



Time Management For Health Professions Students

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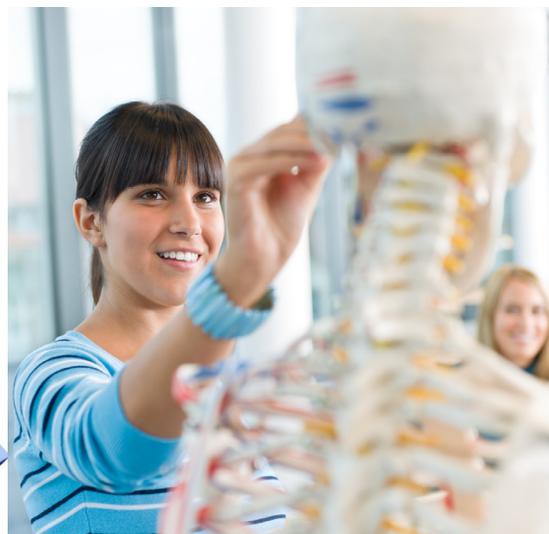


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The Importance of Time Management

Learning how to effectively manage time will be one of the most important skills you will need to acquire in order to be successful. Reducing anxiety and procrastination, eliminating cramming, increasing motivation, and gaining extra time are a few of the many advantages of learning how to effectively manage time. Time management is most important for secondary and post-secondary students who often have intensive workloads with school, employment and extra-curricular activities. It is even more crucial for health profession students who have one of the most time consuming majors. This publication will serve as a guide for students to effectively manage their time and study at their full capacity. This report outlines time management tools and techniques that will play a key role in students' educational success.

“Time management is a set of principles, practices, skills, tools, and systems that work together to help you get more value out of your time with the aim of improving the quality of your life.”¹

Time Management Personal Assessment²

Before learning time management tools, you should first assess your current aptitude. This can serve as an instrument to track the progress of your time management skills. The following questionnaire will give you an idea of your current time management proficiency. Score the following questions using the following scale: 2 for “Always,” 1 for “Sometimes,” 0 for “Never.”

Time Management Assessment Questionnaire			
Questions	Always	Sometimes	Never
1. I do things in order of priority			
2. I accomplish what needs to be done during the day			
3. I always get assignments done on time			
4. I feel I use my time effectively			
5. I tackle difficult or unpleasant tasks without procrastinating			
6. I force myself to make time for planning			
7. I spend enough time planning			
8. I prepare a daily or weekly “to do” list			
9. I prioritize my list in order of importance, not urgency			
10. I am able to meet deadlines without rushing at the last minute			
11. I keep up-to-date on my reading and homework assignments			
12. I prevent interruptions from distracting me from high priority tasks			
13. I avoid spending too much time on trivial matters			
14. I spend enough time on academic matters			
15. I plan time to relax and be with friends in my weekly schedule			
16. I have a weekly schedule on which I record fixed commitments such as classes and work hours			

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Questions		Always	Sometimes	Never
17.	I try to do the most important tasks during my most energetic periods of the day			
18.	I make constructive use of my commuting time			
19.	I periodically re-assess my activities in relation to my goals			
20.	I have discounted any wasteful or unprofitable activities or routines			
21.	I screen and group my telephone calls to allow for control over telephone interruptions			
22.	I judge myself by accomplishment of tasks rather than by amount of activity or “busy-ness”			
23.	My actions are determined primarily by me, not by circumstances or by other people’s priorities			
24.	I have a clear idea of what I want to accomplish during the coming semester			
25.	I am satisfied with the way I use my time			
Total Score				

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Scoring the Assessment

Now that you have completed the survey, tally your score and use the following rubric to assess your current time management skills.

45-50 points: You have excellent time management skills and should use this guide as a reference.

30-44 points: You manage your time fairly well but should use this guide to increase your skill.

0-30 points: Your time management skills should be improved for college but do not panic, following the subsequent guidelines will assist you in improving your ability and further your chances of success.

