

19 Basic Time Management Principles

1. Know yourself – be aware of how you currently spend your time.

It is difficult to make changes if you aren't sure what your habits/patterns are.

Two suggestions:

- Log your time for at least 3 days to get a 'reality check.' Don't make any changes . . . just record each thing that you do and how long it takes. Pay attention to:
 - Your best time for working (i.e., when your brain and body are most naturally alert and awake)
 - How long it takes you to complete different types of tasks
 - Your sleep patterns
 - Your eating patterns
 - Your best time for exercise
 - Etc.
- Read for an hour and see how many pages you cover. Use that as an indicator of what is realistic when it comes to planning your time.

The goal is to put together a schedule that works *for you*, that fits your most efficient times for doing certain tasks.

2. Use time management tools.

Monthly calendar to keep track of upcoming deadlines and commitments.

Day-timer to accommodate all of the tasks that need to be accomplished.

To-Do Lists for daily tasks and prioritizing.

Timer for staying on schedule – both in terms of work and breaks.

3. Break big tasks down into smaller pieces.

It is much easier to get started and stay focused if you have a finite task in front of you. The best way to do that is to break big tasks down into smaller pieces and then schedule the different pieces throughout your week.

4. Make sure each task you schedule is specific and measurable.

Specific = Figure out when you will study, read, work on your assignment, etc, and be specific about WHAT EXACTLY you will do (e.g. Read chapter 1, come up with thesis statement, etc.).

Measurable = Attach numbers to your goal (e.g. Read chapter 1, find 5 books at the library, search 4 websites, do 10 practice questions, etc.).

5. Be realistic when allotting time to different tasks.

If you try to cram too much work into too little time, you'll reduce your personal effectiveness and increase your frustration level. This will make the next thing you have to do more of a challenge. Make realistic time estimates and make adjustments as necessary. If you aren't sure how long things take, time yourself for an hour and you will get a general sense.

6. Use all of your small chunks of time.

Working with a deadline can help us be more focussed and effective. Look for time between classes, on the subway, etc, where you can complete some of your specific action steps and cross them off the list.

7. Work in small amounts of time with a short break – 25/5

At the ASC, we recommend to students to work for 25 minutes and then take a 5-minute break. Twenty-five minutes is a manageable chunk to get through so it's helpful for focus and concentration, but most importantly it's good for memory. Keep track of when you start your break—5 minutes is not long enough to do much other than get a drink of water, stretch, walk around . . .

8. Find a place to study where you won't be interrupted.

Be aware of your distractions and have a plan to deal with them! Once you find a place that is conducive to concentration and focus, designate this place to be where studying , and nothing but studying, occurs. Make sure all the materials you need are close by.

9. Get the toughest, highest-priority items on the list out of the way first.

Be aware of your priorities. Know when your “prime time” for studying is and schedule your most challenging tasks at this time.

10. Get started with the 5-minute strategy.

Mark Twain once said, “the secret to getting ahead is getting started.” Use the **5-minute strategy** if you're having trouble getting started.

11. Don't disengage immediately when presented with an obstacle you cannot ignore.

If you need to respond to a distraction, make sure you have reached a logical stopping point in your work. Take a few seconds to get to this point—you'll spend less time spinning your wheels when you come back. Wherever possible, write a brief note that will remind you of where you left off.

12. Don't skip around; first things first.

Finish one task before you move onto the next one. Make the shift only after you have completed what you needed to. Moving from topic to topic takes mental energy.

13. Write everything down.

“The faintest pencil mark is superior to the clearest memory” (Chinese saying). If you've got an idea or you forgot to do something, write it down, if you finish something, cross it off the list, etc.

14. Prioritize and make choices.

It is often difficult to accomplish everything that needs to be done. Prioritizing can be helpful in ensuring that you are focussing first on what is most important. Figure out what needs to get done for the following day/week and assign an “H” (high), “M” (medium), or “L” (low) indicating the priority level.

15. Learn to say “NO.”

Learn to say “no” to people in your life as well as to yourself. Accept the reality of what needs to get done in the time you have and make choices about what can wait and what won't get done at this time.

16. Routines may help.

Consistent routines can help reduce anxiety while helping bolster your concentration and memory. It can also help build valuable study momentum and prevent procrastination. First, try to keep a consistent sleep schedule in which you **go to bed and wake up at the same time very day**; second, **eat regular meals at the same time everyday**; and third, **develop reading and writing routines** that force you to engage with smaller amounts of material on a more consistent basis.

17. Reward yourself when you are done.

If you are working on something you find particularly challenging, decide on some kind of reward for when you are finished. Set yourself up for success by choosing a reward that you are excited about but that keeps you on track; don't choose something that is going to throw off the rest of your day.

18. Be disciplined -- but flexible -- and learn to adjust as you go along.

Don't beat yourself up for starting your reading at 10:15 when you plan to start at 10:00. It's a WASTE of energy, and you can't afford it. Use time overruns to help you make more realistic forecasts next time. Your schedule may need to be changed, so work in pencil!

19. Take care of your mind and body.

Your body and mind need to be alert in order to complete everything that needs to get done. Get the sleep you need, exercise, and eat well. These should not get thrown out because you have limited amount of time -- they are priorities.