



## 5. USE OF TIME IN TERMS OF PERSONAL EFFICIENCY AND GUIDING STUDENTS

**This chapter deals with the following content:**

- the concept of use of time;
- the steps that can help you in your own planning of use of time, from analysis of yourself, planning your activities and avoiding disruptions to use of time when something gets cancelled.

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When we talk about use of time, we are talking about behaviour aimed at achieving efficient use of time, when you perform activities to achieve certain goals. In the past such behaviour was aimed mainly at being as productive as possible at work, while nowadays training in the use of time is to an increasing extent aimed at life in general having higher quality and at obligations being coordinated to the best possible extent and minimising their impact on our free time.

The authors Claessens, van Eerde, Rutte and Roe, 2007 distinguish between four different generations of aids aimed at efficient use of time as follows:

- reminders (simple notes and lists);
- planning, preparation, setting goals, determining dates using calendars and computers;
- setting priorities and managing on the basis of values, setting long-term and short-term goals, daily organising;
- spending time on truly important things in life, separating up unimportant tasks, training for declining tasks.

In Slovenia people talk more about 'time management' than about 'use of time', but generally authors around the world agree that 'time management' is not an appropriate expression, since until we develop time machines, we cannot manage time nor can we organise it.

Training for use of time should, in order to be most effective, include drills in various skills:

- the skill of planning, setting priorities allocating everyday tasks;
- the skill of spending a greater part of your time on important rather than on urgent tasks;
- the skill of managing disruptions;
- the skill of linking together medium-term goals with daily goals;

- the skill of setting and achieving goals;
- the skill of using lists to prevent forgetfulness;
- the skill of declining, without endangering relationships or your career;
- the skill of recognising and reducing procrastination;
- the skill of decision-making about what is truly important;
- the skill of seeking a work-life balance and
- the skill of influencing the organisational culture of making use of time.

In orientation tutoring it makes sense of course for students to be familiarised not just with how to study, but also with the techniques of using time, since studying is much less structured in terms of time than their previous schooling, and deciding on how to allocate time is left up to them much more.

**Research has shown that efficient use of time is associated with satisfaction at work and study and with less stress at work and study, individuals with greater skills in using time set themselves higher goals in studying and achieve higher grades, so dealing with these issues is well worth the time and is not a waste of it.**

## 5.1. Analysis of time use or 'What am I doing with my time?'

I suggest that you get to grips with the issue of time use by first **reviewing how you spend your time**. You can make up a table in one of the programmes that allows you to make tables, use one of the programmes that allows you to do this (those that are free to use for a single user include <https://www.rescue-time.com>, <https://clockify.me/>, <https://www.timecamp.com/> or <https://tmetric.com/>), and you can also use Appendix 7.

It is advisable to monitor time as precisely as possible for at least three days, if not a whole week, and each day or at the end of the whole period make a review of what is happening. Your students can do the same thing, then you can use one of your meetings with them to analyse the findings. If monitoring time use in this way is too demanding for you or your students, you can immediately make use of Appendix 8, completing it on the basis of the review of time you performed with Appendix 7. You can include in this other activities that were not foreseen. When you add up the time you need for all the listed activities, **you get a better view of whether you are devoting too much or too little time to a single activity**. If you subtract the overall time of all weekly activities from 168, you can see how many hours you have available for unforeseen events.

The general recommendation for work is that you plan just 40% of your time, and keep the rest free for unforeseen events, although it is true that this proportion depends to a large extent on how unpredictable your work is. Of course it also makes sense for studying that you allow some time for unforeseen events, and if nothing unusual happens, you can use the remaining time in the most rational and high-quality way.

Table 6: Part of completed table of time use

Date	Time (XX:XX)	Activity	Satisfied needs	Fulfilled values	Remarks
7 April 2010	00.10	sleep	rest		
	6.40	snoozing			unnecessary
	6.50	eating	eating		
	7.05	morning ablutions	hygiene		somewhat extended showering
	7.30	reading the news		being informed	delaying

7.40	journey to the faculty		
8.19	assessment of reports		very important
8.24	visit Professor X		disruption
8.34	assessment of reports		very important
9.12	preparing e-classroom	curiosity	
9.35	departure for Student Organisation meeting	family	used for telephone conversation with parents

## 5.2. What are my values and needs?

In order for the activities you choose to be as rational as possible, it is important to know what your **values and needs are**.

Under **needs** you list the things without which you could not live or their absence (including in the long term) could jeopardise your existence, or their absence could significantly impact your quality of life (for instance food, drink, rest, hygiene, etc.).

Under **values** you list those things that are important to you, that bring you satisfaction and happiness and fulfil your life (such as friends, knowledge, family, success, etc.). Everyone should make up their own list, and to help with this you can use Appendix 9.

