TOP 5

Tips for Effectively Managing Your Time

1. Set your priorities

2. Make a quarterly calendar

3. Set aside 15 minutes each week to plan your strategy

4. Carve out study time for homework, tests and projects

5. Include downtime on your calendar
A. Steps in Managing Your Time

STEP 1: Set Your Priorities

Before you can prioritize your tasks, you first need to figure out what you do with your time. In the table below, rate the various activities you engage in as High, Medium, Low, or Not Applicable. Add any tasks that you don’t see listed. This analysis will help you in Steps 2 and 3, when you map out your quarterly and weekly calendars.

RATING YOUR PRIORITIES

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<th>Activities</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tr>
<td>SCHOOL-RELATED</td>
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<td>Preparing for class</td>
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<td>Doing library research</td>
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<td>Doing homework</td>
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<td>Studying (independent)</td>
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<td>Attending study group sessions</td>
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<td>Instructor office hours/consults</td>
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<td>Attending tutoring sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORK-RELATED</td>
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<td>Getting ready for work</td>
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<td>Commuting to work</td>
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<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONAL TIME/RELAXATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercising</td>
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<td>Playing an instrument</td>
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<td>Watching TV/movies</td>
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<td>Surfing the internet</td>
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<td>Checking email</td>
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<td>Texting/phone calls</td>
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<td>Social media (facebook, twitter, etc.)</td>
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<td><strong>ROUTINE LIFE TASKS</strong></td>
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<td>Shopping for groceries</td>
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<td>Household maintenance</td>
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<td>Taking a nap</td>
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<td>Sleeping</td>
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<td>Meals/snacks</td>
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<td>Paying bills</td>
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<td>Doctor appointments</td>
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<td><strong>SOCIAL</strong></td>
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<td>Attending school events/activities</td>
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<td>Going out to lunch/dinner</td>
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<td>Spending weekends back in your home town</td>
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<td>Caring for family members</td>
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<td>Going out with friends/parties</td>
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<td>Meeting new people</td>
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<td>Dealing with “drama” with friends or family</td>
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<td>Helping a friend or family member</td>
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<td><strong>COMMUNITY-RELATED</strong></td>
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<td>Volunteering</td>
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<td>Attending church</td>
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STEP 2: Make a Quarterly Calendar

You will be provided with a calendar for your entire quarter at PTI. Obviously, you can’t fill out all the details for every day of the quarter, but you can start by recording set times for your regular commitments spanning the entire quarter.

Reference the table you completed in Step 1 as a guide for filling in your quarterly calendar. HIGH priority items should be scheduled FIRST. After that, try to find time for your MEDIUM priority items. Then consider whether LOW priority items should be eliminated.

a. **Schedule your class obligations first**
   - Look at the syllabus for the class schedule
   - Block off all class and lab times
   - Block off any standard study group/instructor consult/tutoring times

b. **Block all other set time obligations**
   (that rate as high or medium priority)
   - Work
   - Meetings/organization activities
   - Exercise classes
   - Church
   - Upcoming wedding, concert or special event

c. **Record all exam and project due dates**

### Here’s a Tip...

You may find it helpful to use different colors to denote your various activity categories (e.g. green for classes, yellow for labs, red for work, blue for personal appointments)
STEP 3: Schedule Your Weekly Tasks

a. Set aside 15 minutes each week to plan your strategy

- Make a “task list” for the coming week (preferably on Sunday before the school week begins)
  - Prioritize your standard tasks based on your ratings from the table in Step 1
  - Also consider the situation for this particular week in terms of what is Important and what is Urgent. For instance, has a paper that was less urgent before now become top priority because it’s due? (Important & Urgent) Did you just get a project assigned that is due in 5 weeks? (Important & Not Urgent) Did someone you hardly know ask you to see if you could fix a piece of equipment for them? (Not Important & Not Urgent)

- Update your quarterly calendar based on the priorities you identified for the week

Organizing Your Priorities with Stephen Covey’s Time Management Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANT</th>
<th>NOT IMPORTANT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>URGENT</td>
<td>NOT URGENT</td>
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</table>

Quadrant I: Urgent & Important (immediate and important deadlines)

Quadrant II: Not Urgent & Important (long-term strategizing and development)

Quadrant III: Urgent & Not Important (time-pressured distractions that aren’t really important, but demanding your attention)

