

Managing Your Time and Study Environment

Time Management

Most students find that their greatest challenge in adjusting to college life and to succeeding in the classroom is in managing their time effectively. This is especially true for community college students who often work long hours. Adult students deal with the additional issues of child care and family and home responsibilities.

When evaluating your schedule, or how you spend your time, you also need to consider your goals and priorities. What is most important in your life, right now-- your family, friends, school, hobbies, or other activities? As you look at **how you spend your time**, ask yourself if this matches **your priorities**.

Even though attending class and completing assignments is a top priority for most students, many find that they are not allowing enough time for their studies. On the average, students should spend about **2 hours of study for each hour of class time**. For example, if you are carrying 12 credits in a semester, you should allow 24 hours per week for study (this includes time for reading, writing papers, preparing projects, and for test preparation).

If you are finding it difficult to locate the time you need to study, or that there are conflicts among the various demands on your time, you may need to give greater consideration to your goals. By getting clear on your goals, it will be easier to decide how to spend your time. You'll find that you can more easily put off other things and set aside the time you need for studies, if you know how it will help you to achieve your educational or career goals. Ask yourself:

- Why are you in college?
- What are your educational goals?
- What are your career goals?

If you aren't clear on your goals, you may want to visit the Career Center. In the Career Center, you can take various assessment tests and interact with computer programs that will help you to determine your career aptitudes and interests. There are also a number of resources you can use to read about different careers. You can choose to attend a class on Career Decision Making or one of several workshops on Career Decision Making. You may also make an appointment and meet with the Career Counselor to evaluate your needs and to determine what courses you should take to reach your goals.

You may also choose to meet with one of the counselors in the Student Affairs Office who can work with you and help you to manage other issues that may be causing problems for you.

Using Time Wisely

You might have all the time in the world, but if you don't use it wisely, it won't help you to meet your goals. **Procrastination** is a problem for many students. The following are tips to help you deal with this issue:

1. **Clear your schedule. Don't overextend yourself.** Recognize that your obligations and resulting stress are as important as other people's needs. Set limits around being interrupted or rescheduling your work time to accommodate others. Omit or reschedule some of your other obligations. You want to give full concentration to your studies without feeling guilty about what you're NOT doing.
2. **Get motivated.** Create a work area that is free from distractions and commit to staying there for at least one to two hours. If you get side-tracked, remind yourself how this activity will help you to meet your goals.
3. **Prioritize.** What has to be done first? When is it due? What is worth more in terms of your grade? What is worth more in terms of your personal, educational, or career goals?
4. **Make sure you understand the task.** Ask questions. Get help if you need it.
5. **Break down the task into chunks.** Estimate how much time you'll need to complete the task. Don't try to do it all at one time. Break it down so that it's "do-able" and not so overwhelming. Stay up-to-date on assignments to help avoid overload.
6. **It doesn't have to be perfect.** Some people are so afraid that they won't perform perfectly, they won't do anything at all. Make sure you understand the expectations of your instructor. Then evaluate how important the task is and what level of performance is acceptable to you. Then just do it!
7. **When you really hate it, try to make it as enjoyable as possible.** Work on this task first, while you have more energy. Reward yourself when you complete certain aspects of the task. Study with a friend.

Study Environment

Once you have found the time to study, commit to a time and place that meets your needs. In order to do this, ask yourself whether the environment in which you are studying matches your learning style and preferences. Based on your preferences, you should schedule your most challenging classes and intense study sessions in the environments that best match your needs. The following are some aspects of study environment you may need to consider.

Time of day: Whenever possible, you should schedule your most challenging courses and most intense study sessions during the time of day when you are most alert. Ask yourself if you are more alert/productive during the morning, mid-day, or evening and schedule accordingly.

Grouping: Do you prefer to learn or study alone, in small groups, or in large classes? If you prefer small groups, do not sign up for large classes. Try to get into classes where

the instructor uses group activity as a teaching strategy. Form study groups to prepare for tests and exams.

Posture/Mobility: Some people prefer to sit at a table or desk (formal posture) in order to concentrate and study effectively. Others are able to learn more easily while sitting comfortably on a sofa or lying on the floor (informal). Still others need to move about in order to learn, and reading while walking on a treadmill might be appropriate. Further, some people have the ability to sit and study for long periods of time (high persistence), while others need to take frequent breaks (low persistence). Recognizing your posture and mobility needs will help you to plan where and when you should study.

Sound: Contrary to popular belief, not everyone needs to study in a perfectly quiet environment. However, if you do choose to study to music, choose Baroque classical music. The tempo and instrumentation of this music seems to be most compatible with study and learning.

Lighting: Studies have shown that some people become depressed because of light deprivation during the winter months. If you are one of those people, you should try to study and spend as much time as possible in highly lit places. Other studies have shown that reading ability can be affected by the light contrast between print and paper color. There is a high contrast between black letters printed on white paper. Some people find it easier to read black print on blue or gray paper which has less contrast and is easier on their eyes. Being aware that light does make a difference, you should study in the environment that best matches your learning preferences.

Temperature: While you can't always control the temperature of a room, you should be aware of your preference for either a cool or warm environment. Dress in layers so that you can adjust to differences in classroom temperatures. Choose to study in the environments in which you feel most comfortable.