

Goal Setting and Time Management

Well Begun is Half Done

Some of the points below may be new to you. See how many describe your habits, and see how many you would like to explore further. There will be a discussion of each point below the list.

1. I am aware of the purpose of each task I undertake.
2. When faced with a complex task, I break it into parts and tackle one part at a time.
3. I feel a sense of accomplishment each day.
4. My goals are realistic.
5. I formulate strategies for achieving my goals.
6. When I do an assignment for school, my attention is on gaining knowledge as well as getting a good grade.
7. Staying on a schedule is easy for me.
8. I do not let interruptions distract me from completing my tasks.
9. I always hand in assignments on time.
10. I can alter my plans midstream if things are not working out as expected.
11. I have enough time in the day for rest and relaxation.

Discussion

All of the points above relate to goal setting and efficient time management. There will be a basic consistency in the related advice below: staying rested and healthy, keeping things simple, and going for depth of comprehension.

Being Aware of My Purpose: Why am I Doing This?

This is an important question to ask ourselves. If we are very clear on the purpose for listening to a lecture, or doing a homework or lab assignment, or writing an essay or a paper, it is easier to keep our focus. If we find ourselves deviating from our purpose, we can get ourselves back on track by asking ourselves every once in a while: “Is this moving me forward toward my goal?” Having the purpose written on a card and posted somewhere visible as we are working works as a good reminder aid.

Breaking Tasks into Parts: Staying Simple

This works well for homework assignments, essays and papers, or studying for quizzes and exams. For homework assignments, we can set up a timeline that documents the goals of

finishing each stage of the assignment at a particular point in time during the day. For essays and papers, we should set aside time **for research, compilation of research, first draft, receiving feedback, revision, and final revision**. And then we map out strategies for each area.

Please refer below to the sample timeline for writing a research paper. The paper would be 5–6 pages. For longer papers, the basic structure of the timeline would be the same, but there would be more days inserted to allow more time for each activity.

Sample Timeline for Writing a Research Paper

Day	Time	Goal (expressed as an action; one aims at being able to perform the action during the set time.)	Strategies for Achieving the Goal
Monday AM PM	9:45–10:15	Write or type the thesis statement for the paper.	Pick an angle that really interests me. Keep the thesis statement in view at all times.
		Complete a research plan	List possible resources and their locations.
	10:15–11:15	Survey all Internet resources on the resource list.	Bookmark sites that contain relevant information
	5-minute break		
	11:20–Noon	Gather Internet material.	Set up a document in a word processing program and copy relevant quotes from the sites and paste them into this document.
	Lunch: Noon– 1:00		
	1:00–2:00	Continue gathering Internet material.	For each pasted quote, copy and paste the URL beside the quote. [It is very important to keep track of all references right from the start.]
	5-minute break		
	2:05–3:00	Aim at finishing the bulk of the Internet research.	Toward the end of the afternoon, organize quotes in a tentative order.
		Survey other sources. Finish preliminary research.	Mark pages with Post-It Notes or small pieces of paper.
	8:00–9:10		Stop on time at 9:10 pm

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Tuesday AM	9:45–10:30	Organize the first draft.	Use an outline or a set of diagrams; whichever is visually easiest to follow.
	10:30–11:15	Start typing the first draft.	At each point in the text that will need a supportive quote, type in a number (starting at “1” and continuing). Then type the same number next to the pasted Internet quote or write it on the Post-It Note that is marking the place in a book or journal. [Not typing in the quotes right away helps us to use more of our own words and to avoid having most of the paper composed of quotes.]
PM	5-minute break		
	11:20–Noon	Continue typing the first draft.	
	Lunch: Noon–1:00		
	1:00–2:00	Continue typing the first draft.	
	5-minute break	Continue typing the first draft.	
	2:05–3:00		
	8:00–9:10	Go back and start pasting or typing in quotes.	Insert them into the paragraph using quotation marks or use block quote format for quotes that are three lines or longer. Also use the citation format that the professor requires. Make sure each quote is introduced appropriately and then explained or expanded upon right after it. Stop on time at 9:10 pm.

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Wednesday AM	9:45–10:45	Continue typing the first draft and inserting quotes as needed.	Keep up the momentum of using my own words when appropriate to do so.
	5-minute break	Continue typing the first draft and inserting quotes as needed.	
	10:50–12:15		
	Lunch 12:15 1:15	Check the logic so far.	
PM	1:15–3:00 (with a 5-minute break somewhere in the middle)	Then continue typing and inserting quotes as needed.	Make sure that the paragraphs are in the right order and that there are transition sentences at the end of each paragraph that introduce the next one.
	8:00–9:10 pm	On the same document that is being used for the Internet quotes, type up as many of the remaining quotes from other sources as I can.	
Thursday AM	9:45–10:45	Continue typing the first draft and inserting quotes	Every few paragraphs, check for logic.
	5-minute break	“ ”	
PM	10:50–12:15		
	Lunch 12:15 1:15	“ ”	
	1:15–3:00 (with a 5-minute break somewhere in the middle)		
		Finish the first draft by 9:10	

	8:00–9:10 pm		
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Friday AM	9:45	Hand in the first draft.	
Monday AM–PM	9:45 10:00–3:00 (with breaks when needed and with one hour for lunch)	After receiving the first draft back with the professor’s feedback, be ready to revise. Revise the paper.	Have all research sources at hand. Set up a conference with the professor if there are any questions. Check off each point of feedback as I respond to it in the revision.
Tuesday–Wednesday AM–PM	8:00–9:10 9:45–3:00 (with breaks when needed and with one hour for lunch)	Read over the day’s writing. Continue in the same way as Monday.	Make corrections as needed If at any time I feel stuck: take a walk and think or talk things out with the professor or a fellow classmate.
Thursday AM	8:00–9:10 Hand in the paper.	Last reading: Wednesday night	Make final corrections.

