

# FGSR Professional Development Professional Practice Module



## Time Management

What is time management? Often you may hear that it is important to effectively manage your time and to start effective time management. This terminology can be confusing since most of us probably don't waste time and time is continuous.

In simple terms time management, can be thought of planning To-Do the things you want To-Do, when you want To-Do them. This can be done using several techniques to avoid distractions and avoid spending time on things that are not important in our lives.

As a graduate student, you may often have a heavy workload and it may be difficult to balance workload with the rest of your life. Using some time management skills will help you to hopefully get everything into your schedule.

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## Tips

### 1. Use a Planner and Prioritize

Use a daily/monthly planner to keep track of commitments and deadlines. Use only one planner. You can choose between electronic or hardcopy versions. Keep track of all professional, personal, and social commitments in one day timer. This will help you to organize and balance your life and keep organized. When preparing a daily schedule also include personal tasks, this will help you to add balance to your life. For example, add an hour of working out or cooking to your daily schedule. Focus on your goals and appropriate time accordingly. If your goal to learn to skate is your most important goal you should allocate time towards it.

### 2. Avoid distractions

This can be difficult depending on the work environment. If you are planning To-Do some work, try to find a place to complete the work without too many distractions. For example, if you want to write a paper it may be better to write in the library instead of a busy scientific laboratory. Investing in ear plugs may also be useful if your work environment can be noisy.

### 3. Organize your space

Even if your space is limited, keep it organized so that you can find everything you need. Do not waste time looking for items that are buried at your desk and lab bench. Go to an office supplies store and purchase organization items to store items.

### 4. Use To-Do Lists

Make To-Do lists for your work load. List everything that you want to get done in that day or week. If a task is large break it into smaller parts. Each task should be able to be completed in 1-2 hours. Once you have prepared a To-Do list for the day, you need to analyze the list and prioritize. Often there may be more things To-Do than hours in the day. You need to decide which items have high priority and which can be done on a later day. Prioritized To-Do lists will help you to remember what needs to get done, help you to complete most important jobs first, help you to not waste time on trivial tasks and reduce stress.

## 5. Scheduling with a time blocking approach

Once you have prepared a prioritized To-Do list, use this list to prepare a schedule for your day using a time blocking approach. Fill in meetings and classes into your schedule first and then fill in the rest of your schedule with the work from your prioritized list. For example, you may block off half an hour in the morning to reply to emails and check mail. The next hour may be a meeting, and the hour after that the report you are working on. It is important to schedule items into a block of time in your day, and when that time arrives, start to work on that task. This technique also helps to reduce procrastination and stress.

- Identify the time you have available
- Block in essential tasks you must do. For example classes and meetings.
- Schedule in high priority urgent tasks and vital house keeping activities.
- Block in contingency time to handle the unpredicted interruptions and distractions. (This step can be difficult To-Do).
- In the time that remains, schedule in tasks that work towards your goals. If the time that remains is limited, or very limited, you may have to 1) increase time spent on tasks or 2) eliminate some tasks. At this stage, it is important to evaluate your goals, and realize when you need to refuse to take on any more tasks.
- Reduce the number of commitments in your calendar. Using effective scheduling will help you to realize when your schedule is full and you cannot take on any more tasks.

## 6. Pick the right time and stick to tasks

Schedule your most challenging tasks during the times of day when your energy level is high and when you will have the least distractions. Minimize the number of times a day you switch between types of tasks. For example, reply to email only once or twice a day.

## 7. Allow extra time

Estimating time can be difficult. When you are first preparing a schedule it may be difficult to estimate how long a specific task will take to complete. It is best to allow yourself more time than expected. Don't be discouraged if you cannot stick to your exact schedule at first. Over time, your scheduling will become more effective.

Typically, the writing process takes much longer than expected and is difficult to estimate how many pages one can write in an hour.

## 8. Keep ahead

When you have several important but non-urgent tasks it is important to work on them before they become urgent. A good idea is to spend one hour a day on important, non-urgent tasks. Add these tasks into your schedule. You may want to spend an hour or spend one day a week on a specific project. An example would be a scholarship deadline or a report due on a specific date.

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## Activities To-Do On Your Own

- Prepare a prioritized To-Do list.
- Prepare a daily schedule for the next week using the techniques from above.
- Buy yourself a day timer, either hardcopy or electronic version.
- Go to an office supply store and buy items to organize your work space.
- Review your goals and upcoming deadlines and incorporate them into your day timer and scheduling.

- Try ranking the following items in order of most important to least important. Compare your list with a friend's list. (Example To-Do List: check email, meeting with supervisor, marking TA assignments, workout, class, weekly department seminar, methodology seminar, guest speaker seminar, cooking dinner, going to the library to research articles, studying for midterm, writing a paper, applying for a scholarship, and writing an abstract on your research.)
  - Johnny Overwhelmed has a busy week ahead of him filled with TA work, lab work and a scholarship deadline. His supervisor calls him into his office on Monday morning and asks him to complete an abstract by Thursday to submit to a conference. How should Johnny deal with this increased workload? Possible suggestions: 1) May discuss goals with supervisor and may suggest a different conference with a later deadline or an oral presentation submission with a different deadline. 2) Discuss workload with supervisor and decide which of the other tasks will have to be completed at a later date.
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## Other Resources

- Managing Time 2006, Harvard Business School Press.
- Manage your time with Mind Tools. 2008. [www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE\\_03.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_03.htm)