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Time Management Workbook

for Graduate Students at Western University



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Hello Western Graduate Student!

Adjusting to and managing the demands of graduate school can become stressful at times. Stress can be a hinderance if it's too high (our work can be impaired because of strong anxiety) or if it's too low (we can't sustain enough attention or motivation to complete our work). Developing and maintaining ***effective and efficient approaches to time management*** can help to ensure we are working within our optimal zone of performance – just the right amount of stress arousal to get stuff done!

Time management involves planning and directing how we spend the hours in our days to effectively accomplish our goals. ***Self management*** involves making wise decisions about how to allocate our *time* (hours in our days) and *energy* (physical, cognitive, emotional resources) to what is important to us. This workbook addresses both time management and self management, as both contribute to success in graduate school.

More specifically, this workbook will to help you to:

- Develop insight into your personal time and self management style (p. 3)
- Understand personal motivators for developing good timemanagement practices (p. 4)
- Inventory your current and anticipated responsibilities and tasks, and develop a realistic perspective of the time commitments required (p. 5-6)
- Identify personal obstacles that get in the way of following through with your plans (p. 7)
- Create a productive work environment (p. 8-9)
- Set boundaries for your role (p. 10)
- Organize deadlines & due dates (p. 11)
- Time Block for efficiency (p. 12)
- Set & prioritize daily goals (p. 13)
- Maintain focus with single-tasking (p. 14)
- Find fun online time & productivity resources (p. 15)
- Understand & access helpful services and programs at Western (p. 16)
- Reflect & set intentions for time and self management (p. 17)

Let's Get Started!

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Identifying personal views on “Getting Stuff Done”

“Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” (Benjamin Franklin)

“Don’t do today what you can put off ‘till tomorrow.” (commonly attributed to Mark Twain)

When it comes to your academic work, which of the sentiments above most closely aligns with your current approach to time/self management?

In what ways does your current approach **contribute** to effective self management? That is, how does your typical approach help you to effectively allocate your time and energy to meeting your goals?

In what ways does your current approach **hinder** the ways you allocate time and energy to meeting your goals?

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Understanding Personal Motivators for Developing Effective & Efficient Time Management Practices

Ideally, we all want to get our stuff done *effectively* (meet our goals or the expectations of others) as well as *efficiently* (not taking more time and energy than necessary).

Considering your personal reasons for wanting to develop efficiency and effectiveness with your time can help you to cultivate motivation and resilience.

In the table below, there are a number of benefits of developing and maintaining good time management skills and practices. There is also space to add additional, personal benefits which aren't already listed.

Identify which of these potential benefits are important to you:

✓	Reasons Effective & Efficient Time Management is Important to Me
	Pace myself, my work
	Maintain a satisfactory balance between academics and leisure/personal time
	Opportunity for producing quality work that I feel proud of
	A sense of control
	Managing stress and anxiety as a student
	Feeling a sense of accomplishment
	Feeling confident and capable
	Managing procrastination
	Maintaining motivation

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Juggling Roles & Responsibilities

Graduate students typically have a variety of roles, responsibilities, and tasks. These may include:

Teaching Assistant (TA) or Research Assistant (RA) Responsibilities

Teaching; grading; office hours; meetings with supervisor; teaching preparation time, professional development/learning, research, lab work, etc.

Other Academic Responsibilities

Research and thesis/dissertation writing
Course work and/or preparing for exams
Volunteer/committee work

Personal Responsibilities

Family commitments; leisure time, sleep, commute time, meal time, appointments, etc.

Using the chart below, try to anticipate all of the weekly tasks you will need to find time for on a weekly basis. Take inventory of each of your responsibilities and tasks, and record a realistic idea of how much time each component requires. **HINT:** Many of us tend to *underestimate* the amount of time a task will take. Try using the “**50% rule**” which means adding 50% more time in your schedule. For example, if you think it will take 2 hours to prepare for a lecture, create space in your schedule for 3 hours – it always feels better to be ahead of schedule rather than feeling behind!

