

# Time management skills

Have Some Fun · By Simon Townsend · 8 min read

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## Time management in journalism studies

Are you an organised student?

Being an independent learner means taking control and planning your learning. But it doesn't mean you have to become super-student - leaping tall obstacles in a single bound! It is important to learn to organise your study, but there's no need to feel guilty if you aren't studying every waking moment.

Being organised means successfully balancing your various commitments and making the most of the time you have available. Research tells us that student success isn't all that closely correlated to intelligence - rather, the students who do best are organised and manage their time well. Successful students don't necessarily work harder than others. They work more effectively.

Having a plan and working out your goals helps build or reinforce your interest in your studies - the more interested you are, the easier it is to learn. There are different ways of planning your studies and managing your time. Different kinds of schedule will suit different individuals. For example, some people perform best when a deadline looms. They don't mind the pressure. In fact they prefer to wait till the last minute before writing an article for publication or preparing for a tutorial. Others need the feeling of being in control and begin their preparations well in advance.

Time management is part of planning. It is a useful strategy which can help keep you on track. Most guides to study and learning suggest that careful planning is the answer, scheduling every hour of your week and doing your best to keep to the schedule. But many people don't work like this. Most of us need flexibility. We take a break when we feel like it, and we work longer another time. The image of the super-efficient student, who schedules every minute of the day, isn't very appealing to many students.

However, actually drawing up a schedule, which shows how much time you have available, and when you plan to study, is a helpful exercise. You may not keep to it rigidly, but it does give you a yard-stick and helps you assess whether you are doing yourself justice.

You have only so much time. Taking on a correspondence course can be a trap for the unwary. In some correspondence courses, there seems to be so much free time available. It all seems pretty relaxed. But that doesn't mean there's no need to manage your time. On the contrary, it is all the more essential, as no-one else is managing it for you.

## Hints for successful time management

### 1. Plan your studies and reading of target publications

Having a plan helps you to keep focused. Planning is a matter of setting goals and objectives, and deciding on strategies which will help you to achieve them. Ask yourself questions like:

- What do I want to achieve? or Where do I want to end up?
- How much time do I have?
- What resources do I have?
- Who will help me?
- How will I do it?

The answers will help you to plan well. A short term goal (like "Writing an article for publication this week") is a step on the way to longer term goals (like "Writing a publishable article every week"). These are steps towards achieving your ambition (for example, "Becoming a fulltime journalist" or "Becoming a columnist").

### 1. Motivation is a pre-requisite

If you have a sense of purpose you are more likely to study successfully. Thinking about your goals and ambitions, and setting yourself long-term and short-term goals can help to motivate you. Fear of failure is a weak motivator which leads to a surface approach to study. Interest in your training, and an intention to master the material are stronger motivators.

### 1. Get excited about your training!

This may be easier said than done, but you know that it's easiest to concentrate on and learn things which really interest you. If you can achieve a genuine interest in your training, and keep reading your target publications, your learning capacity will improve. Any course may include aspects which are less than inspiring, but keep your goals in mind, and view the more tedious tasks as minor hurdles to jump in achieving your ambition.

### 1. Decide not to drown - take control

A plan is better than just floundering. You can take control. Have a plan (but don't let the plan control you). Budget your time. Use a diary, calendar or planner to schedule your work and your week (but don't get carried away by impossible ideals).

### 1. Set realistic goals for your studies

Set achievable goals and cross them off your list as you achieve them. This helps boost your confidence.

### 1. Balance study with your other commitments

Don't neglect your personal and social life. All work and no play will not guarantee success, and it may cause excessive stress. You need exercise and sleep. You have personal, social and economic commitments. Try to allow a reasonable amount of time for each. A correspondence student might spend two hours a day on study

or working on a publishable article. It leaves eight hours for sleeping, and 12 hours for the other aspects of your life (cooking, eating, shopping, cleaning, earning money, socialising, sport - there may even be time for TV).

1. Record all your activities for a period - compare them to your plan

Did you spend too much time on unimportant things? Did you waste time? (Attending to your personal, social and economic needs is not "wasting" time.)

1. Don't lose sight of your goals

If things look grim and you're getting depressed, remind yourself of your plan and the benefits to you of achieving your goals.

1. Get as much information about your training as you can

Look at outlines, handouts, questionnaires, etc. Ask questions of an experienced editor about what is required and what is important. Spend most of your study time on the important things. Analyse your tasks. Assess the importance of each task, not just its urgency.

