Managing Your Time Effectively

Spending time, like spending money, is a personal matter. Unlike money, however, you can't get a "time raise" or "save some hours" for a busy day. We all have to live on 168 hours each week. Successful students, like other successful people, must budget time according to their priorities to ensure they spend it effectively.

Identify Your Goals and Priorities	The first step in learning to manage your time—controlling your life—is to identify what your goals and priorities are. You must decide what you want out of school and life and what you must do to get it. Is learning—getting an education—high on your priority list? How about your current job? Your family? What is most important to you?
Analyze How You're Spending Your Time *Now*	Next, analyze exactly how you spend your time. For the next week, keep a detailed log of everything you do. Account for all activities: class attendance, study, work, eating, commuting, recreation, exercise, sleep, etc. Also note when (during what hours) you do these activities. How much time each week do you spend… • in classes? _____ hours • studying for classes? _____ hours • working? _____ hours • meeting the needs of others? _____ hours • exercising? _____ hours • relaxing? _____ hours • sleeping? _____ hours
Match How You're Using Time with Your Priorities	Now you can evaluate your use of time. No one can judge your use of time as efficient or inefficient—not even you—unless you do it in relation to your priorities. In addition to looking at how much time you spend on each activity, consider if you are spending quality time on your priorities. For example, if learning is high on your priority list, do you study during your prime energy hours or only after everything else is done for the day?
Develop a Plan to Spend Quality Time on Your Priorities	If you found some time blocks that are not in line with what you want to be doing to reach your goals, you can begin to systematically change your life by taking control of your time. Start by building a realistic time schedule or time budget that gives time to the activities that fit with your priorities and will help you reach your goals. If learning and getting good grades are high on your priority list, then you will have to budget time for attending classes regularly, for studying and reviewing, and for preparing papers, reports, and special assignments. Finally, you must stick to your time schedule. Some flexibility is necessary, of course, to take care of unexpected demands. However, if you spend too much time on non-priority tasks, you will not meet your goals.

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Live Smart Time Management Tips	✓ **Keep a to-do list and keep the items in priority order.** Most people tend to do low-ranking, little things first and never get around to the important tasks. ✓ **Break major tasks down into small chunks.** We often avoid big projects because we have limited time or we don't know where to begin. Break major projects into small pieces and tackle them one at a time. ✓ **Consolidate tasks.** Whenever possible, do more than one thing at a time—except thinking! If you're going to the library to prepare your biology report, also work on your research paper and look up that reference you need for literature. ✓ **Evaluate your habits.** Are your routines the most efficient? Could you save time by changing your routine actions? Could getting up 15 minutes earlier be helpful? ✓ **Have reasonable expectations and goals.** Given the heavy demands on your time, it is doubtful that everything you do can be perfect. Based on your priorities, decide what you want to be "A" quality and what things can be "B" quality. ✓ **Learn to say "No."** There is never time to do everything we want to do, so we must learn to do those things that move us toward our goals and say "no" to those that do not.
Study Smart Time Management Tips	✓ **Make a study schedule and stick to it**. The best way to ensure that you'll have enough study time to meet your goals in each course is to plan for it. ✓ **Schedule study/learning sessions to fit your attention span.** Try studying for 45 minutes and then taking a ten-minute exercise break. ✓ **Begin each study session with goal setting.** Predict specifically what you want to accomplish and then work to meet your goals. ✓ **Study difficult and/or complex material first.** Leave routine and more mechanical tasks for last. ✓ **Vary subjects and type of study for maximum efficiency.** Within a study session do some reading, writing, recitation, etc. to stay interested and alert. ✓ **Schedule periodic review sessions.** To remember material over a long period of time, you must review the information often. ✓ **Use all of your available time.** Even small bits of time, like waiting for the dentist, can be put to use—don't be caught without something to read or study.