If you are not convinced about your values and needs, you can repeat the exercise several times with a gap of a few days, and see which values and needs you listed most. Of course it also makes sense to think about your own values at least every few years (since with development the hierarchy changes) and upon major life events (such as completing studies, birth of a child, sickness, etc.), since it would be

a shame for your planning to be based on values that are no longer highly important to you and to neglect those that have become important.

When you have a list of values and needs ready, you can look over Appendix 7 and ask yourself a few questions:

- Which of my needs have been made a lower priority in my days?
- Which of my values have been made a lower priority?
- Which values could perhaps be given less time?
- Which activities have been very, medium or not important?
- Did I achieve what I wanted?
- What time of day am I most productive?
- What time of day am I least productive?
- Which events constituted disruptions (events that were not under your control and were not important to you or even impede you in achieving your goals – for instance a housemate who wants to go to a party with you when you need to study)?
- Which actions constituted procrastination (activities that are under your control but which you did to avoid a less pleasant but important action)?
- Have I noticed anything else?

It is a great idea to share your observations with the students or for them to share them with each other, since in this way they gain a better insight into how to make use of their time, they share remarks about the findings and help each other find solutions.

## 5.3. Planning activities

Once you have an insight into how you are spending your time, you can start planning your activities in line with this. **You can make up a timetable for each day** and the whole week in advance, and you can also plan for longer periods.

You can do this **using a notebook or calendar** (including online), or you could consider one of the **applications** (for instance <https://todoist.com/> or <https://www.remembertthemilk.com/>).

Be sure to leave enough space in the timetable to satisfy your needs and fulfil your values, and take into account here when you are more and less productive. In setting up the timetable be mindful to allow enough time for unforeseen events, time when you will not be doing anything or when such time does arise, that you will fill it with some sensible activities. Look over your plan and check whether it lacks any time for some important thing, and try to avoid the less important things. You can find out about how you set the goals so that you will be most effective in achieving them in the next chapter.

You can help yourself in planning by **dividing individual assignments into the most precise possible tasks** (you can organise these into a table such as the one in Appendix 7). For instance you can separate up the job of preparing a seminar assignment into specific tasks: finding the literature, studying it, preparing the structure, formulating the introduction. When you have a structure laid out on the basis of your searching, you can add other tasks (or chapters). In longer-term planning you can determine the time for specific tasks so you will complete the assignment on time.

## 5.4. Separating important and urgent tasks

In deciding how to allocate time, it is important to **separate important and urgent tasks**. Important tasks are those that are tied to your needs and values, and urgent ones are those where you are short of time to do them, although they are not necessarily truly important for you. It can help to separate activities by their urgency and importance.

**Important and urgent** tasks are for instance: saving a choking child, rescuing property from a flood, seeing the head teacher because of a child's bad behaviour and so forth. **Some important tasks also become urgent due to procrastination** (for instance submitting a seminar assignment), but you can avoid unnecessary stress if you plan such assignments in advance and carry them out in sufficient time before the deadline.

**Tasks that are just important but not urgent** include: doing sports, doing your favourite leisure activity, meeting up with friends and family, dates with your partner, studying, maintaining your house and car and so forth. In your planning you should allocate these tasks the most time, so they do not become urgent and you can maintain the best possible quality of life.

**Activities that are urgent but not important** are usually disruptors, and often involve helping others achieve their goals, such as responding to a large pile of email, dealing with a student's request for a letter of recommendation and so forth. The problem is that you can spend a lot of time on these activities because their urgency makes them seem important. This does not mean that you don't need to attend to them, but you need to consider to what extent, when and of course to watch out that you do not allocate more time to them than to important activities.

If you have the problem of being too nice to other people, you might benefit from some assertiveness training, so you can learn to stand up for yourself and take time for things that are important to you.

**Activities that are neither important nor urgent are also mainly disruptors.** This involves for instance watching television, wasting time on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and similar, playing computer games, pointless shopping and so forth. When you find yourself in that place, you need to consider whether you are using it to relax after a hard day (which can make sense up to a point), or whether it does not make enough sense and you can stop doing that and switch to something more fulfilling.

## 5.5. How to avoid less important activities

If possible, leave them to someone else, or divide them up (shopping can be done each time by someone who enjoys it, or can be done each time by a different person among your housemates, for instance).

As for disruptors that are not under your control, it is advisable to try to prevent or limit them (for instance you can lock your room when you are focusing on study). If you end up procrastinating, it is good to be aware of this and to try to prevent it.

You might have major problems using a computer, which on the one hand is an essential tool for study, while on the other hand you can use it to access websites that represent both procrastination and relaxation. For this reason you might consider using an **application that allows only limited access to websites** that you determine (such as <https://self-controlapp.com/>, <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/leechblock-ng/> and so forth).

