**“I find it challenging to manage my time”**

*Many students have mentioned that they find it challenging to manage their time. Before I propose ways in which to deal with this challenge, I would like you to take a moment to reflect on the following questions:*

* **What are the factors that currently affect your time management?**
* **Which of these factors are within your control, and which are not?**

These are important questions to reflect on, as you will not be able to enhance, improve or adjust your current time management strategies if you do not know what those strategies are. In other words, you can only change something if you know what needs to be changed.

***In response to the questions above, you may have listed factors such as:***

* + ***an increased*** *(or perceived increase in)* ***work load****;*
  + *an* ***unpredictable schedule****;*
  + *an increase in* ***additional responsibilities*** *(such as chores at home, and family responsibilities);*
  + ***a lack of motivation and a slower working pace****; and*
  + ***mental health challenges****, including challenges that you previously dealt with, but may be tougher to handle now, or new challenges that have surfaced since the start of the lockdown.*

Listed here are ten strategies that may help you gain rather than lose time. You might have even identified some of these strategies yourself while you reflected on the questions above. Let’s go through them together:

1. Identify what your workload consists of for each module, including classes, assignments, tests and tutorials. Schedule them in a planner. Keep in mind that when attending class, you are already working on assignments, tests and tutorials, as you are already engaging with the work.

1. Study cycle: preview, attend, review, study, assess

Preview: Before class, skim through the chapter, note headlines and bold words, read summaries and identify chapter objectives.

Attend: Listen to your lectures, ask questions (e-mail afterwards) and take down meaningful notes.

Review: Within 24 hours, review your notes, fill in the gaps and list any questions that need answering.

Study: Routine study is key. Ask questions such as “why”, “how” and “what if”. Try to fit in three to five intensive study sessions per day (even if you spend only 25 minutes on each session) in the weeks you have to attend class as well. Use weekends for revision. Read through the week’s notes and material to establish connections between concepts.

Assess: Self-assess from time to time. Are the methods that you are using effective? Do you sufficiently understand the material to be able to teach it to others?

This study cycle helps you save time, as you will be working efficiently and effectively throughout the term.

1. Negotiate working time with family members or others with whom you share your life and living space, so that you can set aside time for both academics and household responsibilities. Determine when you work best, and then negotiate to have that time available for your academic work.
2. Time thieves are those activities that steal our time throughout the day, especially also time set aside for studying. While some of these time thieves may be important (such as quality time with friends), others are pure time wasters, which have no purpose at all. Nevertheless, we need to be in control of our time thieves, and always be aware of the amount of time we spend on them. Be particularly mindful of how much of your time goes towards time wasters, and intentionally set time aside for other, more useful activities, such as spending time with friends.
3. It often happens that we put off starting with a task because it seems overwhelming, looks like A LOT of work, or is something we do not feel entirely equipped to do. However, dividing a task into smaller sections instantly makes it more manageable, and reduce the likelihood of procrastination. For instance, let’s say you have to clean your room, wash dishes, unpack your weekend bag and do laundry. Now, you might be putting off starting, as it all seems rather overwhelming. Yet when you start with one small task, such as taking dirty mugs to the kitchen, this will likely lead to another small task, such as gathering all the dirty dishes in your flat. Once you have taken them all to the kitchen, you’ll start to wash them. Once you’ve washed the dishes, you’ll remove your bedding and throw it onto the laundry heap and, while you are at it, unpack your weekend bag to see what other dirty items you can add to the laundry pile, etc. Can you see how starting with something small can escalate? This is what we call “action builds momentum”.
4. Goal setting is important, as it helps you envision what you are working towards. When you have a goal that you yourself has set, as well as reasons for wanting to achieve that goal (which will require some reflection), you are more likely to be motivated to pursue and achieve it. This, in turn, will contribute to a sense of accomplishment, and even more motivation to reach new goals.
5. Have you found that you work well under pressure, but not when there’s ample time? For instance, you tend to study hard the night before a test, but not a week in advance? This is why it is important to create your own deadlines (especially for large assignments). For example, consider setting yourself a goal to start studying one chapter per day a week before a test, or to start completing one question per day a week before an assignment. This will help you prevent desperate and exhausting last-minute efforts, such as pulling an all-nighter, which actually reduces your productivity.
6. When we don’t have a plan, we often end up saying: “I don’t know where the time went.” Avoid this by dedicating time to specific tasks, including leisure activities. For instance, if you plan to have your academic work done by 21:00, and you know you need to get to bed by 22:30, you can dedicate an hour to time thieves such as screen time.
7. Learn to prioritise. Prioritising those tasks that require your attention and time first, you set the pace for the rest of your day. Let’s take sleeping as an example. If you prioritise getting in the recommended eight hours of sleep every night, you will likely be sufficiently rested and refreshed to manage your time well during the day. Similarly, if you prioritise your academics, you will likely find time also to enjoy recreational activities, such as time spent with friends, and feel energised afterwards. However, choosing to socialise while you know you have a looming deadline will simply add to your stress and anxiety, making your social time less enjoyable and relaxing.
8. Eat, get enough sleep, and exercise. Research has shown that when we look after ourselves physically, our productivity and energy levels are likely to increase.

Evaluating and reflecting on the way in which you manage your time will help you both adjust current and develop new skills and strategies. This should be an ongoing process until you reach a point where you feel satisfied with your time management skills and strategies. Even then, regular self-checks will help ensure that you continue using your time as efficiently as possible.