

FIFTEEN WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF NOW

The following 15 time management techniques are about when to study, where to study, and how to handle the rest of the world. As you read, underline, circle, or otherwise note the suggestions you think you can use. Pick two or three techniques to use now. When they become habits and you do them automatically, come back to this article and pick a couple more.

When to Study

1. *Plan two hours study time for every hour you spend in class.* If you are taking 15 credit hours, plan to spend 30 hours per week studying. The benefits of following this rule will be apparent at exam time.
2. *Study difficult (or boring) subjects first.* Most of us tend to do what we like first, yet the courses we find most difficult often require the most creative energy. Save the subjects you enjoy for later.
3. *Avoid scheduling marathon study sessions.* When possible, study in shorter sessions. Three three-hour sessions are far more productive for most people than one nine-hour session. When you do study in long sessions, take a planned break every hour. If you must study in a large block of time, work on several subjects and avoid studying similar subjects back to back.
4. *Be aware of your best time of day.* Many people learn best in daylight hours. Observe yourself, and if this is true for you, schedule study time for your most difficult subjects when the sun is up.
5. *Use waiting time.* Five minutes waiting for a bus, 20 minutes waiting for the dentist, 10 minutes between classes - waiting time adds up fast. Have short study tasks ready to do during these times.

Where to Study

6. *Use a regular study area.* Your body knows where you are. When you use the same place to study, day after day, your body becomes trained. When you arrive at that particular place, it will automatically sense that it's time to study. You will focus your concentration more quickly.
7. *Don't get too comfortable.* In bed, your body gets a signal. For most students, it's more likely to be, "Time to sleep," rather than, "Time to study!" Give your body a message that energy is needed. Put yourself into a situation that supports that message.
8. *Use a library.* Libraries are designed for learning. Entering a library is a signal to your body to quiet the mind and get to work.

How to Handle the Rest of the World

9. *Pay attention to your attention.* Breaks in concentration are often caused by internal interruptions; your own thoughts jumping in to tell you another story about the world. When that happens, notice the thoughts and let them go.
10. *Agree with living mates about study time.* This includes roommates, wives, husbands and kids. Make the rule clear, and be sure to follow them yourself. Make explicit agreements - even written contracts.
11. *Avoid noise distractions.* Don't study in front of the TV. Turn off the stereo. The overwhelming majority of research indicates that silence is the best form of music for study.

12. *Notice how others misuse your time.* Ask yourself if there are certain friends or relatives who consistently interrupt your study time. If avoiding the interrupter is impractical, send a clear message. A gentle reminder should do.
13. *Get off the phone.* You don't have to be a telephone victim. If a simple, "I can't talk, I'm studying" doesn't work, use dead silence. It's a conversation killer. Or, short circuit the whole problem. You are unlikely to receive phone calls at the library.
14. *Learn to say no.* This is a valuable timesaver for students, and a valuable life skill. Others want you to succeed as a student. When you tell them that you can't comply with their request because you are busy educating yourself, 99% will understand.
15. *Hang a "do not disturb" sign on your door.* They work. Using one will relieve you of making a decision about cutting off each interruption - a timesaver in itself.

Adapted from Ellis, D. (1985). Becoming a Master Student College Survival, Inc. Rapid City, SD.

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