There is a similar danger lurking in your mobile phone, for which there are also various apps that help you avoid excessive use (such as <http://www.offthegridapp.com/>).

Procrastination may be a result of feeling overwhelmed by an assignment and not knowing where to begin. In this case it can help to **divide up the assignment into the smallest possible parts and tackle the first one as soon as possible**.



If you do not feel sure of yourself, this can help:

- think about the knowledge and skills you have to achieve the goal;
- education about the issue (you can browse online);
- think about past successes that you have achieved;
- a person who succeeded in something similar and who is most similar to you.

Some people also procrastinate when they fear failure. With some students we have observed that they can put off preparing for exams, so in the event that they fail, they know they did not give it their all, and can face the failure more easily than if they had put everything they could into it, and then have to face a possible failure knowing it was not enough.

In procrastination you also need to check whether there is still some other need that has not been met, and for that reason you are doing things that partly satisfy it – for instance you are eating sweet things instead of realising that you need to rest because your energy is low, you are hanging out on Facebook because you are not socialising enough and at least you have the feeling of keeping up with your friends, instead of getting together with them and spending some quality time in their company.

## 5.6. How do you make use of the time when something is cancelled?

Students as well as other people experience things being cancelled for them. In this case it is good to **have a prepared list of activities and tasks that you can do when some unplanned time arises**. You can make use of Table 7 or one of the applications in which you have entered information about activities (such as <http://www.getontracks.org/>). Based on such a list you can quickly find tasks with which you can sensibly fill the time that has suddenly opened up

for you (this kind of table is also very useful in planning how to spend time in an individual day or week).

Table 7: Part of completed table of tasks

Task	Assignment	Circumstances	Deadline	Flexibility of deadline	Importance	Necessary time	Scope for dividing up	Completed
find articles	prepare section on use of time	computer, internet	15 October 2018	fixed	3	3 hours	3 x 1 hour	14 October 2018
write theoretical introduction	prepare section on use of time	computer, internet	17 October 2018	fixed	3	3 hours	no	15 October 2018
write a section on analysis of use of time	prepare section on use of time	computer, internet	18 October 2018	fixed	3	4 hours	no	16 October 2018
buy tickets for Liffe	attend Liffe	Cankarjev Dom	23 October 2018	can be moved to 6 November 2018	5	1 hour	no	
call dentist	see dentist	telephone	25 October 2018	can be moved to 5 November 2018	5	5 minutes	no	
see the Ivana Kobilca exhibition	see the Ivana Kobilca exhibition	National Gallery	10 February 2019	fixed	4	3 hours	no	

Table 7 is just a suggestion as to how you can arrange your obligations in order to be as efficient as possible, and you yourself can organise your information on the activities you need to do in a different way.

A table organised this way can help you to know precisely:

- what the task is and which assignment it falls under;
- in what circumstances can you carry out the task (what needs to be available to you);
- when the deadline is that you set for completing the task;
- how flexible that deadline is or by when do you absolutely have to complete the task (setting deadlines before the final cut-off helps keep the highest number of assignments as important ones and not urgent ones);

- what is its importance (so you can prioritise more important assignments);
- how much time would you need to implement the task (to be able to quickly place the task in the time slot that has become available);
- can the task be rationally divided up or does it need to be completed as an entire unit, and
- information on when you completed the task.

This kind of arrangement lets you browse quickly through tasks using various criteria, which can help you decide what to do.

For the highest possible quality of life, it makes sense for tasks on the list not just to be the kind that are tied to obligations, and you can add to your reminder list tasks that you simply enjoy, that are important to you not to forget and for which you should also take time when a slot becomes available. Why would you go and study in the library, when you have done that enough already for one day, instead of going to an exhibition you want to see, and that would take precisely the time that you have available?

## 5.7. What about when I finish my assignment?

When you complete a certain task, it is to some extent motivating just in itself that you have done it, but it is also a good idea **to record this** – both in terms of motivation and in terms of having completed tasks put in a separate part of the information in the table.

Once you have completed assignments, take time of course to reward yourself – perhaps with a rest, or with one of the activities that are important to you and which you are putting off because the force of circumstances means others are becoming more urgent.

## In conclusion

Dealing with how you use time can be a long-lasting process and offers ample opportunities for progress, practicing skills and so forth. Of course it pays to invest at least some time in looking at your use of time and trying to improve it, while it is also recommended that you re-evaluate your use of time every so often. I suggest that if this is a topic of interest, you read up one of the resources on it, and you can also turn for additional help to advisers at the University of Ljubljana Careers Centres.

## References

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