Time Management for Graduate Students

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Time Management Strategies

1. Set realistic goals.
2. Calendar high-priority items.
3. Minimize distractions.
4. Focus!
5. Keep yourself accountable.
6. Stop doing some things.
In a notebook:

1. Write out *the degree* that you are currently seeking at UW-Madison.

2. List *the reasons* that you want to earn this degree. Include both professional and personal motivations.
Envision your future

Do this exercise when you “hit a wall.”

It is important to remind yourself why you are making these sacrifices!
Variation:

Write down *what you wish you could be doing now* (that you are putting off for graduate school).

Then *put the list aside and get back to work*.

(Repeat, as necessary.)
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what does a “realistic goal” look like?

- YOU are able to achieve it (yes, you!).
- But, you have to reach the goal while still being human. So you also have to ...
  - eat, sleep, bathe,
  - make time for family and friends,
  - rest, and have fun (occasionally)!
setting realistic goals

There are 24 hours in a day.
  – 8 for sleep
  – 4 for eating, grooming, exercise

Assume a 12 hour day (realistically).

  _____ hrs for work
  _____ hrs for travel (school/work)
  _____ hrs in class/lab
  _____ hrs reading/studying
  _____ hrs for fun or relaxing
Example 1. PT work on campus

There are 24 hours in a day.
   - 8 for sleep
   - 4 for eating, grooming, exercise

Assume a 12 hour day (realistically).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>hours for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.5</td>
<td>hours for travel (to/from campus)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>hours in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>hours reading/studying/etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>hours for fun/relaxation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example 2. Fellowship (no work)

There are 24 hours in a day.
- 8 for sleep
- 4 for eating, grooming, exercise

Assume a 12 hour day (realistically).

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Put the “big rocks” in first.
quick tip:

Use a PLANNER.

Put that 3.5 hours (or 4 or whatever it is for you) on the calendar. If you don’t put STUDY TIME on the calendar, then you are saying that it is NOT a priority.
“Waiting for the perfect setting, the ideal stretch of time, the muse to arrive, the groove to set in—all of these can mean that most often we're just . . . waiting.

And of course, that can mean making little to no progress during a semester, when there are so many other things competing for our time.

I'm willing to bet that many of us have short periods of time throughout our weekly schedules that we could convert to [study] time.”
quick tip:

Give yourself/your school work the BEST HOURS of your day.

- Try the “early bird” approach: get up, make a cup of tea/coffee and get to your school work right away.

- Or, try being a “night owl,” study late into the night and sleep in (if you can).
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3. **Minimize distractions.**
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6. **Stop** doing some things.
You must be unavailable to others (at times)

- Schedule writing/study time and treat it like work (because it is).
- Friends and family need to know when (and when not) to interrupt.
- This will require that you act consistently.
Manage your electronics
so they don’t manage you.

– Turn off alerts.

– Set aside time for electronic communications (try only 10 minutes at a time, or only before & after meals).

– Put the phone/tablet away when you are attending to other things (e.g., during class, when working on a project).
Resist the urge to “multitask”
Multitasking is not efficient.

http://www.online-stopwatch.com/full-screen-stopwatch/
LET’S TAKE A QUICK BREAK.
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The Pomodoro Technique

A time management technique that maximizes focus and allows you to complete projects faster with less mental fatigue.

**WORK 25 min ♦ 5 min BREAK**

After four “pomodoros” have passed, (almost 2 hours, with 100 minutes of work time and 15 minutes of break time) you then take a 15-20 minute break.

Pomodoro [Italian] = tomato
“Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.” So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there. It was easy then because there was always one true sentence that I knew or had seen or had heard someone say.

Ernest Hemingway
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Set Goal(s) for yourself

For example:

- # of minutes (you will read/review)
- # of pages (read or written)
- # of words written
- # of questions on practice exam or in problem set
study/writing groups

can help keep you accountable *if*:

- the purpose is clearly to study (and this is specified in advance)
- participants stay on-task
- you set aside dedicated space/time
- everything you need – *and nothing more* – is in the room
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6. **Stop** doing some things.
First, and Most Important:

Stop trying to be perfect.
Second, stop wasting time.

Identify your most challenging “time waster” and *let it go!*

(At least move it to the weekend!)
Third, learn to say “no.”

☑️ no
☐ maybe

(especially if you tend to over-commit)
Better: develop *yes-criteria*.

**WHOT’s** required for “yes”?

- **W**: do I really _WANT_ to do this? 
- **H**: does this _HELP_ me? 
- **O**: is this the _ONLY_ opportunity? 
- **T**: do I have _TIME_ to do this?
### In summary:

**Monday**
- Set realistic goals
- Keep a distraction sheet
- Write down what is distracting you

**Tuesday**
- Use the Pomodoro technique (25 min on, 5 min off)
- Track your progress
- Use a planner

**Wednesday**
- Minimize distractions
- Manage your electronics

**Thursday**
- Stop doing some things
- Give up your biggest time waster
- Give a hour for exercise

**Friday**
- Commit to what you said you will do
- Use a planner
- Put study time in your daily schedule

**Saturday**
- Stop trying to be perfect
- Use a study buddy
- Starttracking the things you do

**Sunday**
- Set realistic goals
- Use a distraction sheet
- Write down what is distracting you

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Assume no more than 12 hours in a day (for getting stuff done).

Look for ways to "double your time" (e.g., socialize at meal time and during exercise).

Set Realistic Goals
- Use a planner!
- Put study time in your daily schedule.
- Consider giving school work your "best hours" (where possible).

Calendar High Priority items
- Manage your electronics (so they don't manage you).
- Adopt a "closed door" policy.
- Resist the urge to "multi-task".

Focus!
- Pre-commit to your study session/goals.
- Use a distraction sheet - write down what is distracting you and then get the list change.
- Use the Pomodoro technique (25 min on, 5 min off).
Write down an idea that you learned today that you plan to implement in the coming weeks.
Please address questions, comments, or feedback to:
jenny.faust@wisc.edu