

## TIME MANAGEMENT

### Introduction

Time Management relies on a set of related commonsense skills that help you to work in the most effective and productive way possible. Developing time management skills can help you to

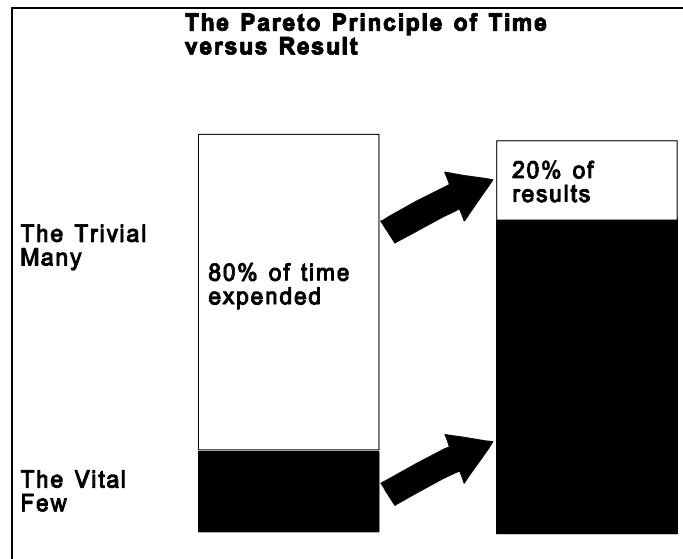
- determine which of the things you do are important and which can be dropped,
- use your time more effectively,
- increase the time in which you can work,
- control the distractions that waste your time and break your flow,
- increase your effectiveness and reduce stress.

Effective time management reduces stress by giving you more

- control,
- productivity and security,
- satisfaction, and
- leisure time.

### The Central Shift in Attitude

At the heart of the subject is an obvious but difficult shift in focus: *concentrate on results, not on being busy*. The relation of task to goal is crucial. Many people spend their lives in furious activity but achieve very little because they are putting their efforts into the wrong tasks or failing to focus their activity effectively. This unproductive situation is neatly summed up by the *Pareto Principle*, J. M. Juran's application of some of the theories of Vilfredo Pareto to quality losses and eventually to most systems. Juran suggested that the *significant* items in a group normally constitute a small percentage of the *total* number of items. Every group can be divided into the "vital few" and the "trivial many"; clearly, the first task of organization is to filter out the trivial many and identify the vital few. This principle is sometimes called the "eighty-twenty" rule.



The Pareto Principle is popular because it seems to explain many familiar paradoxes:

<i>80 % per cent of all</i>	<i>is generated by 20 % of all</i>
garbage	humanity
sales	customers
laundry	a given wardrobe
file usage	files

In general, 80% of unfocussed effort generates only 20% of results; the remaining 80% is achieved with only 20% of the effort. Almost everyone who has ever worked to a deadline knows the truth of this. By applying time management, including task planning, we can ensure that we concentrate as much of our effort as possible on the most rewarding tasks. By doing so we can achieve the greatest return possible for our investment of time.

**Reasons for Avoiding Time Management**

Despite the benefits of time management, many people avoid it because

- they do not know about it,
- they believe they are too lazy to plan,
- they are habituated to crisis management,
- they actually enjoy the excitement of meeting tight deadlines, or
- they believe time management wastes time.

The problem with crisis management and tight deadlines is that while they can be invigorating, often they can also lead to high levels of stress, a disrupted private life, and tiredness. They can even cause the failure of projects, terms, and whole academic years. We may think we perform at our best during crises, but in fact we only perform well *considering the circumstances*. Choosing to work in such situations is a form of self-handicapping; we limit our possible achievement by creating an impossible situation. Obviously, any result better than failure is therefore a triumph, and actual failure can be blamed on the difficult circumstances. Our egos are protected. One step crucial to effective time management is the abandoning of this way of shielding self-esteem.

