

# LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



## Time Management

LEAP Online

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### Introduction

Do you ever wish you had more hours in the day? While we can't manufacture time, we can take control over how we spend it.

In this tutorial, you will explore specific aspects of time management that make independent study a daunting task, highlighting strategies to overcome these obstacles and maximise your productivity.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of this tutorial is to help you:

- Develop your understanding of time management
- Apply different strategies to help you manage your time effectively

By the end of this tutorial, you should be able to immediately apply the knowledge and skills learnt to your studies.

## Who Should Complete this Tutorial?

It is recommended that you should complete this tutorial if:

- You're a new student at the University of Bolton
- You're new to studying in the UK
- Undergraduate or postgraduate student
- You have been advised to complete this tutorial by a member of staff

# What is Time Management?

## Making the most of your time

Time is one of our most valuable and fleeting resources. You may have experienced the surprise of looking at the clock, only to realise that you were already halfway through the day (and had yet to make progress on your goals!). Or, you've likely heard the complaint that there aren't enough hours in the day.

Yet everyone has the same number of hours in the day. Reaching your academic or personal goals isn't about having more time, it's about making the most of the time available. And that's what time management is all about.



Effective time management means that you're able to allocate your time in a way that aligns with your needs and goals. In short, it means you're in control of where your time is going.

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## Time management in Higher Education

As a student in Higher Education, you are ultimately responsible for academic success. Although there is a wide range of support available at the University of Bolton, you must consider what it is you're prepared to do to ensure you achieve your potential, with the least amount of stress, and the greatest personal satisfaction.

According to Cotterall (2019), Higher Education is different from other forms of education, and to do well, you must understand what responsibility means and have the skills to deal with any challenges that come your way.

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Taking control of your learning experience will, of course, bring with it many advantages. For instance, university education offers flexibility and autonomy, allowing you to research topics at your own pace and direction, with the freedom to make choices, and take responsibility to develop your academic and personal skills. However, one of the key challenges associated with university life is the potential difficulty in managing time effectively. Unlike other forms of education, which may involve more structured timetables, independent learning demands a higher degree of self-discipline. As a result, some students find it challenging to allocate sufficient time to their studies, leading to procrastination, missed deadlines, and ultimately, a lack of progress.

'Time management refers to the process of planning, organising, and controlling...activities and resources to achieve specific objectives efficiently and effectively within a given time frame.'

(Robbins et al., 2017, p.188)

Complaints, such as 'there's too much to do and not enough time' and 'there aren't enough hours in the day' are often heard at university, especially when deadlines loom, leaving students wishing they had more time to complete their work. While manufacturing time and time travel are impossible activities (as far as we are aware!) you can take control over how you spend your time.

There will only ever be 24 hours in a day. Therefore, reaching your academic and personal goals isn't about finding more time – it's about making the most of the time available. This is time management.

### What are the benefits of better time management?

Learning to manage your time efficiently and effectively can provide you with significant benefits, some of which include:

- **Increased Productivity.** Effective time management can lead to increased productivity, allowing you to accomplish more tasks in a shorter period of time.
- **Reduced Stress Levels.** Organising and planning your work can help to reduce stress levels. You're likely to feel less pressure about your ability to complete tasks.
- **Improved Work-Life Balance.** Learning to manage your time effectively will allow you to allocate time for both work and personal activities, leading to a better balance between your academic, professional and personal life.
- **Increased Free-time.** Efficient time management will also give you more free-time to take breaks, practice self-care, socialise and create more time for learning new skills.

The benefits of time management, such as increased productivity and reduced stress levels, contribute to a student's sense of self-efficacy by enhancing their belief in their ability to effectively manage tasks and achieve their goals. Let's explore this further.

## The Importance of self-efficacy at University



Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully plan and perform specific tasks to achieve a desired outcome.

### What is self-efficacy?

Self-efficacy, introduced by Bandura (1997), refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully plan and perform specific tasks to achieve a desired outcome. Beliefs can be shaped by personal experiences, observing others, and receiving feedback. Therefore, these beliefs can influence the choices you make, the effort you exert, and your persistence in the face of challenges.

### Why is self-efficacy important at university?

In the context of the University of Bolton, self-efficacy is critical due to the complex social, academic and placement demands students experience. Students with high levels of self-efficacy are likely to perform better academically, have increased motivation and enhanced resilience in the face of setbacks (Pajares, 2005). Moreover, self-efficacy also contributes to students' ability to manage stress, seek support when needed, and maintain a positive outlook on their academic journey.

### How can I assess my levels of self-efficacy?

Assessing levels of self-efficacy involves reflecting on your past experiences, evaluating your beliefs, and identifying areas for development. You can assess your self-efficacy by considering your achievements, setbacks, and the strategies you have used to overcome challenges.

Using feedback from previous assignments effectively can also provide valuable insights into your strengths and areas for development. Additionally, completing the University of Bolton's Wellbeing and Academic and Digital Skills Questionnaires may help to quantify confidence levels in these areas. For more help and advice visit:

- Wellbeing Questionnaire
- Academic and Digital Skills Questionnaire
- LEAP Online: [Using Feedback Effectively](#)
- Life Lounge: [Life Lounge Student Support](#)
- [Student Liaison Officers](#)



### How is self-efficacy linked to time management?

Self-efficacy is closely associated to time management skills, as students with high levels of self-efficacy are better equipped to plan, prioritise and complete tasks efficiently. Research by Sitzmann and Ely (2011) suggests that students with strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to engage in effective time management behaviours, such as setting realistic goals, breaking tasks down into manageable chunks and allocating time appropriately to different activities. Additionally, these students are more likely to persevere when faced with challenges, such as

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procrastination or unexpected setbacks, by using coping strategies or seeking support when needed.

