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# TIME MANAGEMENT FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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With a heavy Engineering course load, one of the most important skills for Engineering students is Time Management. Taking 5 or 6 courses, attending labs, completing weekly problem sets, and participating in group projects mean that you have to be able to handle multiple assignments with limited time. Strong time management skills can help you succeed as an Engineering student while still finding time to have fun. This handout was designed by Guelph Engineering students for you, a Guelph Engineering student. We've tried a lot of different time management strategies and want to share with you some of the strategies and ideas that have worked for us.

## How to Prioritize?

Prioritization is one of the most important components of managing your time. Engineering students need to learn to prioritize duties and tasks to get everything important done.

*This will be especially important around Week 6 and 7, when you will have lot of midterms and projects due in different courses. You'll need to be able to prioritize when lots of things are due on the same day.*

There are a few different ways that students prioritize their school work. Since people all work differently, try and see which method of prioritization works best for you. Here are a few different methods:

### **Level of Difficulty**

Choosing to get done the most difficult assignments first may be one way you want to prioritize. It can be beneficial to take study breaks with the easier tasks when you're working on the tough one.

*If you find that Chemistry midterms are really difficult but Calculus is a review for you, you could start your study time off with your Chemistry notes and take breaks by working on your Calculus assignments.*

### **Marks**

Some students choose to prioritize based on mark allocation. This is important to identify in Engineering courses because there are many assignments due at various times. Some assignments and tests may be weighted higher

than others, so this method can help when you have tons of projects and tests all worth different amounts of marks.

*Some Design assignments may be worth 5% of your total grade but require many hours of work. It's important to keep that in perspective and weigh your time on that assignment against time spent on reports and projects worth much more of your total grade. You might **not** want to spend a week on a Design assignment that is worth 5% and only an evening on the final report that is worth 45% of your total grade!*

### **Time Allocation**

If you have a big project that takes a long time to do, you might choose this as a high priority and put it at the top of your list, and save those quick tasks to be done as breaks throughout the progress of the large assignment.

*Many students find that Mechanics assignments take a long time, but they're very important to understand and finish for success on the midterm. Try and start the assignment as early as possible so you can allow yourself to take breaks and work on other assignments that take up less time.*

Maybe you'll identify with even more than one of these prioritization lists and be able to choose a method based on the situation.

***Once you've figured out your priorities you can move on to decide how to get those important tasks done.***

## Tools to Help Manage Your Time

### **Task Lists**

Producing a task list is a quick and easy way to see what you need to get done in your day or week. Sometimes when you get flustered with a lot of projects you need to do, seeing them all in a list will make it easier to prioritize and then you will be able to accomplish more things!

To make a task list, write out all the things you need to do in a day, week, month or semester. From there you can choose the tasks you want to get done first from your method(s) of prioritization. Check out the

Learning Commons handout, *Making a Task List*, for more information.

### ***Flexible Time***

Make sure you allot extra time for your plans. A good rule of thumb is to multiply the amount of time you allot to a task by 1.5. This way, if you need extra time for a task or need to squeeze something else in, you'll have that time accounted for!

### ***Schedules***

A schedule will help you plan ahead and prioritize tasks. Make a schedule of your classes AND include time to have fun! To keep on track, write out the tasks for each class and activity you're involved in on a calendar, day planner (the CSA provides free ones during the first week of classes) or schedule sheet provided by the Learning Commons. You might find it useful to make daily or weekly schedules to stay on top of homework. Try and think about how much time a task will take. This way you can have a good idea of how to spend your time most effectively.

If you know you have other engagements outside of school that happen on a regular basis, try and schedule them in so you can see how you're spending your time.

*If you schedule in Grey's Anatomy as a planned break, you won't feel as guilty watching it! Instead, you might feel like you earned it (yes...you do deserve rewards sometimes for all your hard work).*

*Also, check out the Engineering Excel Scheduling Program, which combines a weekly schedule and task list. It has been developed by an Engineering Peer Helper with the difficulties of engineering time management in mind!*

### ***Take Breaks***

In addition to making time for fun, if you have a big project that will take a long time, make sure you plan on taking breaks. These can include things like working on simpler projects, exercising, or just going outside and having fun for a bit!

## **REALLY IMPORTANT!!!**

### **Words of Wisdom**

The key is to not get frustrated or down on yourself, because at first you will greatly underestimate the amount of time you think it takes to do something. Once you get the hang of it, you will get much better at guessing how long it takes to complete assignments or study for a test.

Time management takes a bit of work in the beginning but it is SO worth it in the long run! Use 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year to

really master time management and make your life that much easier in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year!