Student Testimonial

“During the 1st and 2nd years of medical school, students spend the majority of time in the classroom in what was essentially an extreme version of college (20-25 units/semester). As a third year medical student I am finding that time-management is very difficult and I find myself making big compromises. After the first two years, classroom time is replaced by clinical responsibilities and patients—not students—become the primary focus of clinical care. This is a tough adjustment for many students who now are expected to work 80 hours a week in addition to class time studying for shelf exams. I have had to miss weddings, see family and friends much less often, and lose out on exercise time because of the schedule. Almost halfway into third year, I have finally figured out that you have to schedule exercise and important activities during less intensive blocks. If I had not learned early into my career the importance of work-life balance, I fear I could become jaded, lose interest and make mistakes—all of which would increase the chance of harming my patients. This is why it’s especially important to develop good time management skills and why I continue to place a high value on sleeping and free-time.”

Paul Deramo
Third Year Medical Student
University of California, Davis

Using a Time Log³

After completing the Time Management Assessment questionnaire, it is also important to obtain a more comprehensive analysis of how you are currently spending your time by creating a time log. A time log is not going to manage your time but assess your current time management strengths and weaknesses. This will help you analyze when and how you are spending your time, which hours of the day you work best, and the approximate time frame it takes you to complete activities.

To best analyze your time, you should keep a log for a minimum of three days. You will want to list all activities which you engage in and the time spent on that activity. You should list all activities including: work, lectures, studying, note-taking, paperwork, scheduling, reflecting, handling problems, personal growth, daily tasks, leisure, visitors and phone calls. You will also give each activity a priority (A - important, B - somewhat important, and C - not important) and a description of the outcome of that activity. There are various formats to logging in your time. See sample below.

Sample Time Log			
Time	Activity	Priority	Outcome
6:00 am			
7:00 am			
8:00 am			
9:00 am			
10:00 am			
11:00 am			
12:00 pm			
1:00 pm			
2:00 pm			
3:00 pm			
4:00 pm			
5:00 pm			
6:00 pm			
7:00 pm			
8:00 pm			
9:00 pm			
10:00 pm			
11:00 pm			
12:00 am			

Once you have completed the time log for a few days, then analyze how you are spending your time. You should look at all your time logs and compare similarities and/or differences. There are a few questions you should be asking yourself while analyzing the time logs⁴:

1. Are you spending too much time on unimportant things?
2. Are you spending too little time on important things?
3. Are there common interruptions to your day?
4. For each task, ask yourself, “why am I doing this?” or “why do I need to do this?”
5. Do you procrastinate between tasks or browse the internet when you should be working on important things?
6. Are there common times where you get the most productive activities completed?
7. What activities are you doing during times of high energy? Are you doing activities that are value-adding and important to you when you have high energy?

Asking yourself these questions while analyzing your time logs will give you a better outlook on how you are managing your time and if you are being as productive as possible. It will help you realize your faults in how you manage your time which will hopefully drive you to correct those faults and thus, start developing better time management skills.

Effective Time Management Involves Advance Planning

Many health profession students will soon realize that there is much to do in a little amount of time. All efforts to manage time effectively require advance planning. It is therefore crucial that students plan ahead their semesters, weeks and days by creating calendars and agendas.

Creating Calendars and Agendas

There are different tools to create and keep a calendar. Some people like to use paper planners as calendars. Others like to use cellular phones or other mobile electronic devices that can remind them of their schedules. Many people who are around computers create calendars on various computer-based systems. These computer-based systems allow you to easily change and update your calendar and arrange your daily activities with methods that may be easier to follow and track than by paper. Some computer-based calendars even send you emails and text messages to remind you of your activities. Many of these computer-based systems are free and accessible from many locations. Students should use the tool they feel most comfortable with and try different methods until they find the most suitable for their needs.

“Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail”



Semester Calendars

Semester Calendars are important because they provide a big picture of your semester's school workload and give you an idea of when you should focus on certain assignments. At the beginning of the semester, gather your syllabi and use a calendar to write down the dates of all the major assignments including papers, lab reports, quizzes, exams, conferences, and finals. This calendar should also include extra-curricular activities you have planned ahead including sports, family and leisure outings. Having a semester calendar will help you attain a better focus and facilitate the construction of your weekly and daily schedules.

Sample Semester Calendar ⁵							
Week of	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Jan. 24							
Jan. 31	BIO 215 Paper 1						
Feb. 7		Math 251 Assignment				Uncle Joe Wedding	
Feb. 14							
Feb. 21				Chem 200 Exam			Med School Application
Feb. 28		Pre-med Club Mtng					
March 7							
March 14			Bio 215 Midterm				Pre-med Club Event
March 21			Chem 200 Midterm			Mothers Birthday	
March 28	Spring Break						
April 4				Math 251 Assignment			Soccer Game
April 11	Bio 215 Paper 2						
April 18		Pre-med Club Mtng				Alex Party	
April 25							Brothers Birthday
May 2		Chem 200 paper due					
May 9				Math 251 Assignment2			
May 16		Math 251 Final	Bio 215 Final	Chem 200 Final			

Weekly Calendars

Weekly calendars help better manage your time and focus in a week's span. Your weekly schedule should include the hours that are not flexible like class times, meetings, appointments, work hours, religious gatherings, and organization/volunteer activities. This gives you a better idea of how many hours you have free in your week to work on assignments and complete other necessary activities.

Sample Weekly Calendar ⁶							
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00 am		Work			Work		
7:00 am							
8:00 am	Bio 215 Class		Bio 215 Class	Gym			
9:00 am						Soccer Practice	
10:00 am							
11:00 am							
12:00 pm	Get ready for work	Appt. with Counselor					
1:00 pm	Work		Chem 200 Class		Chem 200 Class		
2:00 pm		Math 251 Class		Math 251 Assignment Due		Work on Bio Paper w/ necessary breaks	Soccer Game & Bio Paper 215 Due 4/11
3:00 pm							
4:00 pm							
5:00 pm		Volunteer	Work				
6:00 pm				Soccer Practice			
7:00 pm	Work on Math Assignment						
8:00 pm							
9:00 pm	Work on Bio Paper	Work on Math Assignment		Work on Bio Paper		Night out	
10:00 pm							
11:00 pm	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep		Sleep
12:00 am							

Daily Agendas⁷

You should also create daily agendas. They will be daily to-do lists that should include all your activities for that day and the timeframe in which you propose they will be carried out. The daily schedule should be created the night before when you are clear about what needs to be accomplished the next day. It should also include a list of activities you need to get done. You should prioritize those activities by documenting which are most critical to complete and which can wait. You will use the priority lists to see which activities you will schedule first to ensure they get completed. It is important to stick to your daily agenda as best as you can but be flexible to change things around if unexpected events occur.

“People can be divided into three groups: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.” –John W. Newburn

Sample Daily Agenda	
Time	Activity
6:00am	Work
7:00am	
8:00am	Breakfast
9:00am	
10:00am	
11:00am	
12:00pm	Appointment with counselor
1:00pm	Lunch
2:00pm	Math 251Class
3:00pm	
4:00pm	
5:00pm	Dinner- Volunteer with campus organization
6:00pm	
7:00pm	
8:00pm	
9:00pm	Work on math assignment due on 4/7
10:00pm	
11:00pm	Sleep approximately 7-8 hours
12:00am	

Setting Goals⁸

Setting goals is an important tool that will help you effectively manage time. Many people use goal setting as a way to spur focus and motivation. It makes them work harder to accomplish something they set out for themselves. It is important to create clearly defined goals that are easier to track. Also, your goals should be tangible, pushing you, but not being so unrealistic that they are unachievable, because setting goals and not achieving them can be discouraging.