By cultivating self-efficacy students can harness their belief in their abilities to work smarter, not harder, maximising their efficiency, academic experience, wellbeing and overall success.

## Work Smarter, Not Harder



Ariel has been burning the candle at both ends. She's usually the first person to arrive at the library, and the last person to leave. Yet she hardly ever makes a dent in her to-do list.

She's barely meeting her deadlines, and she often feels like she's reacting to problems, instead of getting ahead of them. Determined to succeed on her course, Ariel aims to work through her lunch break to stay on top of her workload.

While Ariel's intentions are noble, she's falling into a common time management trap or mistake.

### Work smarter, not harder

Ariel thinks that she can overcome her challenges by working harder. However, in this case, she needs to find ways to work smarter.

- Work Harder.  
Spend **more** time and effort on your work
- Work Smarter.  
Identify and resolve inefficiencies to do the same amount of work in **less** time.

The academic day can only be stretched so far. If Ariel keeps extending it, then she will increase her stress levels, burn herself out, and hurt the quality of her work.

After some reflection, Ariel realises that she must let go of the mindset that working longer hours will make her more productive.

Ariel seeks support from her Personal Tutor

Ariel talks to her Personal Tutor about her problem. It is recommended that she starts to measure her productivity by what she achieves in a set amount of time – not by how many hours she works.

Ariel also decides that she needs to set healthy boundaries on the amount of study hours and look at ways to achieve more within those limits. Ariel devises a plan to analyse how she is currently spending her time, reprioritise her tasks, and create a realistic schedule she can follow.

In the next section, you'll learn how to follow a similar path by unpacking the three best practices involved in time management.

## What's Involved in Time Management?



No superpowers required!

You don't need superpowers to work smarter. You just need to understand what's involved in effective time management.

Read the information below to get an overview of the three best practices you can use to take control of your time.

### Best Practice 1 - Analyse

One of the easiest ways that you can manage your time better is to analyse how you're using it.

Track how you spend your time to identify your biggest time-wasters or "time-stealers" throughout the day. Look for opportunities to save or redistribute your time to align with your interests, goals, and values.

### Best Practice 2 – Prioritise

The second best practice is to prioritise. You have to know your priorities before you can know how to make the best use of your time.

Which responsibilities are most important to you? Which tasks or projects are most valuable to you? And which activities could be eliminated or postponed?

Rank your activities by urgency and importance so that you can stay focused on those that matter most.

### Best Practice 3 – Schedule

Finally, schedule your time using a calendar or planner.

Commit to your priorities by blocking out the necessary time on your calendar, just as you would for an important appointment. A schedule allows you to protect your time and keep yourself on track.



**A continual process.** Time management is a continual process, not a one-time event. The most successful people make a regular habit of analysing their time, prioritising their tasks, and creating a schedule for their day, week, month or semester.

In the following sections, we'll take a deeper dive into how you can follow that continual process effectively. To start, let's take a look at how you can best track and analyse your time.

## How to Track Your Time



### Where did the time go?

You've been busy at university, pivoting from one task to another. Hours feel like they're passing in minutes, and before you know it, it's time to go home. You ask your peers: "How is it already the end of the day?"

Time flies when we're not paying attention to it. Seemingly small and inconsequential tasks can quickly add up and consume large chunks of your day. That's why the first step to gaining control over your time is to answer the following question:

**"Where is all of my time going?"**

Before you can manage your time, you must first understand where it's going. And that's where time tracking comes into play, giving you a more accurate account of how much time you're devoting to competing projects and priorities.

### How to track your time

So, how can you best track your time? See below to learn four steps.

### Choose a Time Tracking Tool

The first step is to **choose a time-tracking tool**. There are several options for you to consider, such as:

- A spreadsheet
- A simple list, document, or notebook

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- A time-tracking app (visit your app store)

Conduct research and choose the tool that's easiest and most convenient for you. The best time-tracking tool is the one that you'll use.

### Categorise Your Activities

The second step is to **categorise your activities**. In other words, how might you group your daily activities into a small handful of common themes?

Consider naming categories after your core activities, tasks, or assignments. For example, if you're due to deliver a presentation, you might create a category that's titled "poster presentation delivery." Beyond your core activities, tasks and responsibilities, you might also consider creating categories for:

- Emails
- Meetings
- Personal internet use
- Breaks

Remember that the goal of categorising your activities is to find bigger themes. It's easier to analyse how you spend your time on a handful of broad categories than it is on hundreds of individual tasks.

### Track Your Time for a Week or Longer

The third step is to get started. **Track your time** for at least a week, if not two weeks, three weeks, or even a month. The longer you track your time, the more accurate your data will be. Make a daily habit of recording your activities and how much time you spent on them.

Your notes must be accurate, but not complicated. For example, you might create a simple list like this:

- Email 30 minutes
- Tutorial one hour
- Assignment two hours
- Personal internet use 15 minutes



Track your time as you go, and avoid procrastinating or waiting to track your time until the end of the day. This will help you avoid forgetting to log your activities or miscalculating how long you spent on them.

