

Time Management for Writing

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about problems and solutions related to managing your writing time. This will include identifying the challenges time management poses both generally and to writing in particular, and working to eliminate those habits that tend to waste your time. You will also practice strategies that will strengthen your productivity skill. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Importance of Time Management
2. Identifying and Minimizing Time-Wasters
3. Methods of Time Management
 - 3a. Creating a Prioritization Matrix
 - 3b. Making a To-Do List
 - 3c. Using a Calendar

1. The Importance of Time Management

Though sometimes it may seem like your instructors don't realize it, there is more to life than writing essays for class. Students have families, jobs, social lives, and hobbies—all of which compete with schoolwork for their time.

This is why time management is a skill that is essential to your success as a writer both inside and outside the classroom. You need to budget enough time to spend on all the things that are worth it, and mapping your life out will make its challenges easier to navigate. Additionally, time management will allow you to execute all of the steps of the writing process thoroughly in order to end up with the best final product that you can.

If the task of finding enough time for all of your writing assignments—and finding a healthy balance between your other commitments—seems daunting or even overwhelming, remember that everyone is dealing with these issues to some degree. That's why the first step to success is reflecting on your situation and devising a plan. This will help you to prioritize the demands on your time, eliminating those activities that are not a good use of your time and devising a plan to budget your time for those that are. By using your time efficiently, you will improve your productivity and have more time in your personal and professional life.



THINK ABOUT IT

Give some thought to the way you manage your time now and which areas you think you could improve in terms of productivity and efficiency. Be honest when considering the following questions:

1. What are the things that are most important to you, both in the short term and the long term?
2. Do you find you have enough time to give them?
3. What are the things you do that might be a waste of your time?
4. Is there a way to eliminate those?
5. What are some of the things you do well?

2. Identifying and Minimizing Time-Wasters

A time-waster is something you do instead of, or in order to avoid, the work you could be doing. This does not mean that you need to eliminate everything fun or relaxing from your day; in fact, making time for having fun and relaxing can be crucial to maximizing your productivity and efficiency.

The key is that these things—scrolling through social media, taking a nap, going for a walk—do not impinge on the time you have set aside for writing. Though your tablet or smartphone offers you plenty of distractions, technology is not the enemy here. If you can go about your work with a little bit of self-discipline and manage your time efficiently, you will find you have more time to spend however you like.

So, what does minimizing time-wasters look like?

IN CONTEXT

If social media is the primary temptation that distracts you from your work, you might try to keep your phone away from your writing space during the time you are working in order to better concentrate on what's in front of you. Then, when you're finished, you and your phone will be reunited.

A more flexible strategy could also be effective: Maybe you write best in short bursts, so you schedule intermittent breaks for scrolling through social media and giving your brain a rest. Again, the most important thing is to zero in on a plan that works best for you.

3. Methods of Time Management

Now it's time to learn some strategies for managing your writing time. Remember that none of these methods and strategies for time management is going to do your writing for you; you're still going to have to focus and execute your plan.

But the value of having a thoughtful, customized time management plan is that it puts you in the best position to succeed, not only by organizing your time, but by helping you approach your writing with a sense of confidence and control over your destiny.



Productivity: Skill Reflect

Take a few minutes to reflect on your productivity, including your biggest time wasters. Consider times you have worked efficiently to complete a writing project. What did you do? How can you develop a plan to do this for every project? For instance, you might create a schedule with mini-deadlines so that your final draft is completed by a certain date. Or you might set aside time on specific days each week to focus on writing. These practices will make you more productive and more likely to finish your work on time.

3a. Creating a Prioritization Matrix

A helpful way to organize your work by priority is to create a prioritization matrix. This is a kind of chart that allows you to sort your tasks by their degree of urgency and importance.

IN CONTEXT

Any writing you have due in the next few days is urgent, but an assignment worth 25% of your grade is more important than an ungraded assignment. Of course, you're going to complete both assignments, but you want to give more time to the more important one.

On the other hand, browsing for shoes on the Internet is neither urgent nor important (at least in terms of accomplishing your writing goals). Things like getting more exercise or studying for a test that is months away are important, but not urgent—that is, you don't need to be doing them now.



TRY IT

This is what a prioritization matrix would look like:

	High Urgency	Low Urgency
High Importance	<i>Top priorities: Do these now!</i>	<i>Do these things second!</i>
Low Importance	<i>Consider if these things are worth doing when you are less busy.</i>	<i>Don't do these things; they are time-wasters.</i>

Now, here are some sample tasks and activities:

- Draft marketing report for work (due March 10)
- Eat healthier
- Coordinate dinner plans for tonight
- Plan a trip for the summer
- Read for English class (due March 9th; ungraded)
- Respond to Mom’s email
- Check out the new filters on Snapchat
- Brainstorm a topic for Sociology paper (Due April 17; 20% of grade)

If you were filling in this matrix on March 3rd, where would you put each item?

3b. Making a To-Do List

You might find the idea of making a to-do list intimidating because all the work that lies ahead of you will pile up right in front of your eyes, and the sheer scope of it all has the potential to stress you out.

But just imagine how much more stressful it would be if you put this off and wait until due dates are rapidly approaching to attend to your workload. Being organized and prepared for the road ahead will improve your mental health in the long term.

A helpful tip for writing a to-do list is to be specific and break down an assignment into component parts that represent tasks that are doable in one or a couple of sittings.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If your to-do list says “Write paper,” this is not very instructive in terms of what specifically you need to do. Instead, perhaps the list says “Brainstorm topics for paper” and then “Outline paper,” etc. This is a more effective way to organize and estimate your time.

3c. Using a Calendar

If you’ve listed and prioritized your work, it is then helpful to determine when you are going to set aside time for individual tasks and plug them into a calendar.

Organizing your time in this manner gives shape and focus to the days, weeks, and months ahead of you. If you have the discipline to stick to and execute your plan, you’ll put yourself in a position to succeed in both the short and long term.

At the same time, the ability to adapt and be flexible is also important—if you find your schedule has become an obstacle to your success, reconsider and adjust your plan as necessary.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **time management is particularly important** for writing because you need to allow enough space in your schedule to give each step of the writing process the time it deserves. It's therefore important to **identify and minimize time-wasters** so you can spend your time on the things that help you accomplish your writing goals.

Additionally, having a **method of time management** puts you in the best position to succeed. Some useful methods include **creating a prioritization matrix**, **making a to-do list**, and **using a calendar**. As long as you choose the method that works best for you and stick to it, you'll be on your way to productively managing your writing time.

Best of luck in your learning!

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