You should set goals for different aspects of your life including but not limited to educational, personal, health, financial, family, career and spiritual. Students should brainstorm different goals they want to accomplish throughout their life and constantly work to achieve those goals. Goals should drive your planning and scheduling. Setting small but consistent tasks will help you keep on track to complete your goals. For example, if certain educational goals are set like receiving high grades in certain courses, your schedule should put emphasis on those classes. If you make a health and fitness goal then your schedule should include time for physical exercise. If you make a goal of finishing a book series in a semester or year, your schedule should include extra time for leisure reading. These are examples of how goals can drive your schedule and motivate you.

It is important to write your goals down and have them in a visible location. Some students place them on their wall or in their binders. Looking at them daily is a reminder and motivator to stay committed to your goals. It is also important to write down actions that you will take in order to accomplish your goal. This will help you when scheduling your day as you can attempt to integrate tasks that will enhance your ability to realize the goals.

“Goals allow you to control the direction of change in your favor.”

–Brian Tracy

Semester Goals Worksheet

Semester: _____

Goals to be accomplished during this Semester:

Goal 1 : _____

Actions: _____

Goal 2 : _____

Actions: _____

Goal 3 : _____

Actions: _____

Goal 4 : _____

Actions: _____

Goal 5 : _____

Actions: _____

Establishing Better Study Habits⁹

Many students have a tendency to cram all the course information before a test, staying up all night to read material they should have been reading during the course of the semester. Through cramming, students can retain information for a few hours but lose much of what was read in the long term. This is unacceptable for any student but more so for health professions students. Health professions students must retain the information learned because it will be used in their everyday lives while caring for patients. Health professions students must make an effort to have better study habits that help them retain the information they learned during the course of their education. Using the following time management study habits will assist you to retain information long-term.

“Cramming your way out of a hole will soon land you back into one.”

Scheduling Study Time¹⁰

Establishing regular study times and locations for reading and completing assignments is an effective time management tool. Your mind becomes accustomed to the environment and routine you have set to study, which saves time. Additionally, you should schedule your study time for hours of the day in which you are most alert, for example students that are not morning persons should try not to schedule reading or study assignments early morning. When prioritizing what assignments to complete first, you should schedule the more difficult assignments up front as this is the time when you are most energized and alert. It is more difficult to complete complicated assignments when one is exhausted and thus, should leave the easier assignments for a time later in the day. You should also set study time in a place that is conducive to studying. The location will be different for many people; some like to study in the library, others in their own homes. You must be sure that you are in a place that is not full of distractions which can possibly waste your time.

Scheduling shorter study time blocks with short breaks in between study and work periods helps you stay engaged and keep focus. It helps you process the information being obtained and not become weary which ultimately eliminates wasted time. Studying in shorter time blocks is better than large “cramming sessions” because it helps you retain more information in a shorter amount of study time. You should also make an attempt to study lecture notes a few hours after the class lecture is given. Many students do not study lecture notes until weeks later when there are upcoming exams. At this point, much of the information has been forgotten and you have to relearn the material. Establishing the habit of reviewing lecture notes a few hours after each lecture helps you better retain the information discussed during the lectures and saves you time from not having to re-learn material later.

“Never regard study as a duty, but as the enviable opportunity to learn to know the liberating influence of beauty in the realm of the spirit for your own personal joy and to the profit of the community to which your later works belong.” –Albert Einstein

Taking Notes¹¹

Taking good notes while studying will aid in maximizing your time. Many times students read materials without taking good notes and then have to re-read the material when exams and assignments are due. Taking good notes the first time material is read will save students time when reviewing materials. It may take a bit more time to take good notes up front but this will save time later on.

There are various lecture note-taking techniques. These techniques will help you develop clear and concise notes with only the most important information.

