

SCHEDULING YOUR TIME

The way we use time - or waste it - is largely a matter of habit patterns. In this handout we shall see how the efficient use of time is related to improved study habits and better academic work.

It is not easy to change old habits. They become deeply entrenched and we become proficient in them. But if they are bad habits, they put a ceiling on achievement. Let me cite an example. I learned to play tennis with an unorthodox grip, and got to be pretty good in spite of it, though I realised I was always outplayed by opponents using an orthodox grip. I hated to give up what skill I had and go through an awkward period of relearning. When I did change, my game was poor, as I had expected; but with practise it was soon better than before - eventually much better than it could ever have been with the old grip.

It takes determination to change, and the will to make painful adjustments. But the decision to change brings the chance for a better future. If you find that you need to adopt new study techniques, give them a fair trial. You are almost certain to improve much sooner than you would think.

The Value of a Time Schedule

One means to good study habits is scheduling your time. Many students rationalise that they want to be flexible and not tied down. They mean, usually, that they want to be flexible enough to have as many coffee breaks and telephone calls as opportunity offers. Such students seldom have time enough to finish their assignments.

To see where your time goes, and how well you use it, keep a diary of your daily activities (see Figure 2-1) for one typical week. You may find, to take just one example, that your average "ten-minute" coffee break is nearer forty minutes. At the end of the week, add up the time spent in each activity. Analyse this summary to see how you can avoid dribbling away minutes and so save hours for both recreation and study.

If you are one of those who "never have a minute to spare", you will be interested in the following:

An old but still relevant study * showed that in a typical week students at one University spent time as follows in four essential activities.

Study	19.8 hours
Class & Laboratory	18.7 hours
Sleep	49.3 hours
Meals	<u>10.7 hours</u>
Total	<u>98.5 hours</u>

Subtract this amount from 168 (the number of hours in a week) and you still have 69.5 hours unaccounted for - almost 10 hours a day. But in spite of all this wealth of time, students are always running out of it. This paradox argues two things: inefficient study habits and poor scheduling.

Figure 2.1 - Record of One Day's Activities

Start	End	Time Used	Activity Description	Suggestions for Making Better Use of Time
11.45	7.45	8.00	Sleep	
7.45	8.15	.30	Dress	
8.15	8.40	.25	Breakfast	
8.40	9.00	.20	Nothing -----	Look over textbook assignment and previous lecture notes
9.00	10.00	1.00	Class - History	
10.00	10.40	.40	Break - Coffee -----	Break too long and too soon after breakfast
10.40	11.00	.20	Nothing -----	Look over previous lecture notes
11.00	12.00	1.00	Class - English	
12.00	12.35	.35	Lunch	
12.35	2.00	1.25	Reading - Magazine -----	Reserve recreational reading for after finishing assignment
2.00	4.00	2.00	Lab - Chemistry	
4.00	5.30	1.30	Recreation - Volleyball	
5.30	6.00	.30	Nothing -----	Could read magazine now
6.00	7.00	1.00	Dinner	
7.00	8.00	1.00	Nap -----	Not a good idea. Better finish work, then a good night's sleep
8.00	8.50	.50	Study - Maths	
8.50	9.20	.30	Break -----	Too long
9.20	10.00	.40	Study - Maths	
10.00	10.50	.50	Chat session -----	Good, if basic work is done
10.50	11.30	.40	Study - Psychology	
11.30	11.45	.15	Ready for Bed -----	Insufficient time allotted

A time schedule will not make a robot of you. Rather, it will provide order and discipline, and so free you to do your best. A schedule is a plan to help you get things done in an orderly way. It also keeps you informed on your own progress and broadens your horizons by giving you time to do things you could not do without. It saves time spent in indecision, and so prevents worry, hasty improvisations, and the feeling that you are always on the run.

Allotment of Time

The oft-repeated rule-of-thumb that you should study two hours for every hour in class is a rough guide at best. Most assignments are made in terms of pages or chapters, not hours. A lecturer seldom, if ever, says, "Study Economics for two hours before our next meeting". He/she says, "Read Chapter 3", or "pages 220-240", or "Find out all you can about the topic discussed in class today". It is impossible to schedule day-to-day study in fixed numbers of hours, but it is helpful to keep two general points in mind.