## **Make Use of Resources**

Keep in mind all the resources available to you! On campus there are tons of people who can help you keep on track and manage your time! You can:

- Attend an Engineering Study Lab
- Meet one-on-one with an Engineering Peer (email [engpeers@uoguelph.ca](mailto:engpeers@uoguelph.ca))
- Make a study group with other Engineering students to help you stay motivated
- Check out the Engineering Excel Scheduling Program!

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## How to Keep Track of *Everything*

*There are two basic tools that will help you plan and organize your time for success. The first is “My Semester Calendar.” The second is a weekly calendar. We recommend one of two versions of the weekly calendar - you can pick the one that works best for you.*

### Tool 1: My Semester Calendar

Follow these simple three steps to create a “snapshot” of your semester that will help you plan backward from each due date. If you have three papers due and a major test in one week, this calendar will help you plan how to get each paper done in a timely manner and be prepared for your test.

#### Step One

- A. Download a calendar template for each month of the semester. (One source: [www.wincalendar.com/word-calendar-templates.htm](http://www.wincalendar.com/word-calendar-templates.htm))
- B. Go to the Office of the Registrar webpage “Academic Semester Calendar.”
- C. Record those dates that apply to you (i.e. if you’re taking an eight week class, first & last day of class, last day to withdraw with a “W”) on your Semester Calendar by month.

#### Step Two

Take your syllabus for each class and record due dates for:

- Each test and/or quiz
- Each paper or project
- Each final exam\*

\* If your final is not listed on your syllabus, go to ISIS to find when your final exams are scheduled.

### ***Step Three***

- A. Enter all of the university related activities in which you plan on participating or attending (football games, Late Night Live, tennis club tournament, concert, band trips, basketball games, track & field activities, homecoming, etc.).
- B. Enter all other social events in which you will be participating. (wedding, family activities, vacation, etc.).

Once you have listed all of these “demands” on your time you are ready to develop your timeline for meeting your deadlines and achieving your goals. With this information in hand, you can build a monthly planner to help you map-out what needs to be accomplished each week.

- For help preparing for tests, see these E. L. C. Resources (“Get ready for tests?” “Answer the Essay/Short Answer Exam Question Well?” And “What do faculty expect on a major exam?”) on the CLASS website: [class.uark.edu](http://class.uark.edu)
- For research papers, use the Research Paper Wizard at [libinfo.uark.edu/reference/wizard/](http://libinfo.uark.edu/reference/wizard/) to plan backwards from your paper’s due date.

### **Tool 2: My Weekly Calendar**

Your Semester Calendar will give you a good idea of where your pressure points are in the semester. However, you will need to look at your week and make sure that you can accomplish all of your goals. We suggest one of two versions of a weekly calendar: My 168 Hour Time Log and/or My Weekly Calendar.

The 168 Hour Time Log allows you to understand where your time is being spent. So, begin by filling in the hours/time of your week:

1. That all-important fuel which keeps your body going and your mind sharp! SLEEP.
2. All your fixed commitments (those events that occur every week such as class, club meetings, work, volunteer hours).
3. Using a ration of **two** hours of study-time for each **one** hour-in-class, schedule recurring study hours that you can keep each week just as you go to class;
4. Look for open times in your schedule when you can pop-in to the library between classes to study and minimize your travel time back and forth to the residence hall; and

5. Then add the other activities in which you regularly engage: Eating, washing clothes, working, watching TV, working out, playing X-Box, participating in dorm/house activities, etc. [Color-code if it helps you visualize your schedule.]



**Remember** that when “life happens” and interrupts your planned study times, just trade out some hours from those activities in #5 and stay on track as best you can. The idea is to develop a habit of studying at specified times each week that will enable you to achieve your academic goals understanding that sometimes you have to make adjustments.

“My Weekly Calendar” builds on everything you now know about the demands on your time and the deadlines you need to meet. It is a tool that allows you to focus on the up-coming week so that you don’t let something slip in the rush of going to class, working, and participating in other activities. Taking the deadlines from your Semester Calendar and entering them into your weekly calendar will allow you to build your schedule around those deadlines so that nothing is missed and you don’t find yourself not prepared for an exam or with an incomplete paper on the due date. No two Weekly Calendars will be the same, because everyone’s deadlines and priorities are different.



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## Manage Time Effectively

*Spending time, like spending money, is a very personal matter. Unlike money, however, you can't get a "time raise" or "save some hours" for a busy day. We all have to live on 168 hours each and every week. Successful students, like other successful people, must budget time according to their priorities to ensure that they spend it effectively.*

### 1 IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The first step in learning to manage your time is to identify what your goals and priorities are. You must decide what you want out of school and life and what you must do to get it.

Is learning high on your priority list? How about your current job? Your family? What is most important to you? List your priorities from highest to lowest.