One tactic is to attempt to get the speaker's main points and not write down everything said. Writing down everything the professor says may lead to a long document with a lot of notes you may not need. This makes you take more time to sort the large volumes of notes and may hinder your ability to study the most critical information. Techniques to capturing good lecture notes include:

- **Pay attention to repetition or emphasis** in statements. Many professors give these subtle clues to demonstrate important statements.
- **Write down vocabulary, important facts and formulas.** Many professors add vocabulary and formulas as part of exams. Those mentioned during the class lectures are many times the most important.
- **Asking questions** is one of the most important lecture habits you can develop. You should not be afraid to ask questions when you are confused and need clarity on topics. This saves you much time as you will not have to do extra reading to try and understand something your professor could have explained in a few minutes.
- **Learning how to abbreviate words and use symbols** is a tool that will come in handy by saving much time and wrist pain. Many times the professor lectures faster than you can write, so it is useful to use abbreviations whenever possible. You should be consistent with the way you abbreviate words and keep a legend of the definitions to the abbreviations in case you fail to remember what you were trying to write down.
- After class, **review your notes** and highlight information you did not understand or you did not have the chance to completely write down. Ask your professor for assistance when needed.

There are various means to keeping your notes. Many students use the flashcard method when studying certain things like vocabulary and formulas. Flashcard notes are useful because they can be taken anywhere you go and reviewed during breaks and downtime. Students can review flashcards while taking the bus, waiting in between classes, and/or taking breaks at work. It is more convenient than lugging around binders and books and it saves time from re-reading the entire material.

The topics you focus on while studying can also be crucial in effective time management. When looking through your lecture and reading notes, it is important to find and study the areas that are most unclear to you. You should do a quick review of the areas you are most comfortable with but spend the majority of your time in your most difficult subjects. This will save you time and better prepare you for your exams as you will be able to better comprehend difficult subjects.

“Do it right the first time.”

Managing Big Assignments

Breaking down big assignments is another effective time management study technique. Many times students have a big assignment that can take weeks to complete. Scheduling time to work on specific sections of an assignment on different days will save you the time of debating what to start first, every time you begin or continue working on that project.

Study Groups¹²

Studying in groups can be an effective time management study technique. Many students work in study groups, and those who are most successful have an explicit purpose for the group, limiting study group sessions to covering specific course material. To have a successful study group, you have to choose the right people and have a set process. When study groups do not have a good structure, socializing tends to occur, and that distracts group members and limits the time you have to study. Study groups should meet no more than 2-3 hours at a time. Having a time frame helps maintain focus and not allow the group to get off task. They should also try to meet at regular times in a location that everyone finds to be a comfortable study environment.

If practiced appropriately, study groups can have excellent outcomes. Study groups can speed up the process of reviewing course material by having group members help each other grasp difficult concepts. Explaining class material to your group members also helps you because the more you talk about it and explain it, the more you will understand. Group members can also share class lecture notes. There are times when you will not have complete notes because you did not have the time to copy everything down or you had to miss class. Sharing and copying notes can help you avoid searching through the books for answers or things you missed during class. The group can also motivate each other to keep studying and do well in the class.

Additional Time Management Tips¹³

You should try to set realistic times for tasks on your daily schedule. Often people underestimate the amount of time an assignment will take. If you have a long tedious assignment or reading to finish, you should set aside a few hours to work on it. Setting shorter, unrealistic time frames will only backlog the rest of your activities that day and cause you to not complete tasks on schedule.

Have some flexibility in your schedule. Unexpected events can occur at any moment (car troubles, family problems, illness, etc). Being flexible and knowing how to rearrange your schedule and still complete tasks assigned will be helpful in effectively managing your time.

Use any spare time wisely. Many students have to use public transportation to get to school and work. Depending on the length of travel, there will always be spare minutes while waiting for the bus or train or during the travel. Those spare minutes can be used to get some reading or studying done. Every minute in a day counts and if students use the spare minutes, they can have more time at the end of the day to relax or perform other activities.

Staying organized is key in effective time management. You should keep binders for each class with all of their lecture and reading notes. This saves time when you are studying as you do not have to go searching in multiple places to find materials. You should also keep your calendars organized and placed in your notebook or room wall to remind you of your tasks for each day. This saves time and reduces stress of having to look for lost items.