Accuracy is key.

### Tally the Results by Category

Finally, the last step is to **tally the results by category**. How much time did you spend on each category throughout your time-tracking period? For example, how many hours did you spend a week on emails? Or specific assignments?

Also, consider what percentage of your academic week you spend on each category. For example, if you study a 40-hour week and spend two hours on personal time and internet use, then that's 5% of your total time.



If you find that you spent time on activities that don't fit within your original categories, then create a new category that more accurately describes them.



Tracking your time is similar to tracking how you spend your money. You need to be aware of your time-spending habits before you can change them. Data can help. Knowing exactly where your time is going empowers you to identify opportunities to cut unnecessary time “expenses” and reallocate those hours to the activities or tasks that advance your goals.

So, once you've gathered the data, what's next? You'll need to analyse the results of your time tracking to implement meaningful time management changes.

## How to Analyse Your Time



### The results are in!

After tracking your time for a week or longer, tally the results. Look at that, then ask yourself the big question:

### “Where can I save time?”

#### How to analyse your findings

To answer that question, evaluate how you’re distributing your time across categories. Take note of where you’re spending the most time, and ask yourself questions such as:

#### Is This a Good Use of My Time

Identify activities that could be cut or postponed by asking yourself:

- Should I be doing this activity at all?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it relevant to my goals and values?

#### Am I Working Efficiently?

Identify activities that could be streamlined, reduced, or moved down on your priority list.

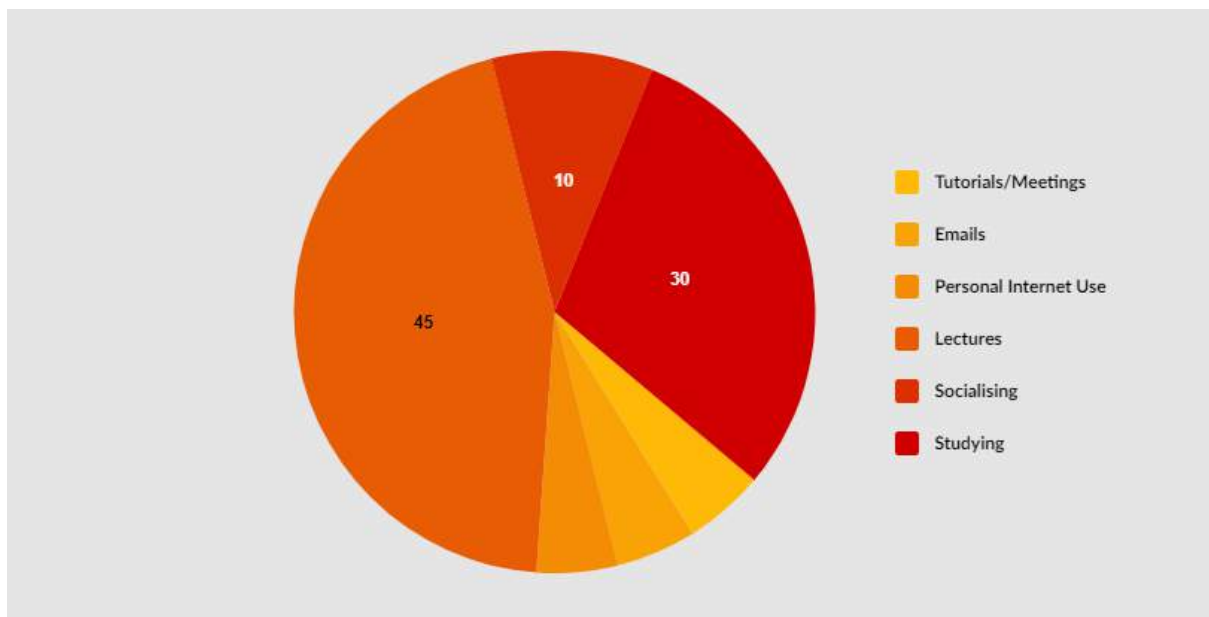
### How Should I Be Spending My Time?

Which activities are most important to your goals? Consider how you might reallocate your hours to high-value or high-priority activities.

#### An example analysis

For learning purposes, we'll use the simple example below:

**How I spend my time (as a percentage of my academic week)**



In the pie chart example above, you might review your activities and ask yourself:

- **Are all these activities a good use of my time?** That may lead you to reduce or eliminate your personal internet use at university.
- **Am I working efficiently?** That may lead you to identify how software, such as Microsoft Office 365, could reduce your time spent writing emails or assignments.
- **How should I be spending my time?** This question may then lead you to allocate more time toward studying, for example.



Analyse your time-tracking results and find opportunities to save time, streamline activities, and postpone or eliminate unnecessary tasks. Use these insights to redistribute your time to the things that are most important to achieving your work or personal goals.

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As you redistribute your hours, you should also consider what's a priority, and what isn't. In the next section, you'll learn how to prioritise tasks so that you can focus on what matters most.

## What is Task Prioritisation?



### What matters most?

Have you ever felt pulled in different directions at university? Or have you ever struggled to navigate competing priorities?

Once you understand how you're spending your time, the next step is to determine which priority to tackle first. And that's where task prioritisation can help.