Quadrant IV: Not Urgent & Not Important (activities that yield little, if any, value)

Try to focus on this quadrant to prevent tasks from moving to the “Urgent” category and creating undue pressure in your life

source: Stephen Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
b. Carve out study time for homework, tests and projects

- Work backwards from exam and project due dates to map out study/writing time
- For every hour of class, plan to spend a minimum of ½ hour for studying or project development
- Try to study at the same time each day and make it a habit
- Also take advantage of small pockets of time, like in-between classes. (These are the best times to review information or translate notes while the material is still fresh in your mind. You’d be amazed what you can accomplish in a ½ hour or 45 minutes here and there)
- Divide study time into 50-minute blocks; give yourself small breaks to keep your brain fresh
- Spread your study time throughout the week or weeks prior to the deadline (this will ensure that you have enough time to address issues that arise; it also allows your brain time to process information that you are studying gradually)
- It’s okay to reduce study time in other classes to compensate for a deadline in a certain class; just make sure you’re keeping those classes afloat until they can get your full attention

c. Include downtime on your calendar

- Be realistic—if you over-commit your time to schoolwork, your system will fail
- Leave segments of time throughout your day for life necessities such as breaks, meals, personal matters, and rest
- To maintain a balanced life, schedule times for fitness, social activities, reading, and other interests; make these activities commitments on your calendar or you’ll find yourself neglecting them
- Label these boxes as “Open”
STEP 4: Take “5” Every Morning

*Take a few minutes each morning to plan your day based on your priorities*

a. Make a daily task list
   - Based on items from your weekly task list as well as what didn’t get accomplished from yesterday’s list (“leftovers”)

b. Prioritize your tasks
   - Number tasks in order of importance
     - Start with the tasks that must be done (facing consequences)
     - End with tasks that can wait until another day, if necessary
   - Only list tasks that you can realistically accomplish so you take the list seriously

c. Align your task list to your weekly calendar
   - Make any necessary adjustments to your calendar to ensure that the higher priority tasks get done today

How Am I Doing?

*Continually ask yourself these questions so you can keep refining your time management strategy:*

- ✔ How am I actually using my time? Am I following my plan?
- ✔ Which tasks was I able to do? Which did not get done?
- ✔ Was my energy level appropriate? How about my stress level?
- ✔ Based on my assessment of how well it’s working, what changes need to be made to my weekly schedule?
- ✔ What are persistent time wasters in my life?
- ✔ Was procrastination an issue?
B. Comparing Time Management Tools

1. Cell Phone

If the only time you don’t have your cell phone on you is while you’re in the shower, you might as well see if you can use the calendaring system that comes with your phone.

- **Pros:**
  - You always have it with you
  - You can often sync it with your computer or another calendaring system
  - You can set the alarm to recur for various events
- **Cons:**
  - If you lose your phone you might really be in a jam
  - It can be hard to enter information, depending on your keyboard
  - The screen can be too small to see upcoming events or projects

2. Internet-based Calendar (like Google Calendar)

Internet-based calendaring systems can be great if you’re constantly online and can access the Internet at nearly any time of the day.

- **Pros:**
  - You can update your data via “The Cloud”
  - You can update from anywhere
  - There is very little chance of losing your data
  - You can share parts of your calendar with others for things like group assignments
  - Some calendar systems will also let you automatically add an event from your email program
- **Cons:**
  - The website you use may go down at critical times
  - It can be hard to access in certain places that don’t have Internet
  - Some Internet-based/cloud calendars charge a fee
3. Paper Calendar

Some might call you old-fashioned, but if using a paper calendar works best for you, then there's no reason to mess with a classic.

- **Pros:**
  - Paper calendars often make things easier to jot down than electronic calendars
  - You can go outside of the pre-scripted format
  - Paper calendars have more creativity and flexibility with things like color-coding or flagging pages with sticky notes

- **Cons:**
  - It can be difficult, if not impossible, to recover data if your hard-copy calendar gets lost or damaged
  - It may not always be accessible
  - Paper calendars are larger to carry around than other calendaring systems
  - You must write in everything instead of having things automatically updated or entered
4. Smart Phone Apps

There are a ton of calendar applications for your smart phone. The challenge here might be figuring out which one to pick if you think a calendar app will work best for you.