TA or RA Responsibilities	Approximate Weekly Time Commitment

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Other Academic Responsibilities	Approximate Weekly Time Commitment
Personal	Approximate Weekly Time Commitment

What is your **total number of weekly hours**? ____

We all have 168 hours each week to allocate. If your total exceeds what is available (168), it is important to consider ways to evaluate and redistribute your tasks and commitments to ensure you can maintain a sustainable, realistic, and healthy plan throughout the academic term.

Areas to adjust:

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Identifying Personal Obstacles

It's important to think about potential obstacles that get in the way of managing time and balancing tasks effectively. If we aren't aware of our barriers or challenges, it becomes difficult to make any changes to help us to better meet our goals. If we can notice what gets in the way, we can then take steps to develop strategies and habits to minimize the undesirable consequences of these obstacles.

Take a few minutes to brainstorm your biggest obstacles to effective and efficient time/self management:

Write down 3 steps you can take to remove or reduce the impact of your largest obstacles:

Step 1:	
Step 2:	
Step 3:	

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Creating a Productive Work Environment

It's preferable to have a space that you can dedicate exclusively to your academic work. Not only does a dedicated space help us to focus better and reduce distractions, it also helps us to mentally separate from our work at the end of our work day. However, having a separate space isn't always an option. In these circumstances, we can work to create separation between our work and leisure space as much as is possible. Options may include having a desk in the corner of a room, and ensuring we organize and separate our personal, academic, and teaching materials.

We often have more options than we may first realize – it can be helpful to try a visualization exercise to help us understand what's actually within our control to create.

Imagine you do have the power to create your ideal work environment. Close your eyes, and create this space in your mind. Consider questions such as:

What furniture is in the room? What makes it comfortable? What helps to keep you alert and focused? Where are your work materials and how are they organized? What other equipment or supplies do you need in your space?

Qualities/Components of my *Ideal* Work Environment:

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After you've spent some time imagining and creating your *ideal* work environment, think about which of these qualities you can create in *reality* – in the space that you actually do have. Record some of your plans for a productive work environment in the space below.

Qualities/components that I can *realistically* implement:

Action steps – What I need to do to create/modify my work environment (eg. rearranging furniture, supplies to purchase, communication with housemates, etc):

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Setting Boundaries

Consider the following sentiment, shared by a graduate student TA at Western:

"I often find myself struggling to determine how to spend my time. I like being available to help students – it's why I want to be a TA – but sometimes I feel I've helped others so much that by the end of the week I've accomplished very little of my own academic priorities."

Setting boundaries with others is an important part of being a good manager of time. Without boundaries, it's easy to get lost in the ways that we are required to interact with and support others. When this happens, we can end up sacrificing our own values and goals.

Setting boundaries and being clear is a demonstration of professional kindness. When your students and colleagues are clear about your boundaries, they are more likely to follow them.

Below are some considerations for setting and maintaining your own boundaries:

	Yes/Not Yet
I understand the requirements and expectations of my TA or RA role, including the time expectations.	
I have set specific hours in my week to accomplish my academic tasks.	
I have determined ways to protect my independent work times from my colleagues, peers, family members, or others.	
I have communicated to students how and when they can contact me outside of teaching time (eg. times you will/will not respond to email correspondence).	
I am familiar with campus services that provide professional help to students with their learning and personal needs, and I know how to direct students to these services (eg. Learning Development & Success, The Writing Centre, Western Libraries, Health & Wellness).	

How could you address the areas you responded with "Not Yet"? What other boundaries are important for you to set for yourself?

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Organizing Due Dates

Use a calendar to keep track of deadlines and obligations for each term. Post your calendar where you'll see it frequently, or keep an online version so you can access it wherever you go.

