

A dark, grayscale graphic featuring a spiral-bound notebook and a pen. The text 'Chapter 18' is centered at the top, followed by a horizontal line, and 'Time Management' is written in a large, serif font below it.

Chapter 18

Time Management

Everyone complains that they need more time in the day. As a busy college student, you could probably list a hundred things you would do with an extra hour or an extra day. But did you know that you could actually give yourself more time?

No, it's not some secret that magically adds a 25th hour to the day or an eighth day to the week. It's called good time management – and it's really fairly simple to do.

This chapter will show you how by:

- Showing you how to assess your use of time.
- Recommending strategies to take control of your time and manage it well.
- Outlining time zappers that students are prone to – and how to avoid them.

How do you use Your Time?

To manage your time well, you need to get a clear picture of how you currently use your time so you can assess how you can use it better. Spend one week tracking how you use your time – from how long you spend in the shower each day to how many hours you watch television to how many hours you spend sleeping, eating, studying, attending class and talking on the phone. You should actually make a chart of each hour of the day, next to which you list what you did during that time.

You will probably be very surprised to find out just how much time you

spend doing things you don't feel are important (*watching junk television, paging through catalogs, or surfing the net, for example*) and how few hours you spend on the things that are your top priorities – like studying, working out, enjoying your hobbies and spending time with friends and family.

After you have charted how you spend your time and can see how your time was spent over the course of a week, assess how you would like to use your time differently. Do you want more time to work out? To read? To visit your mother? Do you wish you could shave a few hours off of your television viewing or net surfing, or reduce the time you spend running errands? List the changes you want to make, then work on an action plan to make the changes a reality.

Manage Your Time Well

Taking control of your time requires you to develop a plan of action. To do this you will need a calendar of your entire school term and what must be accomplished when, and a weekly plan of how you will spend your time to accomplish what you need to. Here's how:

Create A Term Calendar

This calendar serves as a quick reference to all the major events that will take place during this term. Don't forget anything: school assignments, club meetings, family events like weddings or parties, doctor's appointments, personal projects, vacations and holidays, visits from friends or family, etc. Use a large calendar that is easy to read and fits where you want it – on your desk, wall, even on your computer screen. Remember:

- **Use the right calendar.** A free online calendar sounds neat – but won't be useful if you don't want to take the time to turn on your computer and visit the Web site every time you need to refer to it. Likewise, that free calendar from your mechanic may be free, but if there's not enough room to write in all your commitments, or it rips every time you turn the page, it's not useful.
- **Use your syllabi** to write in all important due dates, deadlines and exams.
- **Review your term calendar regularly** – at least once a week, if not more.
- **Resolve conflicts immediately** – even if they are weeks or months away. The earlier you resolve conflicts, the fewer problems will result.

Create A Weekly Plan

As the term begins, map out a rough plan for each week of the term that allows you enough time to achieve what you need to achieve. Then, before the start of each week, sit down and write a detailed plan of the week ahead, including a to-do list and an hour-by-hour breakdown of each day. Remember:

- **Schedule time each week to create your weekly plan for the next week!**
- **Write in all activities you must attend**, like class, meetings and appointments.
- **Review your term calendar** as you are creating your weekly plan to make sure you don't overlook any deadlines, commitments or engagements.
- **Give yourself some flexibility** to accommodate unseen circumstances or events. For example, you may plan to grocery shop at noon on Wednesday, but then find that a traffic accident would cause your shopping trip to last far too long to make it worth it. If you have no room in your weekly schedule for an unforeseeable event like this, you will have to forgo shopping – and end up starving or going without toothpaste as a result!
- **Resolve conflicts immediately.** Don't wait until the day before you have both a meeting scheduled and the need to study for a test the next morning. Decide if you can study at another time, or let your club know well in advance that you won't be able to attend the meeting that week.

Common Time Zappers

Procrastination

We're all guilty of it at one time or another. Whether we organize our junk drawer when we should be writing a paper or trick ourselves into thinking we have plenty of time to watch television when we really have a project due in less than 24 hours, we have all fooled ourselves into thinking we are doing other important things that need to be accomplished instead of getting to the real task at hand. Procrastination is the biggest time sapper known to mankind. Avoid procrastinating by:

- **Creating a realistic schedule** for completing tasks that leave extra time for unforeseeable circumstances.
- **Keeping a positive, motivated attitude.**
- **Breaking tasks and projects into manageable blocks**, with breaks built in.
- **Rewarding yourself for a job well done** – and giving yourself something to look forward to.
- **Getting support.** Find a friend who has to complete the same task you do and work together. Take a time management class or ask your advisor for tips on how to eliminate procrastination.
- **Avoiding negativity.** The more you complain or think about how you really don't want to complete a task, the more stress you create and the more time you put between you and the accomplishment of your goal.

Interruptions

If you're constantly interrupted, you can't possibly manage your time and stick to a schedule. The world is full of potential interruptions – the trick is to manage them. Here's how:

- **Learn to say no.** If you are in the middle of completing an important task and someone stops by to ask you to join them in an activity or help them with their own task, you need to learn how to say no. You don't have to be rude – just let them know that you are busy, but would be happy to help or come by at another time. Ask them to call you or stop by again to set up a time.
- **Ask that your time be respected.** Establish a study time or set times to complete tasks, then let your roommates, friends and family know about your schedule and ask them not to call you, stop by, or expect to hear from/see you during these times. If putting a friendly or humorous sign on your door or message on your answering machine helps, then do it.
- **Turn off phone ringers, televisions, computers, etc.** Some of the biggest interruptions are the ring of your cell phone or home phone, the beep of your incoming e-mail box and the temptation of that television show you can't resist. Avoid the urge to answer the phone or look at e-mail by turning everything off before you begin your task.
- **Get organized.** Getting down to business and finding out that you have to go out to buy printer paper to print out your notes or paper towels to clean up the coffee from last night that you just spilled on your notebook is anything but good time management. If you are organized, you will save time and frustration.

Your Internal Clock

If you have the urge to fall asleep at 2 p.m. every day, it's probably not efficient or effective to plan to study at that time. If you know you can't keep your eyes open past 11 p.m., don't schedule time to finally organize your desk at that time – you'll never do it. Believe it or not, your own internal clock can be a huge time sapper if you try to work against it instead of with it.

Information Overload

Cell phones, PDAs, e-mail, answering machines, Internet news sites, online blogs and magazines jamming your mailbox to the point of overflow. With everything we have to keep up with these days, we could spend all day just listening to messages, answering e-mails, entering information into our PDA and reading the Web sites, publications and blogs that have somehow become necessary. Don't fall into the trap of information overload – you don't have to do and know it all. Don't feel pressured to stay up-to-date with your favorite television show just because all your friends are. Don't feel compelled to answer every silly joke forwarded by e-mail with a thank you or a personal note. So what if you miss today's headlines? Tomorrow they will just be yesterday's news, and you probably have better things to do with your time.