

# 2

## Mastering Time

### In a World of Infinite Choices, Making the Right Ones

#### Questions I Would Like to Be Able to Answer

**2.1 Scheduling Your Study Time: How to Use a Planner**

Question: *How do I set daily tasks from my life goals?*

**2.2 Making a Daily To-Do List & Study Plan: The Secret of Time Management**

Question: *What kinds of things should appear on a daily to-do list, and how do I make a study plan?*

**2.3 Smartphones, Multitasking, & “Fear of Missing Out”**

Question: *Why do I think I need my phone so much—and what can I do about it?*

**2.4 Fighting Procrastination & Other Distractions**

Question: *What are some other time wasters I need to be aware of?*

### ■ What Are the Killer Time Wasters?

The most essential skill in college is *being able to manage your time*. That means dealing with the killer time wasters:

- **Addictive technology and multitasking:** *“I’d rather have a broken bone than a broken phone.”* Students who shift focus from one task to another—writing a paper AND watching television AND texting friends—are less able to organize information and do other serious work.
  - **Procrastination:** *“I’m SO not into doing schoolwork.”* Procrastination—putting things off intentionally and habitually—can result when your prospective task is *boring, long, or difficult*. How will you deal with this problem?
  - **Partying:** *“All work and no play—seriously?”* Partying (drinking and using drugs) may provide temporary relief from college stress, but it also results in missing class, being late on assignments, and failing tests.
  - **Chilling with friends:** *“I just can’t say no.”* It’s tempting to skip schoolwork to socialize with or help out people you know. So, what are you going to do?
  - **Mindless reading and note-taking:** *“It sure feels like I’m learning.”* Reading a textbook by mindlessly highlighting sentences or taking lecture notes by typing everything you hear is not the same as learning. Focus and attention are everything.
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## 2.1 Scheduling Your Study Time: How to Use a Planner

**QUESTION:** How do I set daily study tasks from my life goals?

### The Big Picture

Time management begins with selecting a planner and filling it out with all your school-term commitments and weekly appointments and due dates—including start dates for each assignment and test preparation.

How much studying is a college student supposed to do? The general advice given on most campuses is . . .

*students are expected to devote at least 2 hours of study for every hour they're in class.*

“Study” means doing reading assignments, reviewing class notes, writing papers, and other work outside of class—that is, *homework*.

Some courses may require less than 2 hours of study for every hour of class, but some might require more—perhaps 3 or 4 hours of study per hour in class.

### Ticket To Success

#### What Does a “Full Course Load” Mean?

Sixteen hours of class time per week (about four or five courses) is considered a standard full-time course load in college. If you add 32 hours of study time to those 16 hours of class time, then *at least* 48 hours a week should be devoted to schoolwork.

This means your college work *is more than a 40-hours-a-week full-time job!*

*(continued)*

“Oh, no!” you may say. “So where’s the time for relaxation and fun?” Consider, though, that there are 168 hours in a week, with 56 or so hours devoted to sleeping. Thus, most students usually find time enough left over for them to have fun and be with their friends.

But let’s be honest. Are you commuting long distances? Are you working as well as studying? Are you on an athletic scholarship? Are you an adult returning student with family responsibilities? Then you simply won’t have as much time now for fun and relaxation as you may have had in the past.

The bottom line is this: You’re hoping that, as a result of your college efforts, there’ll be more time for play later. It all comes back to your motivation, as we explained in Chapter 1. College requires deferred gratification—making some sacrifices now for increased happiness in the future.

The best way to translate your life goals into daily study time is by using a ***planner***—a book, calendar, or software for recording appointments and things to be done.

Planners are of several types:

- Paper calendars and appointment books
- Digital calendars on smartphones, tablets, and laptops
- Web-based calendars, organizers, and schedulers

More and more calendaring tasks are performed on mobile devices, which have the advantages of . . .

- more room for entries;
- alarm reminders, to signal start and end of study sessions or breaks;
- calendars on phone and computers can be linked;
- meeting times, such as for a study group, can be set.