Be sure to include:

- ⇒ Academic deadlines/due dates
- ⇒ Self-imposed deadlines (eg. smaller progress deadlines leading up to actual, larger deadlines)
- ⇒ Personal obligations or events

FREE printable and fillable calendars are available here: www.learning.uwo.ca

SEPTEMBER							OCTOBER							
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
		1	2	3	4	5					1	2	3	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Holiday			Classes Begin				11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Holiday				22	23	24	
27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
NOVEMBER							DECEMBER							
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				1	2	3	4	5
Reading Week Begins					Reading Week Ends		6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14				Classes End		Exams Begin		
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
29	30						27	28	Exams End	29	30	31		

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Western Student Services Building, Room 4100
519-661-3017 • learning.uwo.ca • learning@uwo.ca

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Time Blocking For Efficiency

The time blocking strategy involves dividing your days into “chunks” of time. Each block is dedicated to a specific task or type of task.

Effective time blocking includes:

- ⇒ Determining recurring categories of responsibilities (eg. teaching, classes, research)
- ⇒ Realistically approximating the amount of time each type of task requires
- ⇒ Assigning tasks/responsibilities to particular times in the week
- ⇒ Assigning challenging and important tasks as early as possible in the day (eg. research time before time to complete errands)
- ⇒ A commitment to completing the tasks within the designated windows of time
- ⇒ Flexibility – space to rearrange or trade blocks when unexpected tasks arise, or when something takes longer than originally planned for

Here is a simplified example:

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:00 AM	Study/Planning						Study
7:00 AM							
8:00 AM		Commute	Commute	Commute	Commute	Commute	
9:00 AM		Work	Work	Work	Work	Work	
10:00 AM							
11:00 AM							
12:00 PM		Lunch	Lunch/Study	Lunch/Study	Lunch	Lunch	
1:00 PM							
2:00 PM	Birthday Dinner						
3:00 PM							Study
4:00 PM							
5:00 PM		Commute	Commute	Commute	Commute	Commute	
6:00 PM		Family Dinner		Family Dinner			
7:00 PM			Baseball practice		Baseball practice	Spring Concert	
7:30PM		Study	Study		Study		
8:00 PM							
9:00 PM							
9:30 PM							
10:00 PM							

FREE printable and fillable weekly calendar templates are available here: [Weekly Calendar](#)

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Setting & Prioritizing Daily Goals

If you want to achieve your goals, it's important to write them down. Take a few minutes each day to create a prioritized task list using the **SMART** method:

- ⇒ **SPECIFIC** (eg. "Learn how to multiply" vs. "Get better at math")
- ⇒ **MEASUREABLE** (eg. "Read 5 pages" vs. "Work on readings")
- ⇒ **ATTAINABLE** (be realistic; subdivide big tasks to fit the time you have allotted; focus on the most important 1-3 items for the day)
- ⇒ **RELEVANT** (relevant to academics, and life priorities, rather than "nice to know/do")
- ⇒ **TIME-BOUND** (eg. 1-2pm)

Using the principles of SMART goals, create a task list for your day:

- ◆ Did you know this?
 1. You can apply the SMART principles to setting term, monthly, and weekly goals as well!
 2. The RescueTime blog has 9 practical methods for how to prioritize your work! <https://blog.rescuetime.com/how-to-prioritize/>

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Maintaining Focus with Single-Tasking

Sometimes it's easy to get into our work flow and to maintain focus on our goals and tasks. At other times, our minds are busy and our attention is pulled in multiple directions. Multi-tasking is attempting to perform more than one activity at the same time. Although it can be tempting to multi-task (especially when we're busy), it is actually better to focus on completing one task at a time. The "single-tasking" strategy leads to greater focus, fewer errors, and overall greater time efficiencies and productivity.

Exploring your mindset in relation to multi-tasking and single-tasking can help you to maintain productive focus.

What does multi-tasking look like for you? When does it happen? Why does it happen?