### 2 ANALYZE HOW YOU'RE SPENDING YOUR TIME NOW

The second step is to analyze exactly how you spend your time. For the next week, keep a detailed log of everything you do, hour by hour.

- Use the CLASS Learning Tool, [My 168 Hr. Time Log](#), to help you begin.

Account for all your activities: class attendance, study, work, eating, commuting, recreation, exercise, sleep, etc. Then, summarize how much time each week you spend on each of your activities:

in classes?	studying for classes?
working?	meeting the needs of others?
exercising?	relaxing?
sleeping?	etc.

### 3 ANALYZE WHETHER OR NOT THE WAY YOU SPEND YOUR TIME MATCHES YOUR PRIORITIES

The third step is to evaluate the use of your time. Remember, no one can judge how well or how poorly you use your time other than you. And, you cannot make that judgment without relating your use of time to your priorities.

So, you need to consider if you are spending quality time on your priorities. For example, if learning is high on your priority list, do you study during your prime energy hours or only after everything else is done for the day?

- Use the CLASS Learning Tool, **The Energy Cycle Inventory**, to help you identify your prime energy hours.

Do you spend your time studying in a crowded, noisy room while listening to music or in a quiet place where you can concentrate?

#### **4 DEVELOP A PLAN TO SPEND QUALITY TIME ON YOUR PRIORITIES**

If you found some time blocks that are not in line with what you want to be doing to reach your goals, you can begin to systematically change your life by taking control of your time.

Start by building a realistic time schedule or time budget that gives time to the activities that fit with your priorities and will help you reach your goals.

If learning and getting good grades are high on your priority list, then you will have to budget time for attending classes regularly, for studying each class each day by writing your Mirror Questions, Summary Questions, Question Charts and then asking those questions of yourself until you are sure you understand the content of your notes and your textbook, and time for writing special papers, reports or other assignments.

Finally, you must stick to your time schedule. Of course, some flexibility is necessary to take care of unexpected demands, but if you spend too much time on non-priority tasks you will not reach your goals.



### **TIME SMART STRATEGIES**

- ✓ **MAKE A STUDY SCHEDULE AND KEEP IT.** The best way to ensure that you will have enough study time to reach your goals in each course is to plan for it. Make use a weekly and monthly calendar for the whole semester. Be sure to plug in all know deadlines into your monthly calendar, i.e. test dates, paper due dates, the last day to drop a class, holidays, and your own personal finals schedule.
- ✓ **DEVELOP AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR BEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE TIMES TO STUDY.** Arrange your schedule so that you have study time during your peak hours. There really are “morning people” and “night owls”. Find out when you’re at your best and use those hours wisely.
- ✓ **REMEMBER THAT "STUDY" INCLUDES MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIVITY.** While your instructor may encourage you to study, he/she really means read your assignments before coming to class so that you can participate in his/her class appropriately, take good notes and review them daily (Mirror Questions, Summary Questions, Question Charts, etc.), do any assigned homework the best you can and turn it in on time, and after a test, review what you missed in order to learn that material before going on to more complex material.
- ✓ **SCHEDULE YOUR STUDY SESSION TO MATCH YOUR PREFERRED LEARNING STYLE.** Use visuals, make mind maps, listen to your lectures, read your book out load, take breaks, etc.

- ✓ **START EACH STUDY SESSION WITH A GOAL.** How much material do you want to cover, how many chapters do you want to read, etc. Then work to meet your goal. Remember, we often avoid big projects because we have limited time or we don't know where to begin. Break major projects into small pieces and tackle them one at a time.
- ✓ **STUDY YOUR HARDEST MATERIAL FIRST.** Leave the easier, more routine or enjoyable material to the end. In this way, you are studying the hardest material when you are the freshest and most ready to learn.
- ✓ **SCHEDULE REGULAR TIME TO REVIEW YOUR NOTES, MIRROR QUESTIONS, ETC.** To build strong mental linkages (long-term memory) you need to study your material regularly over a long period of time. Remember that memory is enhanced by repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition.
- ✓ **USE ALL OF YOUR AVAILABLE TIME.** If you only have 15 minutes, get a start on a paper (write your basic premise, outline your paper, etc.) and come back to it later. Always have something with you to review, read or study. Those 15 minutes on the bus, at the doctor's office, waiting for a ride, etc. can add up over the span of a day.

[ You may delay, but time will not.  
*Benjamin Franklin* ]

## My To Do List

Date:

[illegible]

## My To Do List

Date:

[illegible]

# How to Create a Fixed Commitment Schedule

- 1) Block off time for all classes, SI, labs, and drills
- 2) Block off work hours, set meeting times, and other weekly commitments
- 3) Fill in meals, wellness, and transportation time
- 4) Determine how many study hours you should include (2-3 hours per every 1 hour in class)
- 5) Block off study hours

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00	6:00
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