Task prioritisation is the process of distinguishing the essential from the non-essential. It's a reliable way to determine what work is a high priority, and what can be pushed or postponed.

### Why prioritise tasks?

Here are three reasons why strategically prioritising your tasks can enhance your efficiency at university:

1. **Advance your long-term goals.** Knowing your priorities helps you ensure that your daily activities are advancing your long-term goals. Prioritisation is all about determining and focusing on what's relevant and essential to your goals.
2. **Structure your day and manage your time effectively.** Not all tasks are created equal. Some tasks deserve more of your time and focused attention than others. Prioritisation helps you structure your day and manage your time to favour your most important tasks.

3. **Eliminate or postpone tasks that aren't a priority.** Finally, prioritisation is just as much about sifting out what isn't important as it is about determining what is important. You can identify which tasks are non-essential, a waste of time, or simply not relevant to your current needs and goals. Eliminating low-priority tasks frees up time to focus on high-priority tasks.

In short, by prioritising tasks, you can sequence your university work more effectively and decide how much energy and time to distribute among competing interests. In the next section, you'll learn how that's done.

### How to Prioritise Tasks



#### Sort tasks by urgency and importance

So, how do you determine which tasks to prioritise? One of the simplest ways is to list all of the tasks on your plate, and then sort them by urgency and importance. See below to learn what defines each trait:

- **Urgency**

Urgent tasks are those that are pressing and need your immediate attention. For example, an assignment with an impending deadline is urgent. Problems, such as addressing an IT issue, also fall in this category.

- **Importance**

In contrast, important tasks are those that contribute to and advance your aims and long-term goals. For example, an important task may be to set strategic goals for the new academic year.

#### The Eisenhower Decision Matrix

Inspired by the Eisenhower Decision Matrix (Eisenhower, 2024), you can sort your tasks into one of four categories:

1. Important and urgent
2. Important but less urgent
3. Less important and urgent
4. Less important and less urgent

	If it's urgent	If it's less urgent
Important	Do these tasks now <b>For example:</b> Important tasks with impending deadlines.	Do these tasks later <b>For example:</b> Relationship building
Less Important	Postpone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unimportant requests from others</li> <li>• Apparent emergencies</li> <li>• Interruptions</li> <li>• Incoming phone calls, emails and text messages</li> <li>• Distractions</li> </ul>	Resist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities, such as computer games, watching TV and surfing the internet</li> <li>• Engaging in conversations and using social media</li> <li>• Daydreaming</li> <li>• Scribbling over your notebook</li> <li>• Adjusting, then readjusting your workstation or furniture</li> </ul>

### How to use this matrix?

You'll find your highest priority tasks in the first column, with lower priority tasks in the second column. Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **Important and urgent.** Make tasks your highest priority. Do them immediately.
- **Important but less urgent.** Make these your second-highest priority. Decide when you'll do them – and make sure to schedule or block the time on your calendar.
- **Less important and urgent.** Low priority can be avoided. Postpone them until you've completed your high-priority tasks.

- **Less important and less urgent.** Are not pressing, and they don't contribute to your goals. They can be deleted as they can be a waste of your time.



If you're having trouble assessing the urgency and importance of a task, try asking yourself this question: "What are the consequences if this task does **not** get done?"

### Urgent does not mean important

You may be surprised to find that urgent, but not important, tasks should be postponed. Some people may wonder, "If it's urgent, then shouldn't I address the task immediately?" The short answer is no. Urgent does not mean important. For example, an incoming phone call, text, or email might urgently pull you away from a task, even if the message isn't important. Make sure to evaluate your tasks carefully and critically. Ask yourself: "Is this really important?"

In the next section, you'll learn how to put the matrix into practice by following along with a real-world example.

### Putting Prioritising Into Practice



Natalie is a mature student studying at the University of Bolton. She needs help prioritising her tasks for the week. Follow how she uses the matrix to sort and navigate her competing priorities below.

#### Natalie's process

Natalie starts by listing all of her upcoming tasks. She evaluates her tasks by urgency and importance and then sorts each task into the appropriate category of the matrix. Finally, she reviews the results to determine where each task falls on her priority list.

#### Natalie lists her tasks

- Complete the essay due in next week
- Send an email to the dentist to reschedule my appointment in two weeks
- Resolve the problem with accessing Microsoft Word
- Text Sarah to explain I cannot go out with her this weekend
- Phone the babysitter to arrange childcare for our anniversary next month
- Buy ink to print off the poster for a presentation due next week
- Buy a new office chair for home

## Natalie sorts her tasks by urgency and importance

Next, Natalie evaluates her tasks by urgency and importance. See how she divides her tasks into four categories:

### Important and Urgent

- **Complete the essay due in next week:** Natalie needs to finish her essay, edit and proofread before the submission date.
- **Resolve the problem with accessing Microsoft Word:** Natalie will need to resolve this issue, otherwise she will not be able to complete her essay.
- **Buy ink to print off the poster for a presentation due next week:** Without ink, Natalie will not be able to print off her poster. She'll need to source new ink or come onto campus to print off her presentation.

### Important but Less Urgent

- **Send an email to the dentist to reschedule my appointment in two weeks:** Natalie still has time to reschedule her appointment. It's important, but less urgent at this point.