However, some people like paper planners. One person said he switched back to paper calendars after having been “inundated with notifications, beeps, alerts, and messages” from his smartphone.<sup>1</sup>

One paper method is the Bullet Journal® approach, described below.<sup>2</sup> An example of a good smartphone app is My Study Life.<sup>3</sup>

### Ticket To Success

## Two Planners: The Bullet Journal & My Study Life

- **The Bullet Journal.** The distinctive feature of this paper planner is that it requires you to go back, look at, and rewrite tasks over and over until you accomplish or abandon them. In a notebook, you write a to-do list of tasks, each represented by a dot. When completed, the dot is turned into an x; if not completed, it becomes a >, which means it's moved to a new to-do list. (See the video at <https://bvtlab.com/6egw7>)
- **My Study Life.** Free with both iOS and Android, the My Study Life app is a smart calendar that can keep track of class and assignment schedules, which can be shared with classmates or teachers. (See <https://www.mystudylife.com>)

### Setting Up Your Planner: What Are Your Commitments?

A planner helps you schedule *everything you need to do*, growing out of the goals you set for yourself in Chapter 1. Based on the lineup of courses you developed for the next few school terms, your planner should indicate all your . . .

- school-term commitments,
- weekly appointments, and
- due dates.

From these, you will develop to-do lists with your daily reminders and priorities.

## Scheduling Your Commitments: What to Do in Your First Week

Your planner should cover all the weeks in the school term—10-week quarter or 15-week semester—and have enough space to allow you to fill it with all your due dates and appointments. It's crucial you take the time—now, during the first week of the quarter or semester—to plan your study strategy for the rest of the term. And that includes planning the dates you will *start* assignments and *start* studying for tests.

Some colleges offer their own calendars or planners listing specific dates for their schools—vacation days, the last day to drop a class, final exam days, and the like.

During your first week of classes, you should . . .

- **Copy school calendar dates.** First, go through your institution's school calendar and copy all your school holidays, registration dates, and deadlines for meeting various academic requirements into your planner.
- **Enter class days and times.** Add the days and times of your lectures, discussion groups, labs, or whatever.
- **Enter dates for reading assignments, test dates, and term paper or project due dates.** From each of your instructors on the first day of class, obtain the syllabus—the course outline or course information sheet, which tells you test dates and term paper or project due dates. From the syllabus, copy all the reading assignment due dates, quiz and exam dates, and assignment due dates for term papers or projects. (Use red to mark critical dates such as test dates.)
- **Enter other important dates.** Add other important information—job hours, tutoring appointments, group study times, medical visits, volunteer activities, birthdays, concerts, sports events, and family commitments.

- **Post instructor office hours.** Find the office days and hours (usually listed in the syllabus) each instructor is available to see students and post them in a prominent place, such as the inside front cover of your planner.

## Planning When to Start Assignments & Begin Studying for Tests

The next step is crucial. After putting all the preceding information in your planner, you need to plan . . .

- *WHEN* you will start each assignment and
- *WHEN* you will begin studying for each test.

Having these start dates in your planner will give you time to do quality work—to avoid having to stay up all night to do a paper or prepare for a test. Some guidelines for how much time to schedule are shown below.

### Ticket To Success

#### Putting Dates on the Calendar: How Much Time Do I Need for Different Schoolwork?

Some suggestions:

- **Reading assignments.** Start *1–3 days* before the due date.
- **Short papers (3–5 pages) and projects.** Start *5–14 days* before the due date.
- **Long papers (10–20 pages) and projects.** Start *14–70 days* before the due date. *NOTE: That's 2–10 weeks, depending on the subject.*
- **Short quizzes.** Start studying *1–2 days* before the quiz.
- **Midterms.** Start studying *3 days* before the test.
- **Finals.** Start studying *5 days* before the test.

*At minimum*, the weekly plan should include those activities that happen at fixed, predictable times. These are your classes, work, regularly scheduled student or family activities—and your regularly scheduled study times. A bare-bones example of a day from a planner appears below. Note the times blocked out for studying.

### Planner example: one day

	MONDAY
7 a.m.	
8	Breakfast
9	English class
10	Psychology class
11	Math prof., office hours, Century Hall, Rm 213
12 noon	Lunch
1 p.m.	Biology lab
2	Study
3	Study
4	Work
5	Work
6	Dinner (call Mom)
7	Study
8	Study
9	Study
10	Make to-do list for next day
11	TV/bedtime

**NOTE:** If you're a part-time student, a commuter, a single parent, or any other kind of nontraditional student, your planning may be a little more complex. For instance, you may have to discuss with a spouse or a child how you're going to balance your school obligations with your family obligations and ask for their support so they won't inadvertently interfere with your program.



## 2.2 Making a Daily To-Do List & Study Plan: The Secret of Time Management

**QUESTION:** What kinds of things should appear on a daily to-do list, and how do I make a study plan?

### The Big Picture

Getting things done means creating a daily to-do list, which (1) reminds you of the tasks you need to do and (2) prioritizes those tasks. When used with your planner for the day, this becomes the basis for a study plan.

