Overcoming Obstacles to Time Management


Over-scheduling

- Try the time estimates and time monitoring exercises to get an accurate gauge of where your time is going.
- Review your priorities. People frequently get caught doing lower priority tasks in place of more important things (do you really need to clean your room today?).
- Frequently ask yourself, “What is the best use of my time right now?”

Over-accessibility

- Everybody in Washington needs a personal assistant to screen their calls! How might you regulate traffic? Don’t answer the phone, close the door, use a “do not disturb” sign?
- Check your motivation: Are you trying to be all things to all people? Trying to be liked? Afraid to be disliked? What are your priorities? What is important?
- Try assertive communication: “I’d really like to go out with you tonight (or talk right now), but I really have to do the laundry (something else.)”

Tyranny of the urgent

- A ringing phone demands attention; so does a big test tomorrow. Both are urgent. Which is more important?
- Constantly running up against urgent tasks suggests that you may be having trouble budgeting your time, trouble identifying priorities, or suffering from procrastination issues.
- Delegate or ignore less important but urgent tasks.
- Truly important tasks require a time line from the due date, working back to the start, with a breakdown of sub-tasks. This helps to identify the “last minute” for each stage, so you can meet your overall project deadline. Try making this type of time line and budget extra time for unforeseen complications.
**Distractibility**

- The beacon of attention (narrow, precise, focused, concentrated) requires enormous energy to sustain. It’s easier to let your mind wander, drift, or react to a variety of stimuli.

- Try building concentration with short, focused bursts of attention and effort. A good, ten-minute effort, with short-term goals, can be very productive. (Short, intensive efforts help with boredom too!)

- Check your anxiety level. Is your distractibility rooted in fear of failure? See the tense and nervous section of this site.

- Check your frustration tolerance. Are you struggling with a difficult task and need more time to learn? Try pacing yourself and get a tutor if necessary.

**Procrastination**

- Everybody procrastinates at one time or another, over one thing or another... The trick is knowing what you procrastinate over, how, and why. What do you procrastinate over the most? What time of day do you find yourself procrastinating? What is your favorite mode of procrastination? (TV, Internet, e-mail, housekeeping, etc.)

- Some things are easily put off because of their general insignificance or low relative value. Others are put off because of your own uncertainty about what to do or how to do it. Some are put off because they’re extremely important or particularly difficult. Check your motivation.

- Some people fear failure because of the importance or difficulty of the task. Some fear success, because success leads to more demands. Some people resent authority and resist compliance out of hostility. Some people are perfectionists and refuse to try if they are not guaranteed a perfect outcome. Some have low frustration tolerance and don’t want to be bothered. And finally, some people are just depressed and have little energy for anybody or anything. Which of these sounds like you?

- If procrastination has become a serious problem for you, visit the Counseling Center.

**Fear of failure**

- “Oh my god, oh my god! If I flunk this test, my parents will kill me! I’ll never graduate! I’ll never get a job! I’ll be forced to drop out! I’ll end up on the street! My whole life will be ruined!!!” Sound like you?
• Irrational “self-talk”, that critical voice in your head, exaggerates stress, increases or decreases motivation, increases or decreases action, disrupts attention and concentration, decreases effectiveness, and ultimately provides an excuse for poor performance. What are you telling yourself? Does it motivate you or just make you anxious?

• Replace irrational self-talk with positive/realistic statements: “It’s just a test. I know a fair amount of this material, I’ll do OK, and besides, the test score may or may not measure the things that I learned in this class. This information may or may not contribute to my career performance. The only person that I have to satisfy truly is myself. Did I honestly make the effort that I wanted to make in this course? What can I do differently for the next time?

Perfectionism

• If at first you don’t succeed, why bother?

• Like other psychological obstacles to effective time management, perfectionism serves to inhibit action, avoid complications, escape anxiety, and ultimately provides an excuse for poor performance. (“I didn’t really try, so it’s not a fair indicator of my ability.”) It reflects all-or-none thinking: anything less than an “A” feels like an “F”, so why bother?

• Check the underlying motivation for your perfectionism: Do any of the above apply to you? Are you trying to avoid action because of uncertainty or fear?

• Check the relative value of what you are trying to do. Some things are important enough to be done perfectly, but most might be satisfied with a “good enough” effort.

Depression

• Normal, everyday depression can last from a few hours to a few days. We’ve all felt it: being down or sad over a disappointment, failure, or loss. These feelings are a normal part of being human. But prolonged, persistent, negative mood which begins to color and interfere with your health, social well-being, and academic success, may need some sort of intervention/assistance or professional help.

• Causes of Depression
  o Significant loss, disappointment, or failure. Loss of control over the environment or unrealistic expectations. Negative thinking about yourself or your life.
• Emotional Symptoms
  o Sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, mood swings, irritability, helplessness/hopelessness

• Physical Symptoms
  o Sleeping too much or too little, eating too much or too little, significant weight gain or loss, fatigue, low energy, loss of social/sexual pleasure

• Behavioral Symptoms
  o Crying easily, withdrawal, quick temper, loss of interest in one’s appearance, loss of interest in favorite activities or entertainments, increased use of alcohol or drugs

• Thoughts and Perceptual Symptoms
  o Feelings of failure, self-criticism, helplessness, hopelessness, resentment, excessive blaming of oneself or others, and pessimism about the future

• Overcoming Depression
  o The problem and the paradox of depression is that it takes energy and effort to overcome it. Be aware of the causes of your depression, check your self-statements and replace them with positive, realistic assessments. Get active socially and ask friends or roommates to help keep you on track. Eat well and cut back on caffeine, alcohol, and sugar. Get some exercise. Volunteer or help someone else. Reawaken your interests and entertainments. Make a progress chart with small, reasonable goals and congratulate/reward yourself for your efforts. Be realistic about your skills, abilities and expectations; accept that you are different from others in this regard and may require a longer learning period. Get a coach or professional help, such as making an appointment at the Counseling Center.