### Less Important and Urgent

- **Text Sarah to explain I cannot go out with her this weekend:** This task is necessary, but it's less important at this point. Natalie can send a text once she has finished her more important tasks.
- **Phone the babysitter to arrange childcare for our anniversary next month:** Again, this task is necessary, but she has time to arrange childcare.

### Less Important and Less Urgent

- **Buy a new office chair for home:** At second glance, Natalie realises that her current office chair is fine. Nothing is broken or needs to be replaced – she was just craving a new look.

Natalie consults the matrix

	If it's urgent	If it's less urgent
Important	Do these tasks now: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete the essay</li><li>• Resolve the problem accessing Microsoft Word</li><li>• Buy ink to print off the poster</li></ul>	Do these tasks later <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Send email to dentist</li></ul>
Less Important	Postpone <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Text Sarah</li><li>• Phone the babysitter</li></ul>	Resist <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Buy new office chair</li></ul>

Task prioritisation helps you to invest your time in the work that matters. But once you know what needs to get done, how do you stay on track? In the next section, you'll learn how scheduling can help.

## What is Scheduling



What's next on your list?

Have you ever forgotten about a meeting, lunch with a friend, or a doctor's appointment? Or, have you accidentally scheduled yourself to be in two places at the same time?

These are just a few simple examples of what can go wrong when you don't schedule effectively.

To manage your time effectively, you need to know what you should be doing, and if you'll have enough time to do it. And that's where scheduling comes into the mix.



**Scheduling** involves planning what you will do, and when you will do it. It gives you a clear road map for what needs to happen, and when to achieve your goals.

### Why is scheduling important?

A schedule keeps you organised and ensures that there's enough time for all your responsibilities and commitments. When done well, a schedule provides a blueprint for a successful day. It also helps to:

- **Protect time for your top priorities.** Scheduling is about distributing your time more deliberately. You can block out, or protect, the time necessary to complete your top priorities. That ensures you're always making progress on your most important goals.
- **Stay organised.** It can be challenging to keep track of multiple tasks, personal appointments, and other activities throughout the month, week, or day. A schedule helps you stay organised and avoid missing or forgetting about your commitments.
- **Avoid distractions.** Sticking to a schedule also helps you avoid distractions. You're less likely to get side-tracked by non-essential items when you have a plan for your day, and know your time limitations.
- **Detect and resolve problems before they happen.** Finally, by planning out everything you need to do for the day or week, you're also able to detect problems before they happen. For example, you can see if you're overscheduling yourself, or if your workload is beyond your capacity. By detecting these problems early on, you're empowered to be proactive and make changes to prevent or avoid them.

"The bad news is time flies. The good news  
is you're the pilot."

Michael Altshuler



To create an effective schedule, you first need to understand how long things take. Underestimate a task's duration, and you'll throw your whole schedule off.

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In the next section, we'll unpack four strategies that you can use to create realistic time estimates.

## Estimating the Time Needed to Complete Tasks



Imagine this

For Josephine's next assignment, she is required to write a literature review on a topic of her choice. The last time she completed research to find relevant source material, it took her three full days to sift through a significant number of sources. Now, Josephine needs to use a similar number of sources in this piece of work and needs to schedule some time to read each one. Read information below to see what happens next:

### Estimated Time

Josephine didn't have much experience with sourcing information for her assignment last time she did it. She was afraid of missing a useful nugget of information and didn't apply any reading or searching strategies to her research.

*"Following a 1-2-1 appointment with an academic librarian and going to a few LEAP Live workshops on reading strategies, I've learned a few tricks to speed up the process," Josephine tells herself. "I bet I can cut down the time I need to two days – instead of three."*

So, Josephine schedules two full days on her calendar to source information for her literature review.

### Actual Time

Yet to her surprise, Josephine was wrong. Once again, the research process takes nearly three full days, just as it did before. But because Josephine underestimated how long the task would take her to complete, she falls behind schedule on the rest of her university work.

### What went wrong?

Josephine's experience is a classic example of what can happen when there's a misalignment between what we think we can accomplish and what we actually can accomplish in a set amount of time. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) were the first psychologists to put a name to that phenomenon: They called it the **planning fallacy**.

According to the planning fallacy, people tend to underestimate how long it will take them to complete future tasks.

In other words, most people have an optimism bias. We're more idealistic than we are realistic when it comes to estimating how long a task will take us to complete. We're prone to ignore potential setbacks and delays and overlook our limitations.



Even if we know how long it took us to complete a task in the past, we're still likely to display an optimism bias and underestimate how long it will take to complete the same task in the future.

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### How to estimate time more accurately

When we underestimate how long a task will take us to complete, we may steal time from other priorities in the day, miss deadlines, create project delays, or break commitments.

So, what can you do to combat the planning fallacy? Knowing it exists is a good first step. That awareness can inspire you to review your time estimates more critically and look out for overly optimistic estimates.

You can also challenge yourself to estimate time more accurately with the help of the following **strategies**.

#### 1. Base your estimate on previous experience

The first technique is to base your time estimate on **previous experience**.

Have you ever completed the same, or a similar, task in the past? How long did it take you to finish it? Use your experience from completing past tasks to inform your time estimates for future tasks. For example:

- If it took you four hours to plan your last assignment, then... Schedule four hours to plan your current assignment.
- If it took you two hours to write your professional reflection last month... Schedule two hours to write your professional reflection this month.



**If you don't have experience with the task at hand, then consider asking for input from others.** How long did it take someone else on your course to complete a similar task?