### **Applying Active Time Management**

Active time management gives you control. While efficiency is essential—all students should master efficient reading, writing, and study skills—most people benefit immensely from a specific program designed to analyze and manage time use. Most plans involve four chief steps:

- I. assessing your use of time,
- II. determining the total time available for all tasks,
- III. using the appropriate scheduling tools to apportion time,
- IV. carefully maintaining the time management tool you use.

#### **I. Assessing Your Use of Time**

Memory is a very poor guide when it comes to assessing how you spend your day; forgetting time spent talking to friends, making coffee, doing the laundry, or eating lunch is all too easy. People notice what *matters* to them; when they engage in familiar or non-productive activities, they may simply not register these as events—but time moves on, all the same. Alertness is also a factor: fatigue and boredom can reduce awareness of the passage of time.

Energy levels vary during the day. Most people know that at certain times they are not especially effective; many people describe themselves as "night owls" or "morning people" and accept their cycle of alertness as an unchangeable characteristic. Some of the ebb and flow of alertness can be controlled; indeed, the development of safe, cheap, convenient lighting has already revolutionized the human cycle of activity. In fact, lighting and entertainment devices have seriously disrupted sleep patterns, in many cases increasing the proportion of the day during which people are inefficient (or dangerous). Even those who are careful about sleep and nutrition, will experience variations in

efficiency—and in their awareness of the passage of time. Unavoidable fluctuations in blood sugar levels, fatigue, routine distractions, stress, discomfort, or combinations of these factors will cause variations in energy and concentration. All of this makes us poor judges of how we use our time and increases the risk of *losing* time.

The answer is an *activity log*: logging your movements and actions forces you to concentrate on your use of time. The exercise is simple: without modifying your behaviour, note the things you do from the moment you get up (you may use the attached weekly planner sheet). Every five or six hours, describe your activities (checking or answering e-mail, dealing with instructors or friends, socializing, or collecting printouts). As well as noting activities, note how you feel: stimulated, bored, tired, or energetic. After several days, analyze your log. You may be alarmed to see the length of time you spend in essentially non-productive (non-academic) activities. You will probably find that you are energetic in some parts of the day, and flat in other parts. Much of this variation can be controlled by adjusting the timing of breaks for food and rest, and by the quality of your night-time sleep. The activity log gives you a basis for experimenting with these variables as well as direct information about how you respond to assignments, classes, and other academic work. Knowing your use of time is the first step in establishing an effective personal scheduling system. Keep your limitations in mind: California psychologist Robert Kriegel (author of *How to Succeed in Business Without Working So Damn Hard*) suggests that people work at peak-performance levels for only five or six hours a day.

## II. Determining the Time Available

Time is limited. Between the first day of a university term and the date of the final examination lie a set number of hours, usually no more than 2400: only half of these, at most, may be used for work. Calculating your available time is instructive: try it now.

1. start with the total number of hours in the term;
2. subtract the number of hours you will spend commuting, sleeping, eating, and cleaning;
3. subtract the hours that will be spent in classes, labs, workouts, practices, rehearsals, jobs, family responsibilities, and other unavoidable activities;
4. subtract ten per cent of what is left (for sickness and unexpected interruptions);
5. determine the number of hours you will probably spend in additional recreational activities (be as accurate as you can; you will later compare this estimate with the figure you obtain from your activity log);

The only way to increase the time available for any activity is to manage time more efficiently.

### III. Using Schedules

Schedules are the basic time management tool. Although creating and maintaining them *takes* time, the cost is justified for these reasons:

- they provide a trigger: a fixed, external stimulus to set you in motion;
- they control *selective memory*, forcing you to remember the tasks you dislike and might avoid;
- they provide practical boundaries to study sessions. These are important; there is no absolute limit on the amount of time a subject can occupy;
- they allow you to organize *cumulative reviews* ; this is the most efficient way of learning, far surpassing "cramming" in its effects;
- they protect you from stressful surprises, such as overdue projects and unexpected tests;
- they encourage adequate relaxation by including regular but not excessive rest periods;
- they promote health by securing blocks of time for physical activity;
- they offer general peace of mind. A well-planned schedule ensures that you are in control of your life and that all your work will get done.

