

## Top 10 Time-Management Tips

College is like juggling: five balls in the air, trying not to let any of them drop. Between going to class, doing the homework, taking the tests, perhaps holding down a job or raising a family—well, how's a mere mortal supposed to do all this stuff? It boils down to managing your time: figuring out where each commitment is supposed to go, deciding how much time to apportion to each, and, most of all, staying on track for the whole fifteen-week semester. But how are you supposed to do all that? Here are our top ten tips for managing your jam-packed schedule:

- 1. Block your courses.** Many students think they'll learn better if they scatter their courses throughout the day with frequent downtime. Wrong. Usually, if you have a gap of fifty minutes between classes, it's much more likely to end up as Twitter or Facebook time than as study time. If you take your courses back to back as much as possible, you'll have larger blocks of time to devote to concerted bouts of studying. And if you can group your classes on only two or three days, it will free whole days for studying.
- 2. Make a plan.** It's never too early to start figuring out how you'll do all the work in each of your four or five classes. In fact, the very first day of classes is the right time. Enter all the assignments—including weekly assignments, quizzes, and exercises or short papers—into your electronic or print calendar. Then develop an overall plan for both your run-of-the-mill weekly studying and the mondo research paper or killer final. Enter it all in or write it all out: no one can juggle in their head.
- 3. Aim to make all the classes.** Going to classes is one of the most time-efficient things you can do. When you miss class, it takes three times as long to learn the material on your own as it would have taken to go to the lecture. And you never really learn it as well. Who could, getting notes from that classmate who writes illegibly and didn't really understand the lecture him- or herself?

4. **Determine whether you're an owl or a rooster.** Schedule your studying for times when you can seriously engage with the work. Depending on their biochronology, some students find 11 p.m. the perfect time to focus, while others like 6 a.m. Just because your classmate studies at a particular time doesn't mean it will work for you.



**EXTRA POINTER.** Be sure to schedule time for sleep. Whether you study in the depths of night or at the crack of dawn, you'll need seven or eight hours of sleep. What good is it managing your waking time if you're so wasted that you can't concentrate on what you're doing?

5. **Set up "zones."** Many students have a lot of things on their plate other than college—a part- (or full-) time job, a few kids to take care of, responsibilities at the church. It's a good idea to divide up your week, and your day, into different, and nonoverlapping time blocks. If you work at your job in the morning, then be sure to schedule all your courses and study time in the afternoons and evening. Tuesday and Thursday are your child care days? Don't try to prepare for your Friday test in those time blocks. The key to success when you have multiple commitments is compartmentalization: keep each activity separate, and don't let one zone bleed into another.



**5-STAR TIP.** Learn to say no. If you're in your study zone and your boss calls, or your kid needs help with his or her homework, or your pastor asks you for help with the pancake breakfast, tell them you'll get back to them later. Hey, your work should be at least as important as filling in for the sick worker, fifth-grade social studies, or the toppings for the pancakes.

6. **Keep a daily log.** Especially at the beginning of the semester, you should track how long it takes you to do the homework in each of your classes, to prepare for quizzes and tests, and to write short

papers. Knowing this can help you estimate the time frame for future course assignments. Also, writing it down will prevent you from overestimating how long you're really studying (at least if you're recording honestly).



**5-STAR TIP.** Adjust your study plan dynamically as the semester progresses. Typically, you'll find that some courses get harder as they go, that some projects take longer than you planned, and that the workload is divided unevenly over the semester in some courses. The more flexible—and the more open-minded—you are about time management, the more successful you will be.

- 7. Do your homework on time.** Even though there's no parent or teacher to stand over you, be sure you're doing the outside-of-class work when it's assigned. Doing the reading in advance of the lecture, studying for each quiz as it comes along, and memorizing what needs to be memorized on a week-by-week basis are all strategies that will increase your efficiency and cut down on overall study time. Sure, it's tempting to blow off the homework when there's no test looming or when the prof doesn't bother to call on anyone in class. But the fun will quickly diminish when you have five hundred pages of reading to catch up on two days before the test.
- 8. Prioritize your study time.** Every professor thinks that his or her course is the most important thing in the universe. Learn to *triage* your courses—that is, to spend different amounts of time on each course depending on how important or difficult that course is. Do not spend all your time on the course you find most enjoyable or easiest to do. And if you find you're spending every waking hour on one of your courses, cut back. Keep in mind that you've signed up for four or five courses, each of which will count toward only 20 to 25 percent of your overall GPA.
- 9. Plan to do each task once.** It's very time-inefficient to do things twice. Some students think they'll learn better by copying their notes over (more neatly this time), listening to the same lecture twice (once

in person, once on their iPod), or doing the reading three times (once to get the general idea, once to focus in on the plot and characters, and once to take notes). Fuggetaboutit. All these are incredible time wasters. And it's not likely that you'll be able to focus or understand better the second time around.



**REALITY CHECK.** At the end of the second week, assess whether you've had any do-overs—that is, done any task twice. If you find that you have, diagnose your problem and devise a strategy for doing each task once for the balance of the semester.

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- 10. Divide and conquer.** Break up larger projects such as research papers, field studies, and studying for cumulative exams into manageable chunks. And spread the stages over a reasonable number of days. Always add some extra time to what you think you need, because usually there's a major crunch or crisis toward the end. It's better to finish a little early than to find yourself running around like a madman when your computer crashes at 4 a.m. the morning before a paper is due.