## 2. Employ bottom-up estimating

The second technique is ideal for large or complicated tasks that require several smaller steps to complete. It's called bottom-up estimating. Here's how it works:

1. Identify the individual steps involved in completing the task
2. Estimate how long it will take to complete each step
3. Add all your time estimates together to get a total

Bottom-up estimating involves breaking down a task into its components. You estimate how long it will take you to complete each component, then add all your estimates together to calculate how long the task will take as a whole.

### An example

Emily is a third-year student and has been tasked with conducting a research project for her final assignment. Before she begins, Emily needs to estimate the time and resources required for each component of her assignment using the Bottom-Up Estimating method.

- **Literature Review:** Emily estimates that she'll need to spend around **20 hours** searching for relevant literature, reading articles, and taking notes.
- **Research Design:** This phase will involve designing her research methodology and she estimates this will take her approximately **15 hours**.
- **Data Collection:** Emily plans to recruit participants to gather data. She estimates this phase will take her **10 hours** of her time.
- **Data Analysis:** Analysing the data she has collected will take her **25 hours**.
- **Write-Up:** Finally, Emily estimates that writing up her findings will take a further **20 hours**.

If you add all these individual time estimates together, then Emily should schedule a total of **90 hours** to complete her assignment.

### Questions to ask yourself

You can choose to use one of the time-estimation techniques above or a combination of approaches. Regardless of which technique you use, ask yourself the following questions to make sure your estimates are realistic:

- What could go wrong, or are there any risks for delays?
- How complex is the task? Is there any part of the task that I'm unsure or uncertain about?
- What other priorities do I have on my plate, and how may they interfere with my time and attention allocated to this task?
- Is the task dependent on anyone else? If so, what's on their plate, and is there any risk of a delay on their part?

Consider your answers to these questions carefully, and use them to inform your time estimates. For example, if you know that a task involves a high level of complexity and doubt, then you may want to add in some extra time to your estimate to account for it.

Now that you're a pro at estimating how long tasks take, let's unpack how to best schedule those responsibilities.

## How to Create a Schedule



### The basic rules of scheduling

A schedule directs what you should be working on and when. However, for this to work, your schedule needs to be organised and well-planned. So, let's start by reviewing three basic rules of scheduling:

- **Be consistent.** Make a habit of recording your schedule by using a physical planner or calendar, or an online calendar or another online scheduling tool. Also, be sure to update your schedule as soon as you make changes.
- **Be focused.** If you try to accomplish everything, you won't accomplish anything. Identify and schedule your top priorities first. Pick and choose what to focus on for the day or week. You can schedule lesser priorities and non-urgent activities in the time that's remaining.
- **Be realistic.** Finally, be realistic. Is it possible that you'll feel burnt out after four hours of deep work? Then schedule a break. Your schedule is only helpful if it is realistic.



Effective scheduling requires you to be consistent, focused, and realistic. Make a regular habit of scheduling, pick and choose what you want to accomplish in a day or week, and schedule with your limitations and constraints in mind.

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Now that you're in the right mindset, let's create a schedule of your own.

### 6 Steps to create a schedule

#### Step 1 – Choose a tool and frequency

The first step is to choose a tool and frequency. In other words:

- **What tool are you going to use to create a schedule?** You can create a physical schedule by using a pen and paper, planner, or physical calendar. Or, you can use an online calendar or scheduling software. Choose whatever tool is within your budget and easiest for you to use.
- **What time span will your schedule cover?** Consider if you want to create a daily, weekly, monthly or semester schedule, depending on your needs and projects.

**Tip:** Be consistent. Make the tool and frequency you choose the standard. The goal is to make scheduling a regular habit. Consistency is key.

## Step 2 – List tasks by priority

The next step is to list all the tasks you want to achieve in your chosen time span by priority. This step is twofold:

- **List.** First, make a list of everything that's on your plate. Don't worry about the order of tasks yet. For example, if you're creating a weekly schedule, list all the tasks you want to achieve by the end of the week. Or, if you're creating a daily schedule, list all the tasks you want to accomplish by the end of the day.
- **Rank or reorder tasks by priority.** Second, review all the tasks you've listed and rank or reorder them by priority. If you're struggling to prioritise tasks, remember what you learned about the Eisenhower Decision Matrix. Ask yourself: *"Which tasks are urgent or have an impending deadline?"* or *"Which tasks are important or contribute to your goals and success?"* As you answer those questions, consider what tasks fall into the *"do," "plan," "postpone,"* and *"resist"* categories.

## Step 3 – Estimate how much time you'll need

At this point, you have a list of everything you want to do for the day, week, month or semester in order of priority. Now, you need to estimate how much time is required to complete each task.

For example, perhaps you estimate that you need two hours to plan your next assignment. Or, you expect to take one hour to find relevant source material.

**Tip:** Try using one of the techniques you learned about in the last section. For example, you might choose to base your estimate on historical data or employ the bottom-up estimation technique.

### Step 4 – Schedule your top priorities

The fourth step is to schedule your top priorities. Add your high-priority tasks to your calendar or another scheduling tool. Block out the time that you estimated in the last step.

**Tip:** Try to schedule high-priority tasks earlier—rather than later—in the day. That way, you’ll be less likely to get distracted by other needs and requests that get thrown at you throughout the day.