It is ok to say “no” to **non-critical tasks**. There are many times when friends, family or employers ask for some time or extra work. You should not be ashamed to say you cannot commit to something if you do not have the time. Committing to other non-critical activities may take time away from other priorities and impede successful time management.

Reward Yourself. Students should also reward themselves by scheduling down-time including recreational hours, hanging out with friends or just relaxing. You should make an effort to undertake the whole college experience including clubs and other extra-curricular/civic activities. Students must learn to have a good work/life balance between educational/work activities and recreational activities. This allows you to keep from burning out and ultimately losing time from stress and fatigue.

Students should **live a healthy lifestyle**. They should set aside enough time for sleep. The human’s brain needs to rest to perform at its full capacity. Students usually need 8-9 hours of sleep a day to be fully functioning but reports show that students currently get an average of 6-7 hours of sleep. Getting a full nights rest will help you maximize your time by not feeling tired and drowsy during class or study hours causing you to take more time to learn the material. You should also eat well-balanced meals and exercise regularly. This will help keep you focused and energized and thus not waste time.

Time Management Tips for Working Students¹⁴

There are many economically disadvantaged students who must work while attending school. Time management is that much more crucial for these students as they have fewer hours in a day to study and complete assignments.

Working students must learn to successfully balance time between work and school. They must evaluate which is most important, work or school. If school is most important then you have to be willing to cut some hours when needed to commit to extra study time even if it means that you do not have extra spending money. Failing classes because you are not completing assignments or you cannot focus in your lectures due to lack of sleep is not acceptable. If work is your priority due to economic reasons then you must learn to better adjust your schedule and classes to make the most out of your situation. You should look into options such as night or online courses which are more flexible and can be completed after work. You should also balance your class load by going to school part-time instead of full-time. This will allow you to better manage your time while working and going to school.

A key to successful time management for working students is having clear communication with others. It is important for you to talk with your employer and let them know your schedule. Many employers are sympathetic to college students who also work and they will try to accommodate their schedule and grant time off when needed for study. Some employers will allow students to study during slow work hours, so this is something that should be discussed with your employer. You can study note cards during breaks and lunch time.

The location of the student's workplace and school can have an effect on their time. You should look for employment on campus. Many colleges offer work in different fields of study and provide flexible schedules. Working on campus is beneficial because it eliminates travel time from work to school. It will free up more time for students to use on their studies. Students should try to look for employment with flexible schedules such as work study programs, tutoring, babysitting, etc. Students' schedules change each quarter. During certain times of the year the student needs more study time, so flexible work hours are an advantage for the student.

Student Testimonial

“Medical school and residency, while incredibly rewarding, put incredible time constraints on one's life. During the first two years of medical school, it is 40 hours a week in the classroom plus intense daily studying, and after starting third year, fourth year, and residency, students and residents can work up to 80 hours a week in the hospital providing patient care. This leaves little time for family, friends, significant others, hobbies, exercise, sleep, and down-time. Inevitably some of the aforementioned things fall by the wayside at times. The most important key to time management is, for me, prioritizing. The reality is that as you progress further in your medical career, you have less and less time, and have to choose carefully how you use it and with whom you want to spend it. Planning ahead of time is essential. Most weeks, medical students/residents only have one day off, and it is critical to decide exactly what you want to do with that day, contact who you want to see, consider logistics, and schedule/plan the day ahead of time in order to accomplish everything you want to do. Acceptance is also critical to your well-being - accepting that you simply can't do it all, and being okay with that. At the end of a day off, I try to think about not what I wasn't able to do, but rather focus on everything I did accomplish, and feel fortunate. With all the above demands, self-care becomes extremely important. Prioritizing sleep, exercise, and time for healthy meals is essential to surviving as a medical student or resident - after all, you can't take care of others unless you first take care of yourself.”

Leslie Lane
Family Medicine Resident
San Francisco General Hospital

End Notes

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