- Scheduling fixed hours is realistic only when reviewing or studying for a test. Even here, studying for a required amount of time is not an end in itself. You must understand what you have studied before you can say you have finished.
- All of us know that the time required per subject varies from student to student and from subject to subject. One student writes English themes easily but grasps Chemistry only with great effort; another breezes through Mathematics but has a terrible struggle with History. French may take less time than Japanese. To schedule realistically you must know what you can do with your various subjects in how much time. Within your schedule, you must allocate your time accordingly. Experience, and the desire to do more work in less time, should lead, after some trial and error, to fairly accurate planning.

Massed and Distributed Study

Ideally, when studying a new assignment, you should study until you master it. As much massed study as is possible preserves continuity of context and effort.

When reviewing, however, it is better to distribute rather than mass the time devoted to any one subject. For example, in allotting six hours to review for a French test, you will learn more in six one-hour periods spaced through the week than in one six-hour period. Psychological studies show that in the intervals between the six one-hour periods, incidental learning continues. The sum of learning gained in six distributed hours is thus greater than that in six massed hours. In addition, you will be less susceptible to boredom. But it is not always easy to schedule six well-spaced hours in one week, and a compromise of three two-hour periods may be the best you can do. Remember though, that at the end of six distributed hours of study you still have not necessarily mastered the subject or finished the job.

Daytime Study Periods

One cause of poor work in University is failure to make use of short periods of time. One hour between classes is not a "dead" hour. Use it or lose it!

Many students can do more during the day when they are fresh than in comparable periods of time in the evening. One Engineering student, who consistently performed well, watched movies or read for pleasure after nine o'clock every night. His secret was to make every minute count. Concentrated effort during the day gave him free time in the evening. He was practicing a sound psychological principle, rewarding himself for work well done.

Free periods before tutes and after lectures provide valuable opportunities for study. For a course in which you read and discuss, it is an advantage to study just before class, so that the

material will be fresh in your mind and your thinking stimulated. For a lecture course, retention and understanding are aided by a review of your lecture notes immediately after class - or at your first possible opportunity. Many students who formed the habit of reviewing notes directly after a lecture found it very successful. They make the following points: first, immediate review gives more thorough understanding and provides a basis for a better group of succeeding lectures and reading assignments; second, it saves time to review the lecture before forgetting sets in, and it eases the task of reviewing for examination; finally, grades improve in proportion to the time and effort put into immediate review.

Taking Breaks

Most students report that they need to take ten-minute breaks during an extended study period. Take a ten-minute break whenever you feel the need for one; this minimises "clock watching". More important than the length of a break is what you do when you take one. Stand up, walk around, or just stare out the window if you like - but keep in your mind the subject you are studying: speculate about it, argue with yourself about some problem just encountered in your reading, take the opposite view and wonder why it would not hold up. By thinking positively about the subject, you not only maintain continuity of study but improve your grasp. Most students who do this find that they usually take less than a ten-minute break, since they are eager to get on with the subject, and that they did not need a warm-up period when they resumed studying. Without this technique it is too easy to abuse the break by making it too long.

Scheduling Recreation

In planning your time, be sure to have a reasonable balance between work and recreation. It is unrealistic to omit from a time-plan the physical and social activities necessary for a well-balanced life. If your schedule is not realistic, you will be tempted to give up the whole idea of scheduling.

Developing good study habits through scheduling your time does not mean becoming 'a greasy grind'. The student who makes him/herself a slave may become an unattractive personality and may study less efficiently than he/she thinks they do. But an imbalance that permits extra-curricular activities to outweigh studies probably accounts for more failures in University than anything else. Here are a few suggestions to help you avoid this pitfall.