### Step 5 – Schedule your lower priorities

Now that you have a place for all your high-priority tasks, the fifth step is to schedule your lower-priority tasks in the remaining time available.

**Tip:** Avoid overscheduling yourself. If you don’t have time for everything, then don’t try to make it all fit. Instead, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it essential that I complete this task this week? Or, could it wait until next week?
- Could this task be postponed?
- Is this task a priority? And should I be doing it at all?

### Step 6 – Leave time for flexibility

Finally, the last step is to leave time for flexibility. Time estimates aren’t absolutes, and schedules rarely go 100% according to plan. Expect that there will be delays, distractions, unpredictable changes, and tasks that take longer than you thought. Plan for the unexpected in your scheduling techniques. For example, you might:

- Schedule a 15-minute “buffer” between tasks and activities in case they take longer than expected
- Block out an additional hour each day to account for last-minute, unexpected changes, or other unpredicted delays

**Tip:** Add regular breaks to your schedule, too. Everyone needs a break from time to time. It's better to plan for breaks in your schedule than it is to ignore them or pretend like you don't take them. Scheduling your breaks will give you a more accurate and realistic plan for your day.

### 6 steps - Summary

The six steps to creating an effective schedule are to choose a tool and frequency, list your tasks by priority, estimate how much time you need to complete each task, schedule your high-priority tasks, schedule your lower-priority tasks, and leave time for flexibility.

### Keep all your commitments in one place

The process highlighted above is designed to help you schedule university-related tasks and commitments. However, you likely have personal appointments and commitments to schedule, too.

Don't separate your academic and personal calendars. Having two separate calendars makes it easy for commitments to get overlooked, or for your schedule to become overbooked.

Instead, use the same calendar (or another tool) to schedule all your commitments in one place. For example, noticing that you have to pick up your daughter from football practice at 6:00 p.m. may make you think twice about leaving university at 5:00 p.m.

"The key is not to prioritise what's on your schedule,  
but to schedule your priorities."

Stephen Covey

### Four tips to perfect the art of scheduling

Now that you have the steps down, you can fine-tune your schedule with the following tips.

#### Colour-Code Your Schedule

The first tip is to colour-code your schedule. Choose different colours for different activities or tasks. For example, you might make all lectures blue, all workshops orange, or all tutorials green.

Most online scheduling tools make it easy to switch colours when you schedule a new appointment or block of time. You might also use highlighters to create different coloured borders around appointments and tasks if you're using a physical planner or calendar.

**Why it works:** Colour-coding your schedule makes it more visual and easier to navigate at a glance.

#### Try Adding “Themes” to Your Schedule

You might also try creating “themes” for your schedule. This tip is ideal for individuals who work on a wide variety of tasks. Choose a single “theme” for each day of the week and schedule accordingly. For example, perhaps you decide to reserve Monday for activities related to research. Or, you devote Tuesday to your placement, or Friday to your assignment write up.

**Why it works:** Schedule “theming” helps you stay focused on one skill set or a related group of tasks at a time. It also helps you be more productive by avoiding multitasking or interrupting your energy and task “flow.”

#### Schedule for Your Task and Energy Flow

That leads to our third tip, which is to schedule for your task and energy flow. Let's break down what each term means below:

**Task flow.** Task flow refers to the momentum you gain when you're already working on a task. Try not to break your momentum by stopping or switching between tasks midway. For example, you may find it easier to write your essay introduction in one

sitting than you do to write half of it on Monday, and then have to remember where you left off and get back into the swing of things on Friday.

**Energy flow.** In contrast, energy flow describes the natural fluctuations in your energy levels and focus or attention throughout the day. Do you find that you're more energetic in the mornings and experience a post-lunch slump? Then schedule your most important tasks in the mornings instead of after lunch. Or, will you feel drained after attending a lecture? Consider scheduling some reading time that's not too mentally taxing immediately after the lecture.

**Why it works:** Scheduling for your task and energy flow helps you optimise the times of the day when you feel most motivated, inspired, and productive.

### Establish Productive Routines

Finally, the last tip is to establish a routine in your schedule where it makes sense. For example, perhaps you decide to schedule an hour after lunch every day for emails. Maybe you enjoy a 15-minute meditation break at 10 a.m. every morning. Or, perhaps you schedule time to go for a run after university every Wednesday. Establish a routine for regular or repeated tasks or priorities when relevant.

**Why it works:** Routines are efficient in scheduling because they require less planning. Routines become habits and make it second nature to do tasks without thinking or worrying about them.

### Your schedule can change

Finally, keep in mind that your schedule is a living document. It's your plan for the day or week based on the information you have available. Sometimes, new information (or priorities!) will emerge, and you'll want to adjust your schedule accordingly. That's okay.

Your schedule should always be realistic and reflect your current situation and needs. Review and re-evaluate your original plan. Start the scheduling process over as needed. It's more important to work your schedule around top priorities than it is to stick to the original (and perhaps, outdated) plan.



**Let me check my schedule.** However, make sure that schedule changes are deliberate and reflect your priorities. Avoid making schedule changes due to poor planning or distractions. Instead,

A good schedule keeps you accountable to your commitments and helps to protect your time. In the next section we will share some final thoughts.

## Final Thoughts



Congratulations! You're nearing the end of this time management tutorial. As we draw to a conclusion, let's take a moment to look at the importance of finding your study zen, taking breaks without feeling guilty about it, dodging procrastination pitfalls, and embracing the Pomodoro Technique like it's your new best friend.