By now, your planner is nearly completely filled up—with class times, reading assignments, academic start dates and due dates, appointments, work hours, practice times, and social and family commitments.

From time to time, you will want to add new obligations, such as sports practice, music rehearsals, study group meeting, or a visit with a sick friend.

### Key to Getting Essential Work Done: The To-Do List

Every evening, when you're checking your last text messages or email, you should refer to your planner and make up your ***to-do list***, the list of tasks you need to do the next day. The to-do list can be on a notepad, a 3 x 5 index card, or on the calendar on your smartphone or tablet.

The main purposes of the to-do list are to . . .

- *remind* you of the tasks you need to do and
- *prioritize* those tasks.

### What Goes on the To-Do List?

Your to-do list should show the day's classes, meal times, travel times, extracurricular activities, exercise times, and

any other appointments. It will also show new items and unfinished tasks from the day before.

However, the most important thing your to-do list does is . . .

*show your study tasks and set priorities for that day.*

Feel free to add comments, exclamation points, stars, and so on to help personalize your list.

An example of a to-do list is as follows.

### To-do list example: one day

MONDAY 9/22
1. *Priority: Start study for 9/25 quiz in English!!!
2. **Priority: Start 10-page psych paper due 10/11!!
3. ***Read bio text Ch. 6. ( <i>Behind! Get it done!</i> )
4. Read psych text pp. 30–60. ( <i>Fun subject—got an A going.</i> )
5. Ask math prof. to explain problem set 14.10.
6. Sign up at gym.
7. Get student commuter card.
8. Send J. D. birthday card.

### The Study Plan: Times & Places for Studying

The ***study plan*** outlines the study times, locations, and learning goals for your study sessions that day. This happens by taking your study tasks from your to-do list and putting them into your planner, which shows which times you have designated as study times.

You should also indicate the locations at which you will be studying since they may be affected by commuting and other factors. These need not be the same dedicated study areas. As Benedict Carey writes in *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth about When, Where, and Why It Happens*, scientists have found “we work more effectively . . . when we continually alter our study routines and abandon any ‘dedicated space’ in favor of varied locations.”<sup>4</sup>

The elements of a study plan—times, assignments, and locations—are shown highlighted in the following example.

## Study plan example: one day

	MONDAY
7 a.m.	
8	Breakfast
9	English class
10	Psychology class
11	Math prof., office hours, Century Hall, Rm 213
12 noon	Lunch
1 p.m.	Biology lab
2	Study: Start research for psych paper due 10/1 (library)
3	Study: Read psych text pp. 30–60 (student union)
4	Work
5	Work
6	Dinner (call Mom)
7	Study: Read bio text Ch. 6 (dorm room)
8	Study
9	Study: Start study for 9/25 English quiz (common room)
10	Make to-do list for next day
11	TV/bedtime

### Suggestions for Dealing with Daily Tasks

When making up your daily to-do list, you can always make some rough notes, then list activities in order of importance.

The best advice is the following:

- **Prioritize—“What tasks are truly important?”**  
Put the most important study tasks first, whether studying for a quiz, completing a reading assignment, or starting research on a paper. Rank the first three tasks you must do in order of their importance: #1, #2, #3 or \*, \*\*, \*\*\*. And do those tasks first.

- **Use your prime study time—“When is my energy level highest?”** Each of us has a different energy cycle.<sup>5</sup> The trick is to use your hours of best performance—your prime study time—to work on the heaviest academic demands. For example, if your energy level is high in the morning, you should schedule your most difficult work to do before noon.
- **Break complex tasks into chunks—“Can this assignment be done over several days?”** For example, if you’re writing a term paper, you might determine the topic on Monday, do early research on Tuesday, create an outline on Wednesday, start the writing on Thursday, and so on. Studying for midterm and final exams should also be spread over 3–5 days.
- **Take breaks—“How many minutes of break time are best?”** You should build breaks into your study sessions. Set a kitchen timer or smartphone alarm for a 25-minute stretch of focused work, followed by a small reward and brief break.<sup>6</sup> Or try some of the other times shown below. The optimum approach, scientists have determined, is to work for 52 minutes, then unplug for 17.<sup>7</sup> The maximum study time without a break is probably 90–120 minutes.<sup>8</sup> (*NOTE:* Research finds that standing up every 30 minutes may slow development of life-shortening diseases.<sup>9</sup>)

### Sample study sessions and break times

Suggested study time	Suggested break time
25 minutes	5 minutes
45 minutes	10 minutes
<i>Optimum:</i> 52 minutes	17 minutes
80–90 minutes	30 minutes
<i>Maximum:</i> 120 minutes	40 minutes

- **Build in rewards—“What will make me feel good about finishing my work?”** You might build rewards into your to-do list to give yourself some positive reinforcement for finishing your tasks. Examples:

checking texts and email (try not to do this *while* studying—it can add up to a 20-minute diversion before you know it), visiting websites, grabbing a snack, watching TV, taking a walk, getting exercise, visiting a friend, playing your guitar. Big rewards help too: dinner with friends, going out, taking a trip.