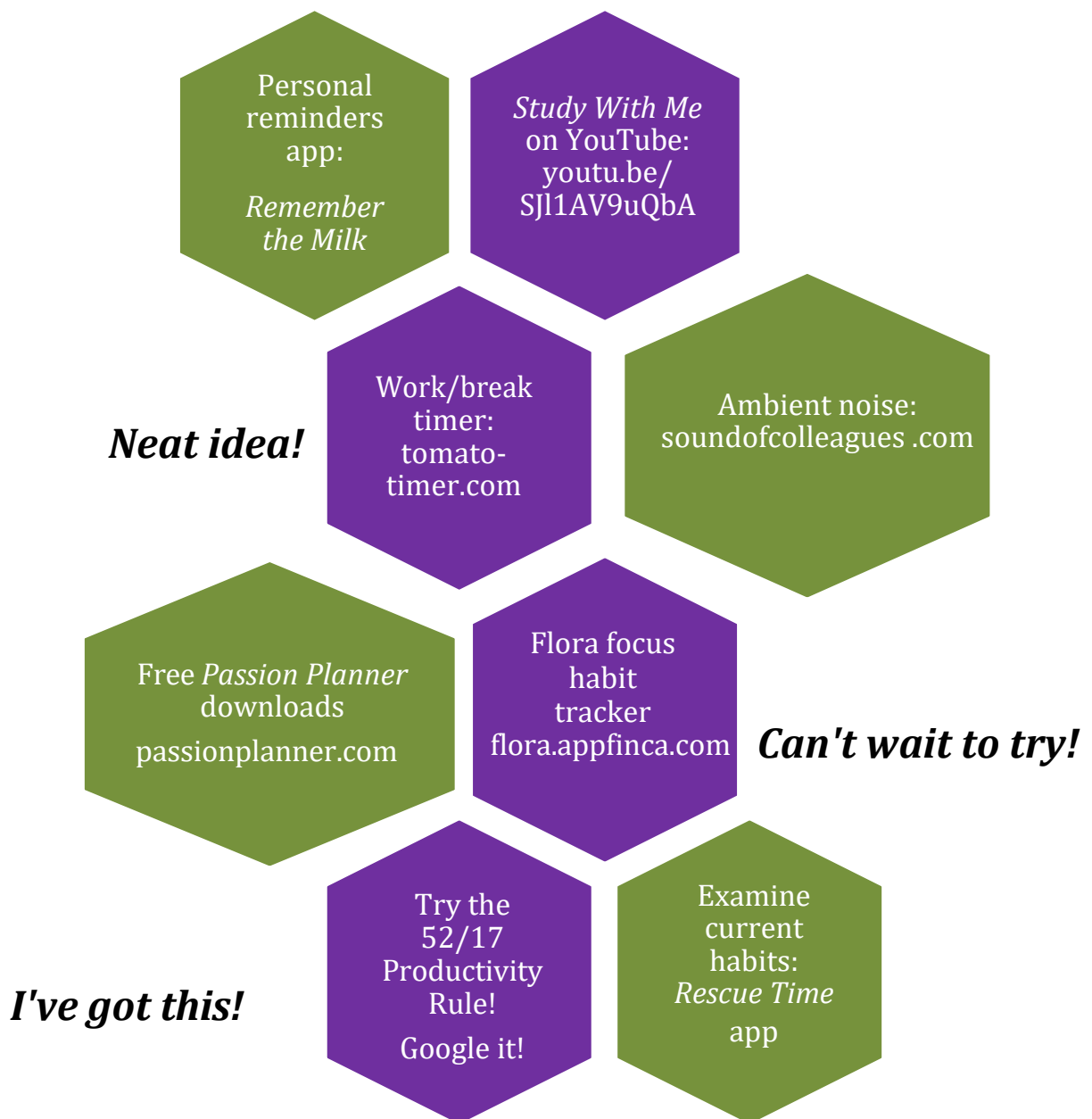
What would you like to change with respect to your focus? How can you enhance your single-tasking skills?

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Check it Out!

There are an abundance of online resources and tools to that contribute to positive and productive self management. Here are some fun ones to check out if you're looking for ideas.



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Learning Development & Success provides free academic support to help graduate students:

Transition to graduate school

Manage time and get organized

Combat procrastination

Balance multiple tasks and roles

Read academic texts

Prepare for comprehensive exams

Maintain motivation

Manage grad school stresses

Prepare for thesis/dissertation

To learn about our *individualized services, workshops, drop-in help* and more, visit: www.learning.uwo.ca

To book a *confidential appointment* email: learning@uwo.ca

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Final Reflections & Intentions



What ideas resonated most for you?



What do you plan to try this week?