In continuing with the discussion on timing and strategies, while studying for quizzes and exams, we:

- ❖ assemble all the information we have to study
- ❖ decide how the different parts fit together and set priorities so that we give each part the right amount of attention
- ❖ study in a sequence so one part feeds logically into another. (This is discussed in more detail in the section on Preparing for and Taking Exams.)

Accomplishing Daily Goals: Am I Staying Rested and Healthy?

Accomplishing daily goals in academic situations can be easier if we maintain our sense of purpose and are clear on what keeps us rested and healthy each day. For example, preparation for class includes:

- ❖ Going to bed on time the night before
- ❖ Going to the morning group meditation program
- ❖ Eating an adequate breakfast
- ❖ Structuring a timeline for the assignment for that day
- ❖ Structuring a time for exercise

The activities may vary, but the basic idea is: take good care of ourselves. We let go of the idea that it is stressful world and we need to strain every minute to stay on top of things.

Staying Real: Protecting Our Mental and Physical Health

If a task is going to take several days, then the timeline should reflect that. We don't try to cram it all into one day. In addition to having a realistic timeframe, it is important to be aware of what will keep us alert during the time we are accomplishing our goals, and we do not mean caffeine. We're speaking of a healthy routine that keeps us active and protects our nervous systems at the same time. The routine mentioned above fits that description.

Gaining Useful Knowledge: Making it All Worthwhile

A college education is expensive. If the modern day world declares that time is money, why would we waste our time learning if the knowledge will not serve some purpose in our lives? If we set our goals in that light each day of the school year, and we put attention on achieving them, then we are using our time wisely. Otherwise why bother?

As we review our notes for the day, or read an assignment, we should regularly question ourselves: "Why is this important to know in the context of my academic course, and why is it important to know in my life?" What basic principles am I learning that are practical to know and that add depth and interest to my study?

Staying on a Schedule: A Skill that Will Serve Us All of our Lives

Routines are more natural to life than we might think. Nature is always on a routine: sunrise, sunset, four seasons, seed to tree, tree to seed, and many other examples.

Learning to stay on a routine that is in tune with nature's rhythms can culture a life-long habit that keeps us focused on the important parts of living and automatically weeds out the parts that can cause ill health and other problems.

The routine at Maharishi University of Management is based on natural cycles. Waking a little before 6:00 am is the best time to wake up feeling refreshed. Waiting until after 6:00 am can put us into another cycle that can cause drowsiness. Participating in the Research in Consciousness program around 7:00 am is the best time to culture alertness for class that begins at 9:45 am. Lunch around 12:00 noon hits just the right time for optimal digestion. Recreation at 3:15 pm stretches out the muscles that have contracted in class, and Research in Consciousness program 4:30–5:00 p.m. refreshes the mind for evening study. A light dinner is best for optimal digestion, and then study time until around 9:10 p.m. Bedtime with lights out before 10 p.m. ensures that we catch the cycle that is most conducive to easily falling asleep and sleeping well.

When we go out into the world, most of the timings can stay exactly the same, with a few adjustments for the workaday time schedule.

Interruptions, Distractions: They Don't Have to Defeat Us

First of all we can set up initial conditions that help us avoid being interrupted. The ringers on phones can be turned off, and calls can go onto answer machines or voice mail. We can pick quiet places to study. If we go to the library, we can sit off in a corner. It's fine to schedule in study breaks. If friends are close-by, we can have a mutual agreement of when to break for stretching the legs and conversation, etc. If using a computer, it's good not have our e-mail account open while we are working.

There is time for everything in life; we just have to organize the time wisely so we don't feel scattered and distracted.

Punctually Meeting Obligations: Balancing Focus with Rest

All of the suggestions so far can help us get things done on time, without a lot of pressure, which, in itself is a distraction. Staying rested gives us more energy, and more energy helps us focus on the tasks at hand. We can more easily be on time for class, stay focused on our assignments, and in general stay on top of things. This makes for a more satisfying learning experience.

A Steady Routine and Instant Flexibility: Funnily Enough, They go Hand in Hand

A rested, alert mind is also a flexible one. If a project or an assignment starts to take longer than planned, we can stop for a few minutes and re-think our schedule.

One important question to ask is why are we slowing down? Are we getting lost in the parts and losing sight of the whole picture? Glancing at our purpose can refresh a study session and get it back on track for maximum efficiency.

If we are working on a group project, and one or more members seem to be holding things up, we can have a time out and discuss what's happening. Refreshing each other on the basic purpose of the project and advising each other how to avoid distractions can build group coherence and strengthen communication skills.

Balance is the Key

A balanced routine that includes proper rest and dynamic activity is the basis of skill and efficiency in action. At Maharishi University of Management, all students are guided in this way.

Exercise

1. Summarize this section on Goal Setting and Time Management in your own words. Print out your summary and post it where you can see it every day.
2. At the end of each day look at your summary and note what advice was easy to follow and what might need more practice.
3. Take the areas that you would like to practice and set goals for yourself on a separate sheet of paper. Include a timeframe and specific strategies with you goal.

A sample timeframe, goal, and strategies:

Timeframe: By next Saturday

Goal: I will be able complete my homework assignments without having to stay up late.

Strategies:

- ❖ Before I start, I will map out a timeline for completing the assignment.
- ❖ I will monitor my progress in keeping to the timeline.
- ❖ I will notice if anything distracts me or slows me down and take steps to eliminate these obstacles.

We'd love to hear from you. Let us know about your experiences using the advice in this section.

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