

Managing Your Time (Phil Race)

(Adapted by from "How to Study", Phil Race (2003) Oxford, Blackwell)

Only you can manage your time. We've all got exactly the same amount of time to manage in a day: 24 hours, yet some people seem rushed and other people seem laid back.

1. **Decide that you are in charge of your time.** This doesn't mean that you're going to sit back and waste it, but it also doesn't mean you're going to get so flustered about all the different things which you need to do that you're going to end up doing nothing much but scrabble around. Being in charge of your time is about making sure that you get good value from using it.
2. **Remind yourself what's in it for you.** Being good at time-management will improve your quality of life. You'll be more efficient, more effective, and under a lot less pressure from other people.
3. **Managing time *makes* time.** Yes, it *takes* some time too, but the hours you'll save by getting good at time-management will be *your* time to use.
4. **Think in terms of high learning payoff.** Choose to use your time to do things that have high learning payoff, such as making summaries of things, discussing things with others, quizzing yourself about what you've just learned, quizzing yourself about what you learned three days ago, and three weeks ago, and so on.
5. **Limit the time you spend on things with low learning payoff.** There's less learning gain per minute in tasks such as passive reading, writing essays, writing reports, doing practical work, and simply sitting in some of the less stimulating lectures. You've still *got* to do these things of course, but don't kid yourself that you're getting a lot into your mind just because you're busy.
6. **Don't waste time *thinking* about doing some work.** We're all very good at putting off the evil moment of actually *starting* work. Just start – that's saved you from wasting any time putting it all off.
7. **Manage your minutes, and the hours will look after themselves.** Don't wait till you've got a good, solid, quiet three hours to get on with your next bit of studying – you haven't got such a time window! Use what you've got, five minutes now, five minutes soon, and lots and lots of short-but-useful spells of time.
8. **Spend some of the short bits of time on *your* learning agendas.** For example, it just takes a few minutes to look over the notes from one of last week's lectures, or make your own summary of something you've read, or a checklist of things you're going to do in the next few hours or days.
9. **Choose to use the *first* 10% of the time available for a task.** You'll probably have noticed that left to human nature we usually manage to finish a task well enough in the *last* 10% of the available time. It's pure logic that just as much could have been done in the *first* 10%. Think of all the other things you can then get through in the remaining 90% of the available time for that task – not least spending a little time now and then going back to the task and polishing it up. That means more marks.
10. **Set your own deadlines.** Your lecturers will set you deadlines, but make *yours* earlier ones – much earlier ones. Set staged deadlines as well as final deadlines. Break big tasks into manageable chunks.



11. **Tell other people about your targets and deadlines.** Knowing that they could then ask you “have you done what you said you were going to do by today?” is a great incentive to making sure you’re going to be able to reply “of course, yes”.
12. **Be an early person.** Don’t just turn up on time for lectures, tutorials, labs, and so on, but get there that bit early. Even if you’re standing around doing nothing as a result, you can use your brain to do some useful thinking. You can tune in to what you already know about the topic, and what you want to find out about the topic, and how that topic relates to other things you’re learning – all high learning payoff thinking.
13. **Get ahead of schedule.** Try to get yourself a couple of weeks (or more) ahead of where you need to be. It’s a great insurance policy. You won’t then be completely thrown by the unexpected – a bout of ‘flu, the sudden family crisis, a friend who needs your time, and so on. It’s a great feeling when you’ve got time in hand. You then don’t use up energy worrying about hand-in dates, assessment dates or exam timetables, and can use your energy instead gaining learning payoff.
14. **Keep going backwards.** Make time to stop and reflect. Go back to what you learned yesterday, the day before, the week before, and so on. You still need all of this. Don’t just go surging forwards, letting all of your learning evaporate in your wake. Consolidate. You’re measured sooner or later on how much you’ve consolidated – not on how much you once learned then forgot!
15. **Plan time off.** When you’re ahead of schedule, you deserve some time off. When you take *planned* time off, you’ve got a clear conscience and can *enjoy* the time off far more than if you’d just escaped from the pressure of a backlog of work. Enjoying time off restores you brain and body, and makes you fitter for your next bout of high-payoff learning.