- **Pros:**
  - Calendar apps are often easy to use
  - You can sync them with other electronic programs, like email
  - Some may be free
  - You can set alarms that will utilize your phone
  - You don't have to carry around a separate calendaring system

- **Cons:**
  - Some cost money or monthly fees
  - They may crash, leaving you without a good back-up system
  - It can be hard to enter data on a small phone screen and keyboard
  - It can also be hard to see larger time frames, like monthly calendars

5. Time-tracking Systems

This may not be a daily/weekly calendaring system, but it can be a good way for you to keep track of your time on a very short-term basis. Consider using a program like Pomodoro to keep you focused on certain projects and tasks.

- **Pros:**
  - These nifty programs can help keep you focused on a certain task for a pre-assigned amount of time
  - They can often be the kick you need to finally do a certain task or project
  - They can help you realize how much of your time is spent on various activities throughout the day

- **Cons:**
  - Unfortunately, you can sometimes end up spending more time tracking your time than just using it wisely
  - They may not mesh with your own working style
  - The constantly running stopwatch may make some people feel stressed
Just like some students can rock a chemistry class while others excel in art history, different calendaring systems work better for different kinds of folks. Figuring out which one works best for you is often the biggest step. As long as you keep trying and decide on something, any time management system can take your college life from chaotic to organized.
C. Biggest Time Wasters in College

College life is hard. As a student, you most likely balance your classes, homework, finances, a job, friends, a social life, a relationship, cocurricular involvement, and ten million other things—all at the same time. It's no wonder, then, that you may need to just “waste” time now and then. But how can you tell if you're wasting time in a productive or nonproductive way?

1. Social Media (we’re talking Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
   - **Productive uses:**
     - Connecting with family and friends
     - Connecting with classmates
     - Relaxing in a fun way
   - **Nonproductive uses:**
     - Gossiping
     - Snooping out of boredom
     - Obsessing over old friends or partners
     - Getting information out of jealousy
     - Trying to start drama

2. People
   - **Productive uses:**
     - Networking
     - Relaxing with friends
     - Socializing, getting to meet new people
     - Engaging in interesting conversations
     - Experiencing new things with good folks
   - **Nonproductive uses:**
     - Malicious gossip
     - Looking for people to hang out with because you're avoiding a task
     - Feeling like you have to be part of the crowd when you know you have other things to do
3. The World Wide Web

- **Productive uses:**
  - Doing research for homework
  - Learning about topics that are interesting
  - Catching up on current events
  - Looking into academic opportunities (like continuing ed or studying abroad)
  - Looking for employment opportunities
  - Booking travel to visit home

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Stumbling around just to keep boredom at bay
  - Looking at sites you weren't interested in in the first place
  - Reading about celebrities or news tidbits that have no connection or impact on your time in school (or your homework!)

4. The Party Scene

- **Productive uses:**
  - Having fun with friends
  - Letting yourself relax during the evening
  - Celebrating a special event or occasion
  - Meeting new people
  - Building friendships and community at your school

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Engaging in unhealthy behaviors that impede your ability to do important things the next day, like homework and going to work on time
5. Drama

- **Productive uses:**
  - Getting help for your friend or yourself during a time of need
  - Connecting a friend or yourself to other support systems
  - Building and learning empathy for others

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Making or being involved with drama that is unnecessary
  - Feeling the need to fix problems that aren’t yours to fix and that can’t be fixed by you anyway
  - Getting sucked into drama simply because you are easily sidetracked from the task at hand

6. Email

- **Productive uses:**
  - Communicating with friends
  - Catching up with family
  - Contacting professors
  - Exploring job or research opportunities
  - Dealing with administrative offices (like financial aid) on campus

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Checking email every two minutes
  - Interrupting work every time an email comes in
  - Emailing back and forth when a phone call might better suffice
  - Letting emails take priority over other things you need to do at your computer
7. Cell Phone

- **Productive uses:**
  - Touching base with friends and family
  -Dealing with timely matters (like financial aid deadlines)
  - Calling to solve problems (like bank errors)

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Texting every 10 seconds with a friend while trying to do another task
  - Using your phone as a camera/video camera all the time
  - Checking facebook at bad times (in class, during conversations with others)
  - Always feeling like it’s the priority instead of your task at hand

