

Making more hours in the day

Where does the time go? Here's one way to think about it:

- * There are 7 x 24 hours in a week (=168)
- * You spend about 56 hours sleeping (=112)
- * Allow 3 hours a day for eating, bathing etc (= 91) Take away 35 hours a week for academic commitments including lectures, seminars, lab time, independent study etc (= 56)
- * That could be 8 hours every day for keeping fit, socialising, chores, paid work, family etc.

If it doesn't feel like you have that much time, you may need to make your time work harder for you. That means **working more effectively, learning to prioritise**, and getting used to the idea that sometimes you must **just say no!**



Where does your time go?

Try keeping a **time-use diary** for a few days to see where your time's going. Use this to note briefly what you've done for each hour. Now check what's actually using up your time, and think about how you could address it.

Or you could try this **interactive time-use diary**.

Working more effectively

Developing your study practices so that they are more effective can save lots of time – and improve your marks. Here are some suggestions:

- **Do focused/active reading.** Think about what you want from your reading before you start. Make yourself a list of questions and look for the answers. Having targets will help you to focus and avoid those 'I don't remember a word I've just read' moments.

- **Stop reading earlier.** You don't have time to read everything on the reading list, nor are you expected to. Read enough to give you a clear understanding. If you're writing an assignment and you need to find out more, you can do more reading to fill in the gaps once you've written your first draft and you know what you need to add.

- **If you don't understand something, take a step back.** Reading it over again is not likely to make you understand it. Ask yourself what is preventing you from understanding it – is there another piece of information you need? Is there something else that you need to understand first? Ask if you need help – you won't be the only one.

- **Keep complex tasks for your best thinking time.** Be aware of when you work best – for most people it's in the morning, but everyone is different. Try to do more difficult tasks (writing, reading a complicated article) at your best times. Keep more routine tasks for other times.

- **Don't re-write your notes** – do them right the first time! Think about what you want to find out before you start reading, leave the pen on the table and only pick it up when something's worth noting.

- Always plan before you write. This always saves time - even in the exam room. You may think that you are saving a few minutes by writing without a plan, but you will spend far more time wondering what to write next, and your writing will be muddled and unclear.

- Keep things simple. Use the five point plan: intro, point 1, point 2, point 3, conclusion. An essay plan need only be five words long. A brief presentation could be five slides, which would double up as speaker's notes. It's always better to discuss fewer things in more depth.

Learn to prioritise

Especially in your busy periods when you have a lot of work due at once, it will help to work out what your goals are and what you need to do to achieve them. Some of the tasks you think you have to do may turn out to be unnecessary, or at least less urgent than you think.

- * Make a list of the tasks you think you need to do.
- * Make a list of your goals for study (e.g. pass the course, get good marks, achieve a degree etc).
- * Consider the task list in the context of the list of goals.

Mark each task up as 'Do now', 'Do soon', 'Do later' or 'Don't do'. If you're still not sure how urgent something is, ask yourself, "what would happen if I didn't do it today? This week? At all?" You may well find that the things you put off till later turn into things that someone else has already done, or that you don't need to do at all.

Just say no!

However well you plan your time, make your study practices more effective, or prioritise your tasks, you may still find that you have too much to do. If this is the case, it's time to decide what you can cut out.

This may mean not always agreeing to co-ordinate group projects, or handing over the organisation of an event to someone else. You might have to attend football training twice a week instead of three times, or cut out one of your exercise classes. You could lower your housework standards, or cook simpler meals.

The important thing is to remember that these are temporary measures - you only have a short time at university, you've worked hard to get here and so you deserve to have enough time to achieve your best.

If your newly recovered time isn't to disappear again, you'll have to make up your mind to say no more often in the future. Remember:

- * No-one will think you're a bad person if you don't always say yes.
- * If you don't do it, someone else will. If not, it may not have needed to be done in the first place.
- * The stress caused by overloading yourself will impact on the people around you.
- * Being asked is proof in itself that you're considered capable - you don't need to take on more to cement that proof.

Do be polite, but don't go in for lengthy justifications and excuses as that gives the opportunity for counter-arguments. Explain that you need to focus on study at present, but that in the vacation, or after exams, you'll be happy to help wherever you can.