### Find Your Sanctuary

We're not suggesting that you leave Bolton to build a fortress of solitude in the Himalayas to get peace and quiet (although, it does sound rather nice!), rather you find a study space that's not akin to the chaos of Bolton during rush hour. Needless to say, trying to study while your roommate is playing loud music is a recipe for disaster. So, find a study space where you can hunker down and get in the zone as this will help you to maximise your productivity.

The cognitive and restorative benefits of natural environments are explained using the Attention Restoration Theory, which suggests that exposure to these environments can improve cognitive function and attention span (Celikors and Wells, 2022). Therefore, when tasked with independent learning, try to find a quiet study area in the university, like in the library or quiet room at home.

To book a study space, visit the [University of Bolton Library webpage](#).

Similarly, nature can also have a positive effect on people. Research by Bolouki (2022) highlighted the restorative and cognitive benefits of nature, supporting earlier research by Berman et al. (2008) that walking in a natural environment increases

attention. Therefore, taking a break by going for a walk or studying in the university garden on a dry, warm day may help to maximise your productivity.

### Give Yourself a Break

Imagine this, you have been staring at your screen for hours, your eyes are glazed over, and your brain feels like it's taken a trip around the world and back...twice! Does this sound familiar? If so, it's time to step away from your screen, stretch your legs, and give yourself a gentle reminder that you're only human – not a caffeine-fuelled machine. Regular breaks are important in the fight against burnout and maintaining your focus and motivation (Parker, 2017; Brazaitis and Satas, 2023). Therefore, don't feel guilty for taking a break – embrace them with open arms (or, as you know, open Netflix tabs).

### Procrastination

Failure to take regular breaks can contribute to procrastination tendencies and this is a game you shouldn't compete in. If you procrastinate, don't worry – you're not alone! Research by Sirois et al. (2023) found that between 80% to 95% of new university students procrastinate at least once, but 50% of students frequently procrastinate.

There is growing evidence that, not only will frequent procrastination impact academic study and work life, but it can also be detrimental to your health and well-being. For example, research suggests that procrastinating frequently can lead to ill health, higher stress levels, poor sleep patterns and poor health behaviours, such as not eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly (Kelly and Walton, 2021; Johansson et al., 2023; Sirois et al., 2023).

As you can see, therefore, the adrenaline rush of finishing your assignment five minutes before the deadline is not worth the negative consequences. So, resist the invisible gravitational pull of social media and daytime TV, banish the "I'll do it later" mantra, and tackle your tasks head-on. Your future self will thank you for it (and maybe even reward you with a break, as mentioned earlier).

If you find that you're still procrastinating, try the following steps:

- Initially, reflect on when and how you procrastinate.
- Explore the time management methods mentioned earlier to boost your productivity and decision-making.
- Structure your time and prioritise urgent and important tasks.
- Create positive habits to include. For example, start work at a certain time or identify daily targets.
- Make environmental changes. As suggested earlier, the environment plays a significant factor when you study. Many of us like to study in familiar surroundings, which are breeding grounds for distractions (e.g., at home, in front of the TV).
- Reflect at the end of the day and look over your progress. Consider what worked well and it would be even better if you changed...next time.
- As you will explore next, break larger tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks.

### The Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique is proof you can conquer your tasks one at a time. By breaking your study session into manageable chunks, you'll not only boost your productivity but also give yourself ample opportunities to enjoy activities (back to Netflix) during your break. So, set a timer to study and relax, embrace the power of the Pomodoro Technique, and watch your productivity blossom.

In the next section, let's check your understanding by covering some do's and don'ts of effective time management.

## Do's and Don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Treat time management as a continuous process	Give everything on your to-do list the same amount of time and energy
Organise activities by category when tracking your time	When organising your day, do urgent but less important tasks first
Resist or postpone tasks that aren't a priority	Try to boost your productivity by making optimistic time estimates
Base your time estimates on historical data	Work on a variety of tasks in short bursts of time
Schedule routine times to tackle regular or recurring tasks	
Adjust your schedule to reflect your energy levels throughout the day	

## Summary



### Key takeaways

Time management allows you to plan and control how you spend your time to achieve your goals. By setting healthy boundaries, you can work smarter not harder.

Take control of your time by:

1. Tracking how you spend your time to identify your biggest timewasters. Look for bigger themes and tally the results to see how much time you're devoting to competing projects and priorities.
2. Analysing the time you devote to various tasks. Determine what's a good use of your time, where you could save time, and if you need to reallocate time.
3. Prioritising tasks to distinguish the essential from the nonessential. Sort tasks by urgency and importance to decide what to do first, what to plan, and what to postpone and resist.
4. Scheduling your time to decide what you will do and when you'll do it. Remember to choose a tool and frequency, list your tasks by priority, and make conservative time estimates leaving time for flexibility. Then, schedule your top priorities first, followed by your lower priorities.



For more support on this topic, consider attending a free workshop at [LEAP Live](#).

## Academic Skills Enhancement



For further information and support:

- [Books On Time Management](#)
- [Life Lounge](#) (for wellbeing support and advice)
- [Goal Setting](#)
- [Mindfulness](#)
- [Managing Anxiety](#)
- [Stress Management](#)
- [Work-Life Balance](#)

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