Exam Techniques

Time management

Somehow you need to fit in:

- lectures, seminars, tutorials and practicals;
- assessed work;
- independent study, reading and thinking;
- family life, social life and relationships;
- sports, music and other interests;
- travel;
- cleaning, laundry, shopping, cooking and eating;
- part-time work;
- just relaxing with a book, music, game or the TV;
- catching up on sleep.

Decide how much time this will all take, and the right balance for you, then make the most of your study time. Here’s how:

- Choose the time of day that works best for you - are you a lark or an owl?
- Have a routine - treat studying as a job with set hours
- Pace yourself - have achievable goals - and rewards!
- Use a reminder pad - things you need to do - then they won’t distract you.
- Stop at regular intervals to give your eyes and brain a rest

Plan your study time:
- What tasks do you have - assignments, prep for taught sessions, private study?
- How long will each take?
- What are the deadlines (check your course information)?

Use a planner
- Choose what suits you - wallchart, diary, smartphone
- Include lectures, classes, labs, deadlines, exams
- Use colour coding if it helps

Organise your study time
- Put the detail in your planner a week at a time
- Mark the contact time: lectures, tutorials, labs
- Decide how to use the unscheduled slots: reading, research projects, preparing assignments, writing up

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Organise your social time too

- Part-time work
- Family and friends
- Social, sport and relaxation
- Shopping, cooking, laundry, sleeping
- Be realistic - if you are too tired, you won't be able to study!

Pace yourself

- Major essay or assignment? - schedule time when you are at your best
- Vacation study - how much study? Need to work? Holiday? Family and friends?

Save time as well

- Write notes efficiently the first time - don't spend time rewriting
- Organise notes and resources - find them quickly
- Use smart reading strategies - read what is relevant now, note what might be useful later
- Make the notes you need and write the full reference alongside
- Work with the word limits - less reading for shorter assignments
- Keep a note - in a book or on your phone - as ideas occur to you
- Be organised - numbers, highlighters, post-its - whatever works for you
- Write assignments directly on to computer

Five quick tips

Getting started

Set clear, realistic goals. Split a big task into smaller ones. If there are study tasks you don't like doing, try putting them at the start of a work session. Get them finished while you’re fresh, then reward yourself with things you enjoy doing.
Keeping going

Variety is important when you're studying. Try not to keep doing the same thing for hour after hour: your eyes and brain will get tired, and you'll stop being productive.

Break up long periods of activity by reviewing how you're doing.

Don't push on if your concentration is flagging.

Taking breaks

Take breaks when you need to; when your concentration is slipping, or when you've been looking at the computer screen too long.

But try to avoid distractions like interesting TV programmes or chatty friends. Stay focussed on your work. It's best to make yourself a drink, move around a bit, then get back to study.

Knowing when to stop

When you've achieved the goal you set yourself, stop and reward yourself.

Take the time to do something interesting but not essential. Don't start a new task when you know you won't have the time or energy to finish it.

Knowing what gets in your way

If there are things that get in the way of your studying, such as noise, poor concentration, or lack of motivation, be active in working to overcome them.

If you know you try to ignore difficult or less interesting tasks, then tackle them straight away and reward yourself with something you like more.