8. Movies, TV and You Tube

- **Productive uses:**
  - Just hanging out with friends (organizing a “movie night” or “TV night”)
  - Watching a video clip for class
  - Watching a video clip or two for fun (but stopping after “a few”)
  - Watching a few videos of friends or family
  - Watching impressive feats or performances
  - Watching snippets on a topic for a paper or project

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Getting sucked into a movie you didn't have time to watch in the first place
  - Watching several episodes of a TV show on Netflix (instead of your original plan to watch ONE)
  - Watching something simply because it was on TV
  - Watching for "just a minute" that turns into 2 hours
  - Watching videos that add nothing to your own life
  - Using it as an avoidance from the real work you need to do
9. Video Games

- **Productive uses:**
  - Letting your brain relax
  - Playing with friends (near or far)
  - Learning about new games while meeting new people

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Losing sleep because you're playing too late at night
  - Playing for too long when you have homework and other tasks to do
  - Using video games as a way of avoiding the realities of your college life
  - Not meeting new people because you're alone in your room playing video games too much

10. Not Getting Enough Sleep

- **Productive uses:**
  - Finishing a paper or project that took longer than expected
  - Engaging with other students about something so exciting it's worth missing a little sleep over
  - Meeting a scholarship deadline
  - Doing an activity that truly enriches your college life

- **Nonproductive uses:**
  - Staying up too late on a regular basis
  - Missing so much sleep that you aren't functional during the time you are awake
  - Having your academic work suffer
  - Having your physical, mental, and emotional health suffer from lack of sleep
D. Overcoming Procrastination

1. Be Aware
   Reflect on the reasons why you procrastinate; your habits and thoughts that lead to procrastinating.

2. Assess Your Feelings
   How does it make you feel when you procrastinate? Are these positive, productive feelings? Do you want to change them?

3. Change Your Outlook
   Alter your perspective by looking at a big task in terms of smaller pieces that make it less intimidating. Look for what’s appealing about an assignment or what you want to get out of it beyond just the grade.

4. Commit to Action
   If you feel really stuck, start simply by committing to complete a small task, any task, and write it down. Finish it and reward yourself. Write down on your schedule or “to do” list only what you can completely commit to, and if you write it down, follow through no matter what. By doing so you will slowly rebuild trust in your ability to do what you say you will, which so many procrastinators have lost.

5. Choose Your Surroundings
   When doing school work, choose wisely where and with whom you are working. Repeatedly placing yourself in situations where you don’t get much done and are easily distracted – such as “studying” in your bed, at a café or with friends – can actually be a kind of procrastination.
6. **Set Goals**

Focus on what you want to do, not what you want to avoid. Think about the productive reasons for doing a task by setting *positive, concrete, meaningful* learning and achievement goals for yourself.

7. **Be Realistic**

Achieving goals and changing habits takes *time* and *effort*; don’t sabotage yourself by having unrealistic expectations that you cannot reasonably meet.

8. **Monitor Your Self-talk**

Notice how you are thinking and talking to yourself. Talk to yourself in ways that remind you of your *goals* and replace old, counter-productive habits of self-talk. Instead of saying, “I wish I hadn’t…” say, “I will…”

9. **Un-schedule Yourself**

If you feel really stuck, you probably won’t use a schedule that is a constant reminder of all that you have to do and is all work and no play. So, if your many attempts to make a schedule have failed miserably, make a largely *unstructured, flexible* schedule in which you slot in only what is *necessary*. Keep track of all the time you spend working toward your goals, tally it up, and reward yourself for it. This can reduce feelings of being overwhelmed and increase satisfaction in what you get done. For more see the book *Procrastination* by Yuen and Burka.

10. **Swiss Cheese It**

Breaking down big tasks into little ones is a good approach. A variation on this is devoting *short chunks* of time to a big task and doing as much as you can in that time with few expectations about what you will get done. For example, try spending about ten minutes just jotting down ideas that come to mind on the topic of a paper, or skimming over a long reading to get just the main ideas.

After doing this several times on a big task, you will have made some progress on it, have some *momentum*, have less work to do to complete the task, and it won’t seem so huge because you’ve punched holes in it (like Swiss cheese). In short, it’ll be easier to complete the task because you’ve *gotten started* and removed some of the obstacles to finishing.

"The best way to get something done is to begin."

~Author Unknown
References:


