

1.

MANAGING YOUR TIME

Learning Objectives

- Explore time management strategies, such as how to avoid procrastination
- Apply strategies for succeeding in an online class

Time Management Strategies

The two areas most students struggle with when acclimating to college life are studying and time management. These issues arise from trying to manage newfound freedoms in college and from misunderstanding expectations of college classes. As most students discover, time in college is not the same as it was in high school. In college, you have many more “unscripted” hours of the day. Fewer hours are devoted to sitting in a classroom, but more hours need to be devoted to studying and working, on your own. While this free time can be liberating, you may find that social opportunities conflict with academic expectations, or you may underestimate the amount of time it takes to study for a test, create a presentation, or write an essay. For example, waiting to write an essay the night before it’s due may have worked fine in high school, but in college, your professors expect you to do more than write an error-free, five-paragraph essay. In college, most essays should demonstrate your careful thinking and reading about a topic. Waiting until the night before an essay is due can spell trouble because you won’t have the time to think and read about your topic, much less write, revise, and edit the essay.

Following are three specific strategies for managing your time for any course, followed by advice for succeeding in an online class.

Strategy 1: Create A Schedule

Whether they used a planner in high school or kept track of work tasks using an online program, most students have had to keep track of a schedule at some point in their lives. In college, keeping track of your time is crucial.

Professors may not remind you of work due, and many have strict policies regarding late work, so you need to figure out a scheduling system that will work for you.

Your schedule will be unique to you, depending on the level of detail you find helpful. Some things—due dates and exam dates, for example—should be included in your schedule no matter what. Most professors include a schedule of major due dates, attached to the semester schedule. Look over the schedule for each of your classes and identify the major due dates.

In addition to major due dates, you might find it helpful to break down assignments into steps (or milestones) that you can schedule, as well. Again, this is all about what works best for you. Do you want to keep a record of only the major deadlines you need to keep in mind? Or does it help you to plan out every day so you stay on track? Your answers to these questions will vary depending on the course, the complexity of your schedule and your own personal preferences.

Your schedule will also vary depending on the course you're taking, so pull out your syllabus and try to determine the rhythm of the class by looking at the following factors:

- Will you have tests or exams in this course? When are those scheduled?
- Are there assignments and papers? When are those due?
- Are there any group or collaborative assignments? You'll want to pay particular attention to the timing of any assignment that requires you to work with others.
- Is part of your grade based on your class participation? If so, how will you handle any classes you might need to miss?

We all have exactly 168 hours per week. How do you spend yours? How much time will you be willing to devote to your studies?

Strategy 2: Get Better at Prioritizing

Due dates are important. Set your short and long-term goals accordingly. Ask yourself the following:

- What needs to get done today?
- What needs to get done this week?
- What needs to get done by the end the first month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end the second month of the semester?
- What needs to get done by the end of the semester?

Your time is valuable. Treat it accordingly by getting the most you can out of it.

Above all, avoid procrastination. Procrastination is the kiss of death, because it's difficult to catch up once

you've fallen behind. Do you have a problem with procrastination? Be on your guard so that it doesn't become an issue for you.

Strategy 3: Combat Procrastination

Do any of the following descriptions apply to you?

- My paper is due in two days and I haven't really started writing it yet.
- I've had to pull an all-nighter to get an assignment done on time.
- I've turned in an assignment late or asked for an extension when I really didn't have a good excuse not to get it done on time.
- I've worked right up to the minute an assignment was due.
- I've underestimated how long a reading assignment would take and didn't finish it in time for class.
- I've relied on the Internet for information (like a summary of a concept or a book) because I didn't finish the reading on time.

If these sound like issues you've struggled with in the past, you might want to consider whether you have the tendency to procrastinate and how you want to deal with it in your future classes. You're already spending a lot of time, energy, and money on the classes you're taking—don't let all of that go to waste!