- It is natural to want social activity. It is natural to have dates, take part in sports, go to movies, join clubs and societies. But remember that these are adjuncts to learning, and that learning is the real reason for going to University.
- Students who try to do too many things are likely to spend too much time away from study. Few people can play on an athletic team, belong to clubs, work part-time, and do acceptable academic work - all at once. Something has to give, and it will probably be study.
- The plea that you have an assignment to complete, a paper to write, or a problem to review is going to be accepted in University.

How to Make a Time Schedule

The specimen weekly time-plan in Figure 2-2 illustrates some general principles of scheduling. The outlined boxes represent class periods, and the allotment of time for study, recreation, and the requirements of daily living revolves around these fixed class hours as discussed in the analysis.

But for practical use, week after week, a schedule such as this would be too rigid and detailed to serve as a realistic guide. Some weeks you will have special assignments that will take more time than is provided by so general a plan. And, just because your schedule says you must study History at that hour, wouldn't you be foolish to miss hearing the speech of a world-famous person who is visiting your campus?

Clearly, there would have to be weekly revisions and variations. But to draw up so detailed a schedule every week would take a good deal of time - time better spent in studying. And yet, in the long run, it would be even more wasteful of time to make no schedule at all.

Seeking a happy medium, we offer a system which is not an iron framework yet gives support in using time effectively and realistically. There is no need to schedule in detail, week after week, the many activities that are fixed throughout the term: meals, sleep, class hours, free time on Saturdays and Sundays, and the like. These constitute the master pattern of your week and should soon become established as matters of habit. The practice of using between-class hours to brush up in advance for recitation and discussion courses and to review notes taken in lecture courses, should also become so habitual that there is no need to schedule every such free hour in detail. Here, then, is a plan for a schedule that is easy to make, practical, and genuinely helpful.

- First (Figure 2-3), make out a master schedule for the term and fill in your fixed activities: rising and retiring times, meals, classes and weekend time to be held in reserve for non-study activities. You may also, if you wish, include fixed times for recreational reading or for reviewing notes. The empty boxes now represent hours which you can schedule for study.
- Second (Figure 2-4), make a weekly schedule sheet which revolves around your assignments. The format is simple: draw a horizontal line to divide a lined sheet of paper in half. Use the upper half to list your subjects, assignments, estimated study times, and due dates. Then, using the due dates and the estimated times as control factors, check your master schedule for hours available. Choose enough available hours to do each job, and write them on the appropriate line on the bottom half of the weekly schedule sheet. Then stick to your schedule. Give study hours top priority. As long as you do, the remaining free hours will be really free.

Students find that this way of scheduling really works: no countless boxes to fill in; no intricate maze to grope through; best of all, no more guilty conscience from schedules laboriously made and quietly abandoned.

Figure 2-2 - Some Principles of Scheduling

Assume that this schedule is your own, and study it in the light of the analysis on the last page.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 - 8	----- DRESS AND BREAKFAST -----						
8 - 9	History	Study Chem	History	Study Chem	History	Study Chem	
9 - 10	Study History	Phy Ed	Study History	Phy Ed	Study History	Phy Ed	
10 - 11	Study French	Chemistry	Study French	Chemistry	Study French	Chemistry	
11 - 12	French	Study Chem	French	Study Chem	French	Study Chem	
12 - 1	----- LUNCH -----						
1 - 2	Maths	ROTC	Maths	ROTC	Maths		
2 - 3	Study Maths	Library Theme	Study Maths		Study Maths		
3 - 4	Study English	Library Theme	Study English	Chem Lab	Study English		
4 - 5	English	Library Theme	English	Chem Lab	English		
5 - 6	----- RECREATION -----						
6 - 7	----- DINNER -----						
7 - 8	Study English	Study Maths	Study English	Study Maths	Study English		English Theme
8 - 9	Study French	Study History	Study French	Study History	Study French		English Theme
9 - 10	Review English	Review French	Review History	Review Maths	Review Chem		Study History
10 - 11	----- RECREATIONAL READING -----						
11 - 12	----- CONVERSATION, SLEEP -----						