- **Use downtime to be productive—“How can I use travel time, weekends, and holidays for easier assignments?”** Lesser tasks, such as doing reading assignments, studying word lists, and the like, can often be handled during downtime—when you’re commuting or traveling or during weekends, holidays, and vacations.
- **Stay flexible—“How sacred is the to-do list? How can I adjust it?”** No to-do list is engraved in stone. There will be times when you’ll need to switch activities around (for example, making an office-hours appointment with an instructor for a different time because he or she is not available). That, of course, is just the way life is.



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## 2.3 Smartphones, Multitasking, & “Fear of Missing Out”

**QUESTION:** Why do I think I need my phone so much—and what can I do about it?

### The Big Picture

One of the biggest time wasters is overuse of smartphones and tablets, which leads people to do a lot of multitasking, or task switching, which wears out the brain and makes learners more tired. The constant checking of smartphone texts and social media is fueled by impatience, boredom, and fear of missing out (FOMO), but such “phone addiction” can be broken.

How much do you use your cell phone or smartphone?  
More than 4 hours a day?

That’s the average. (That’s more than 3 weeks a year, or 3.9 years of your lifetime, that you’re staring at a smartphone screen.)

About an hour is spent on texting, another hour on phone calls, more than an hour on social media (YouTube™, Facebook®, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter®), and under half an hour on email.

Use of mobile phones and tablets now represents about 65% of total digital media consumption, with adults of college age (18–24) spending more time on mobile devices than older people do.

How does this affect your ability to succeed in college?

### Multitasking: Road to Shallow Learning

Smartphones (and tablets) seem to lead to a lot of multitasking. **Multitasking is shifting focus from one task to another in rapid succession**, such as trying to write a paper while texting friends and while watching TV. Multitasking “gives the illusion that we’re simultaneously tasking, but

we're really not," says a psychiatrist. "It's like playing tennis with three balls."<sup>12</sup>

When students constantly split their time between tasks, assignments take longer. Task switching wears out the brain and makes learners more tired. Information learned is often quickly forgotten. "Multitasking while doing academic work," says a brain expert, "leads to spottier, shallower, less flexible learning."<sup>13</sup>

In fact, heavy multitaskers—those who think they can focus like laser beams whenever they want—have been found to be terrible at organizing information, discerning significance, and similar tasks. They "are suckers for irrelevancy," one sociologist says. "Everything distracts them." One study found that people who are interrupted by technology score 20% lower on a standard cognition test.<sup>15</sup>

### **Fear of Missing Out**

Multitasking occurs because we're impatient or bored or don't want to do the work at hand. Constantly checking texts and Facebook and other social media is also driven by FOMO—***fear of missing out***, or the fear that other people may be having rewarding experiences from which you are absent.<sup>16</sup>

FOMO leads people to constantly check social media, such as right after they wake up, during meals, and right before going to sleep. Such people are often unhappily comparing themselves to other people—but continually checking social media makes the unhappiness worse.<sup>17</sup>

Social media are not harmless. "The ability to concentrate without distraction on hard tasks is becoming increasingly valuable in an increasingly complicated economy," says one computer scientist. "Social media weakens this skill because it's engineered to be addictive."<sup>18</sup>

If you think you might be overly involved with your smartphone, see the *Ticket To Success* box that follows.<sup>19</sup> We describe some more serious problems with smartphones in Chapter 5.

### Smartphone Addiction: How to Spot It, How to Fight It

What's your relationship with your smartphone?

Do you reach for it first thing in the morning and last thing at night? Are you anxious when it's low on battery power or out of reach? Can you put it down for 2 hours and not look at it? Do you use it when you're bored or depressed? Have you checked it at least once while reading this chapter?