Think about the difference between what is urgent and what is important. Spend a short time handling the urgent but relatively unimportant tasks - and leave lots of time for the important ones. Example: An assignment due is important but not urgent. Cooking tonight's meal is urgent but not important (unless it is a special occasion).

1. Prioritise your tasks in order of importance.

Spend most time on the most important tasks. Reading and really STUDYING your target publications is important. But don't spend too long on any one task. You might earn praise for an assignment, but then not have time to do another important task.

1. Set your own deadlines

Don't just respond to others' deadlines. Apart from meeting your own assignment deadlines, you can design your study plan to suit yourself.

1. Learn to study anywhere

Your favourite place of study may be a stimulus for study. But don't avoid study because you are not at your favourite study place. Be prepared to study in odd moments that would otherwise be wasted. Have some work with you at all times.

1. Think about your articles while carrying out routine chores

Plan your publishable article while mowing the lawn, vacuuming the floor, or going for a jog. Your brain can keep working while you do housework or exercise.

1. Avoid displacement activities

Tidy your desk later, not at the beginning of your study period. Later, you will be able to think about what you have learned while you do the mechanical task of tidying. (Do stare out the window sometimes - you need time to reflect, but not for too long). Putting important tasks off is a risky strategy.

1. Have several tasks on the go at any one time.

A variety of tasks helps the day go more pleasantly.

1. Break up large tasks into smaller ones

A large and daunting task should be reduced to smaller tasks, like: compile a bibliography, photocopy the research, make the phone calls, schedule the interview, begin the first draft of the article for publication.

1. Allow yourself breaks from study

It's difficult to concentrate for long periods. Take 10 minutes off every hour.

1. Work with your fellow-students

You can learn from each other and motivate each other. Join the College's website.

1. Self-awareness is the key

Keep thinking about your learning. Reflect often. Are you getting an overall understanding of the course? If not, get help via email from your journalism tutor. Being self-aware - thinking about your learning habits and how you are achieving - is one of the most important strategies for success in any enterprise, including all kinds of journalism. Learning isn't something that just happens to you. You have to take an active part in the process. The more you think about what you are doing, and how it fits into your goals and objectives, the more likely you are to succeed. Planning, thinking about and taking control of your learning really is worth the effort.

DO NOT SEND THIS TO SIMON BY ITSELF.

## **Send Only With An Assignment**

How well-organised and time-efficient are you?

When I first sent this questionnaire to my journalism students, I wrote: "Fill this in only if you want to." I rarely received one back. Why? Because most students will do no more than they have to, and many won't face up to bad habits in organisation and time-management. So now I say: "If you don't send this back quickly, I will be suspicious that you're badly organised." Please answer all the following questions as honestly as possible. It's important to me as an experienced editor to learn more about you in order to assist you.

Type each question again, and type your answer underneath.

Make answers any length you like, the longer the better.

1. What is YOUR single biggest problem with organisation and time management?
2. How might this problem be solved?

3. If you were perfectly organised and had perfect time management, what would happen to your life?
4. Describe your calendar or diary and how you use it.
5. Describe your phone-and-address book and how you use it.
6. Who is the person you know (or know of) who has the best personal organisation and practises the best time management? Describe.
7. Think of someone close to you (particularly a parent, child or spouse). Describe in detail this person's BEST and WORST habits of self-organisation and time management.
8. Describe how you keep and use your "to do" lists. Or explain why you don't use them.
9. For a job interview is it perfectly okay to turn up:

A.) 15 minutes early

B.) 2 minutes early

C.) dead on time

D.) up to five minutes late but no more?

Give your opinions of all four answers.

1. Do you feel, at particular times and places, that you have the right to be lazy?
2. With 100% honesty, describe your exercise habits.
3. Describe the last time you screwed-up an appointment. Why did it happen? Could it happen again?
4. On a scale of 0-to-10 how bad or how good is your self-discipline, and explain why.
5. Briefly describe the last time you showed persistence and explain.
6. Do you enjoy meetings and conferences at work, and why?
7. Who in your life is so inflexible that it interferes with your achieving your goals? Explain.
8. At work what are the five greatest barriers to your being better organised and more time-efficient?
9. When alone, do you daydream, think or listen to music, or do something else? Explain.
10. Describe the part alcohol plays in your life and if it interferes with your efficiency and ability to achieve.
11. What one task in your personal or work life having you procrastinated about the longest? Describe.

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