular schedules and lack of sleep compound the problem. Naturally, all of these factors have an impact on your performance and can be a major contributor to failing.

Managing Time for Success

Time is probably the most important resource you have to manage during your academic career, and in order to manage it correctly, you must control it. If you don't, poor habits will form and take control of your time for you. One way to control your time is to create a schedule that you can follow. You should have a long and a short-term calendar. The long term calendar should be at least one month long and something that will give you the picture of all your major deadlines for quizzes, tests, midterms, papers, and exams, as well as your goals. You should be able to look it over at a glance. Naturally, you can choose the type of calendar that is easiest for you to make and update. In today's technological era, smartphones, tablets, computers and many email applications offer you extremely easy-to-use solutions that often can be synched across devices. The important thing is to have one, even if it is a good old-fashioned paper desk calendar. The second type of calendar should be a weekly schedule that takes into account both short and long-term assignments, as well as the times for classes, study time, eating, sports and socializing. This is the perfect way to break down your long-term assignments into manageable chunks that you spread out over the entire semester. Behind all of this scheduling and prioritizing are the goals that you should be setting.

Setting up your weekly calendar sounds pretty straight forward and easy, but here are some tips that you can follow to make it more effective.

Committed time: Record all the things you must do and the times you must do

them, such as classes, part-time jobs, commuting, sports, clubs, etc.

Personal time: Schedule the time you need for eating, grooming, household chores, exercise, etc.

Free time: Just because you are committed to succeeding in college does not mean you shouldn't schedule in time to have fun with friends or by yourself. Socializing is an important aspect of your academic career, as it fosters networking skills that you will undoubtedly need in the future. However, make sure you are realistic about how much time you can or should dedicate to these activities.

Study time: Schedule your study sessions before the week even begins. You need to make sure you have sufficient time to do your long and short-term assignments, reading, reviewing and studying. A good rule of thumb is to plan to spend two hours studying for every hour you spend in class. Naturally, some classes are harder than others, so you can allot more for the most difficult courses and less for those that are not as challenging.

Scheduling your study time might seem extremely simple, but many students end up studying in inefficient ways. One of the first things you have to determine is when you can concentrate the best during the day. (Most studies show that one hour of study during daylight hours is the equivalent of two hours during the evening. However, there are some students who simply excel at night). Once you have determined when you study best, schedule your study time for your most demanding courses first, and use your less efficient time for rewriting notes, integrating reading and lecture notes, etc. Try and schedule your study time close to your classes, as this will help you with long-term retention. Study in one hour blocks, dedicating 50 minutes to study time and ten minutes of rest. Knowing you will have a break is a good motivator. Distribute your study time. It is better to study one hour a night for a subject over four nights than spend four hours in one night. Make your life livable. Make sure you schedule in enough time for sleeping, relaxing, exercise, eating well-balanced meals and social activities. Remember that your week has seven days, not five. The weekend is a great time for fun and relaxation, but if you are wise, you can use a lot of down time on the weekend to achieve your academic goals.