If so, maybe you have smartphone addiction. A lot of this is "self-induced anxiety," says psychology professor Larry Rosen. He and others offer the following suggestions on what to do about it:

- **Tell everyone you're reducing your phone use.** Wean yourself off your phone by making a public statement that you're going to do so.
- **Warn your friends.** Tell your friends and parents they shouldn't take it personally when you don't respond right away—that they should no longer expect you to be on all the time.
- **Reduce your use gradually.** Announce to the world you will check your phone only once every half hour, when you'll then take a minute or so to text back or return calls. Later make this every hour, then every 2 hours.
- **Alternatively, set certain times to check your phone.** Do a 5-minute sweep of your messages before sitting down to do your work, then turn off and hide your phone for the next hour, until you take a break. Turn your phone off an hour before bedtime and leave it off overnight. Turn it off during meals and during class time.
- **Engage in real human contact.** Work on having true human connections, not just by "liking" your friend's status but by meeting for coffee.



## 2.4 Fighting Procrastination & Other Distractions

**QUESTION: What are some other time wasters I need to be aware of?**

### The Big Picture

Some principal ways students can waste time are by putting things off (procrastination), partying (drinking or taking drugs), watching too much TV or spending too much time playing videogames, not saying no to the social demands of friends, and using inefficient study techniques.

College is hard work, but all around you are all kinds of distractions and temptations that can hurt your efforts. Here are some of them.

### Procrastination: Putting Things Off

**Procrastination** is defined as **putting off things intentionally and habitually**. There are six styles of procrastinators, according to psychologist Linda Sapadin: perfectionists, dreamers, worriers, crisis-makers, defiers, and overdoers.<sup>20</sup> Such procrastinators need to understand the emotional problems that are hobbling them, then work to change the thinking behind them. Examples:

- **The perfectionist**—“**I can’t get it right!**” So concerned with being unable to meet high expectations, the perfectionist never finishes—and sometimes never starts. Solution: Set realistic (not idealistic) goals before starting and focus on making progress.
- **The dreamer**—“**I have a fabulous idea, if only I could get it done.**” Dreamers are great at planning but frustrated by the reality of doing the hard work. Solution: Try turning the dreams into concrete goals and spend time working on them regularly.

- **The worrier**—“**I can’t decide the best way to do this.**” Worriers are fearful of the unfamiliar, resist change, and avoid making decisions. Solution: Don’t catastrophize, don’t let negative statements creep into your thinking, and break bigger projects into smaller segments.
- **The crisis-maker**—“**I can’t seem to focus unless I have a tight deadline!**” Crisis-makers think they work best under pressure and get off on the last-minute adrenaline rush. Solution: Try to see tasks as opportunities, reward yourself for getting started earlier, and get your adrenaline from other activities, such as sports.
- **The defier**—“**I’m not going to have my life ruled by these artificial due dates!**” Defiers rebel against external deadlines. Solution: Channel your rebellious nature into a cause you believe in and set aside time to do the things you enjoy.
- **The overdoer**—“**Too much! I’m swamped!**” Overdoers can’t say no and take on too much. Solution: Prioritize and make academic success more important than trying to make others happy.

### Partying: Drinking & Doing Drugs

On some campuses, *partying* (getting drunk or high) starts on Thursday night and continues through the weekend—unless, perhaps, one has classes on Friday.<sup>21</sup>

People in general—and college students in particular—tend to equate drinking alcohol with relaxation, good times, fellowship, and the easing of pain and problems. However, about one in four students report negative academic consequences from drinking: missing class, falling behind on assignments, doing poorly on exams or papers, and getting lower grades overall.<sup>22</sup>

## Bingeing on TV or Videogames

Young people of college age (18–24) watch over 22 hours a week of television.<sup>23</sup> (Watching 3 hours a day over time leads to poor performance in mental acuity over time.<sup>24</sup>)

Of incoming first-year men, 1 in 10 said they play more than 10 hours of videogames a week (but only 1 in 50 women said the same thing).<sup>25</sup>

## Nonstop Socializing: Not Saying No to Friends

As with the overdoer kind of procrastinator (see above), some students are just unable to say “No” to hanging out with their friends instead of doing their schoolwork. It’s your personal responsibility, however, to make it clear that school comes first.

## False Learning Shortcuts: Techniques That Don’t Work

Some students go through the motions of learning without actually learning. Two supposed “shortcuts” that may seem to save time but don’t really work are . . .

- **Reading books by highlighting and underlining.** Highlighting or underlining are ineffective learning strategies for reading your textbooks and other materials. Indeed, some research shows that highlighting can even *get in the way* of learning.<sup>27</sup>
- **Taking lecture notes by typing.** Students who take notes on their laptops generally perform less well than students who take handwritten notes in longhand, who appear to learn better, retain information longer, and more readily grasp new ideas.<sup>28</sup>

We show the best ways of reading and note-taking later.