Figure 2-3 - A Master Schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 - 8	----- DRESS AND BREAKFAST -----						
8 - 9	History		History		History		
9 - 10		English		English		English	
10 - 11		Chemistry		Chemistry		Chemistry	
11 - 12	French		French		French	Chemistry	
12 - 1	----- LUNCH -----						
1 - 2	Maths	ROTC	Maths	ROTC	Maths	Review	
2 - 3	Phy Ed		Phy Ed		Phy Ed	Review	
3 - 4						Review	
4 - 5						Review	
5 - 6						Review	
6 - 7	----- DINNER -----						
7 - 8							Recreation
8 - 9							Recreation
9 - 10							Recreation
10 - 11							Recreation
11 - 12	----- SLEEP -----						

Special Notes

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

Figure 2.4 - A Weekly Schedule

Subject	Assignment	Estimated Time	Due Date	Time
History	150 pages	6 ½ hours	Wednesday	8.00
English	Paper	12 hours	Saturday	9.00
Chemistry	20 pages - read	4 hours	Thursday	10.00
Maths	20 problems	6 hours	Friday	1.0
French	Lesson 5	4 hours	Wednesday	11.00

Monday	Read History Start French	9.30 - 10.30	3.30 - 6.00	7.00 - 10.00 10.00 - 11.00
Tuesday	Read Chemistry Finish French		2.00 - 6.00	7.00 - 10.00
Wednesday	Do Maths Start English (Paper)	9.30 - 10.30	3.30 - 5.30	7.00 - 10.00
Thursday	Finish Maths English Paper (Write)		2.00 - 5.00	7.00 - 11.00
Friday	English Paper (Revise & polish)	9.30 - 10.30		7.00 - 10.00

Monday through Friday/Saturday

- 7 - 8 am Preclude the frantic dash and the gobbled (or skipped) breakfast by getting up on time
- 12 - 1 pm Take a full, leisurely hour for lunch
- 5 - 6 pm Relax before dinner - your reward for a day of conscientious work
- 7 - 9 pm Keep up with current notes and assignments by systematic studying
- 9 - 10 pm To forestall cramming at test and examination times, give some time every day to a review of previous assignments and ground covered to date
- 10 pm A “cease-study” time of ten o’clock is an incentive to work hard during the day and early evening.

10 - 12 pm You should devote some time every day to reading books that truly interest you. Recreational reading and conversation help you “unwind” for a good night’s sleep

Monday - Wednesday - Friday

9 - 10 am Use the free period after History (a lecture course) to study your lecture notes

10 - 11 am Since French (at 11.00 am) is a recitation course, prepare by studying during the free period that precedes class

2 - 3 pm In Maths class (1 - 2 pm) problems are usually discussed and worked out on the blackboard. It is wise to take notes on both discussion and blackboard work. Then because Maths. problems can quickly become “cold”, use this free period to go over the work covered during the preceding hour

3 - 4 pm English (4 - 5 pm) is often a discussion period. Use the free hour to study and warm-up in advance

7 - 8 pm Your evening study time begins. Start with English, your last class, so that any notes you took can be reviewed before forgetting takes place

8 - 9 pm Study French, giving priority to the notes and assignments of the day

Tuesday - Thursday - Saturday

8 - 9 am Since Chemistry (10 - 11 am) is your “hard” subject, you build your morning study program around it. An hours study before class will make the class period more meaningful

11 - 12 noon Another hours study immediately after Chemistry class will help you to remember the work covered in class and to move more readily to the next assignment

Special

Tuesday, 2 - 5 pm Library: Theme) For some assignments you will need to
Sunday, 7 - 9 pm English: Theme) schedule blocks of time in order to do
research or to develop and follow up ideas.

Saturday from noon onwards is left unscheduled - for recreation - for special projects to which you must devote a concentrated period of time - for extra work on difficult subjects - for thorough review.

Sunday is your day until evening. Study History before you go to bed because it is the first class you'll have on Monday morning.

* **Arthur A. Dole, "College Students Report on the Use of Time", *The Personnel & Guidance Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 9 (May 1959), 635.**