Below are some effective strategies for overcoming procrastination:

1. **Keep your studying "bite-sized."** When confronted with 150 pages of reading or 50 problems to solve, it's natural to feel overwhelmed. Try breaking it down: What if you decide that you will read for 45 minutes or that you will solve 10 problems? That sounds much more manageable.
 2. **Turn off your phone, close your chat windows, and block distracting Web sites.** The best advice we've ever heard is to treat your studying as if you're in a movie theater—just turn it off.
 3. **Set up a reward system.** If you read for 40 minutes, you can check your phone for 5 minutes. But keep in mind that reward-based systems only work if you stick to an honor system.
 4. **Study in a place reserved for studying ONLY.** Your bedroom may have too many distractions (or temptations, such as taking a nap), so it may be best to avoid it when you're working on school assignments.
 5. **Use checklists.** Make your incremental accomplishments visible. Some people take great satisfaction and motivation from checking items off a to-do list. Be very specific when creating this list, and clearly describe each task one step at a time
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Tips for Success in an Online Class

In an online class, keeping track of when work is due is very important, and that means paying attention to your professor's schedule as well as his or her method of communication. Does your professor send out reminders when work is due? Does the course management system (e.g., Blackboard) alert you to due dates? You can find many useful resources online that will help you keep track of your schedule. Some are basic, cloud-based calendars (like Google calendar, iCal, Outlook), and some (like iHomework) are specialized for students.

1. Make sure you have the required software—e.g., Microsoft Word for most English classes. Issues with technology will create major problems.
2. In all college classes, students are expected to learn independently, outside the classroom; independent learning is even more important for online classes, so you need to make sure you have the discipline to do the work without constant reminders. You also have to test yourself to ensure you're truly learning the skills and concepts your professor is teaching.
3. Learning in an online class means studying *all* instructional materials your professor provides. Instead of using a costly textbook, many professors use OERs (open educational resources). These include free online textbooks—like this one—but also handouts, websites, and videos. Most professors expect students to learn on their own by taking notes over these materials. They may not quiz you over everything you read, and you may be able to get by with just skimming some materials, but you are putting yourself at a huge disadvantage if you don't study the instructional materials.
4. Much of the reading you'll do in an online class is reading you can do on the screen, as long as you take notes. When you watch a video, you should also take notes. ***No student remembers something that they read on screen unless they take notes.*** You simply must take time to go over your assigned materials carefully and to review your notes regularly. When you're expected to read something closely, such as when you need to summarize or analyze a text, print it. Research shows that reading comprehension is better when we read something in print.
5. Even though you do not have to sit in a classroom for a few hours each week, online classes require the same amount of time as face-to-face classes, so you should schedule 9-12 hours each week to complete work. If you're not spending that much time working on an online classes, it's highly likely you're not learning what you need to learn to be successful.
6. Start major assignments well in advance of the due date. Many online classes have only one due date, but that doesn't mean the student can do all of the work due on that date.
7. Recognize that some of the assignments in an online class, such as threaded discussions, are known as "formative," meaning the work is designed to help you develop specific skills or understand concepts. Typically, formative assignments are low-stakes assignments; they don't count a lot toward your final grade, but they do help you do well on major assignments, such as tests or papers. Missing a couple of formative assignments might not hurt your final grade, but if you miss a lot, or if you don't complete

them earnestly, you'll miss the chance to learn.

8. Check your college email once a day and log onto the course site at least three times a week. You might want to assign yourself certain days and times to “go to class” by logging on.
9. If you're confused about anything you're studying or about your grades, you should email your professors to ask questions and/or to set up an appointment to meet. In your email, be respectful and explain specifically which concepts you need help with. Reference the materials you've studied so that your professor knows you have already put forth effort to learn the material.
10. If you're having technical difficulties, you need to contact the college's IT support. Professors don't usually know how to assist with technology issues. Professors also don't usually accept late work because of technology problems. You will need to be pro-active if you have any problems navigating your course site or submitting work.

Key Takeaways

This short reading should have helped you learn

- You will have a lot of free time in college, but compared to high school teachers, professors expect much more work from students
- Managing your time by using a schedule, prioritizing, and combating procrastination is crucial to college success
- Online learning requires discipline and technological savvy