All of these benefits depend upon regular, careful maintenance of and adherence to your schedule. *You must learn to treat items on your schedule with the same respect you accord external events, such as examinations—and you must insist that others respect your schedule as well.* This is the greatest single challenge in time management.

#### Types of Schedules

Most people find four types of schedules useful: yearly, monthly, weekly, and daily.

##### 1. Yearly

Not everyone needs a long-range planning schedule, but most will benefit from at least a general yearly outline. Long-range schedules are often included with other formats, such as a daily appointment book.

## 2. Monthly

A large monthly calendar with blocks of space for each date provides an overview of upcoming events: tests, assignments, and appointments. This information ensures that special and periodic events are taken into account. Erasable wall calendars are especially useful, because events tend to move and change shape at this level.

## 3. Weekly

A weekly study schedule establishes basic patterns of behaviour within a compact range, and helps build regular habits. Student schedules often follow a weekly cycle. The following guidelines are useful in establishing a weekly schedule:

- Study difficult subjects first. Begin with the most challenging tasks; remember that new or difficult work is much harder to undertake once you are tired.
- Leave the easiest, most mechanical tasks for last. These require less intense effort, and they can be part of your transition to relaxation.
- Study a subject shortly before or after class time. If you do not have time for a full study session, try to find at least a few minutes of preparation time before each lecture; you will remember more if you understand the material. The best time to review class notes is immediately after each lecture.
- Try to schedule a short break between study sessions on different subjects. You may need time to reorient your thinking before you begin a new topic with different demands.
- Arrange study time in substantial blocks. Research shows that the most efficient unit for study is the 60-minute block, ten minutes of which are reserved for relaxation.
- Avoid scheduling several successive hours of study for the same subject. You learn more by arranging several sessions spaced throughout the week than by attempting a single, marathon event.
- Schedule study for periods when you will be alert and motivated. If you are out of practice, you may have to work up to a solid weekly routine.

- Include time for physical recreation in your plan. You cannot study if you are not well and active.
- As a rough guide, allow two hours of study time for each hour of class. Obviously, this means that a full-time student taking six courses per term faces about fifty-four hours of academic work per week.
- Medical evidence suggests that the average adult needs eight hours of sleep each night. Take this seriously; sacrificing sleep for *any* activity is a mistake.
- Take time for good, balanced meals. Coffee and high-fat snacks will leave you exhausted—or worse, ill—when you most need health and energy. Schedule time for eating.
- Work takes longer than you expect. When you arrange your schedule, always *double* the amount of time you expect a project take. If the project is of an unfamiliar type, *triple* your best estimate of the time required.
- Do not overlook small blocks of time. Twenty minutes might not be suitable for profound study or serious work on a report or essay, but it is perfect for reviewing notes before class, checking a reference at the library, or making a fast survey of a textbook or article. Use the small blocks of time efficiently!
- Build in some degree of flexibility. If you do not, you will be unable to respond to extra demands, whether personal or academic.

#### 4. Daily Schedule/"To Do" List

You may maintain a day-book listing appointments and calls; a "to do" list of urgent tasks is especially useful. You can keep this in a small notebook or file card that you always carry. The list is a constant reminder and it provides immediate satisfaction as you cross off each item you accomplish.

#### IV. Maintaining Your Schedule

Although you can never increase the total amount of time, you can increase the time available for work by efficient, careful scheduling. None of this will work unless you maintain your tools, keeping your schedules up to date and recognizing major changes in your work patterns. Time management is a dynamic activity: few of us have the luxury of a perfectly fixed and regular schedule. Develop, maintain, and above all respond to your personal scheduling tools. Your ability to manage time is a crucial skill.

**Weekly Schedule**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>	<b>Sat</b>	<b>Sun</b>
<b>7:30</b>							
<b>8:30</b>							
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