

# Time Management

## PRIORITIZING TASKS, PREVENTING PROCRASTINATION, AND PROMOTING PRODUCTIVITY

Time is a valuable personal resource—if you gain greater control of it, you gain greater control of your life. Time managed well not only enables you to get work done in a timely manner; it also enables you to set and attain personal priorities and maintain balance in your life. This chapter offers a comprehensive set of strategies for managing time, combating procrastination, and ensuring that you spend time in a way that aligns with your educational goals and priorities.

Equip you with a powerful set of strategies for setting priorities, planning time, and completing tasks in a timely and productive manner.



### Reflection 4.1

Complete the following sentence with the first thought that comes to your mind:

For me, time is . . .

### Chapter Preview

### Learning Goal

### Ignite Your Thinking

## The Importance of Time Management

To have any realistic chance of attaining our goals, we need an intentional and strategic plan for spending our time in a way that aligns with our goals and enables us to make steady progress toward them. Thus, setting goals, reaching goals, and managing time are interrelated skills.

Most college students struggle to at least some extent with time management, particularly first-year students who are transitioning from the lockstep schedules of high school to the more unstructured time associated with college course schedules. National surveys indicate that almost 50% of first-year college students report difficulty managing their time effectively (HERI, 2014). In college, time-management skills grow in importance because students' time is less structured or controlled by school authorities or family members and more responsibility is placed on students to make their own decisions about how their time will be spent. Furthermore, the academic calendar and class scheduling patterns in college differ radically from high school. There's less "seat time" in class each week and college students are expected to do much more academic work on their courses outside of class time, which leaves them with a lot more "free time" to manage.

**”**  
The major difference [between high school and college] is time. You have so much free time on your hands that you don't know what to do for most of the time.”

—First-year college student (Erickson & Strommer, Teaching College Freshmen)

“

I cannot stress enough that you need to intelligently budget your time.”

—Advice to new college students from a student finishing his first year in college

Simply stated, college students who have difficulty managing their time have difficulty managing college. One study compared college sophomores who had an outstanding first year (both academically and personally) with sophomores who struggled in their first year. Interviews with both groups revealed there was one key difference between them: sophomores who experienced a successful first year repeatedly brought up the topic of time during the interviews. The successful students said they had to think carefully about how they spent their time and that they needed to budget their time. In contrast, sophomores who experienced difficulty in their first year of college hardly talked about the topic of time during their interviews, even when they were specifically asked about it (Light, 2001).

Studies also indicate that people of all ages report time management to be a critical element of their life. Working adults report that setting priorities and balancing multiple responsibilities (e.g., work and family) can be a stressful juggling act (Harriott & Ferrari, 1996). For them, time management and stress management are interrelated. These findings suggest that time management is more than just a college success skill; it's also a life management and life success skill that benefits both our family life and work life (Gupta, Hershey, & Gaur, 2012). When we gain greater control of our time, we gain greater control and a greater sense of satisfaction with all areas of our life. In fact, studies show that people who manage their time well report feeling happier (Myers, 1993, 2000).

#### AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

I started the process of earning my doctorate a little later in life than other students. I was a married father with a pre-school daughter (Sara). Since my wife left for work early in the morning, it was always my duty to get up and get Sara's day going in the right direction. In addition, I had to do the same for myself. Three days of my week were spent on campus in class or in the library. (We didn't have quick access to research on home computers then as you do now.) The other two days of the workweek and the weekend were spent on household chores, family time, and studying.

I knew that if I was to have any chance of finishing my Ph.D. in a reasonable amount of time, I had to adopt an effective schedule for managing my time. Each day of the week, I held to a strict routine. I got up in the morning, ate breakfast while reading the paper, got Sara ready for school, and got her to school. Once I returned home, I put a load of laundry in the washer, studied, wrote, and spent time concentrating on what I needed to do to be successful from 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. every day. At lunch, I had a pastrami and cheese sandwich and a soft drink while rewarding myself by watching *Perry Mason* reruns until 1:00 p.m. I then continued to study until it was time to pick up Sara from school. Each night I spent time with my wife and daughter and then prepared for the next day. I lived a life that had a preset schedule. By following that schedule, I was able to successfully complete my doctorate in a reasonable amount of time while giving my family the time they needed. (By the way, I still watch *Perry Mason* reruns.)

—Aaron Thompson

## Strategies for Managing Time and Tasks

Effectively managing our time and our tasks involves three key processes:

1. **Analysis**—breaking down time to see how much of it we have and what we're spending it on;
2. **Itemizing**—identifying and listing the tasks that we need to complete and when we need to complete them; and
3. **Prioritizing**—ranking our tasks in terms of their importance and attacking them in order of their importance.

The following strategies can be used to implement these three processes and should help you open up more time in your schedule, enabling you to discover new ways to use your time more productively.

**Become more aware of how your time is spent by breaking it into smaller units.** How often have you heard someone say, “Where did all the time go?” or “I just can’t seem to find the time!” One way to find out where all our time goes and find more time to get things done is by doing a *time analysis*—a detailed examination of how much total time we have and where we’re spending it—including patches of wasted time when we get little done and nothing accomplished. This time analysis only has to be done for a week or two to give us a pretty good idea of where our time is going and to find better ways to use our time productively.

(Complete the online Exercise 4.5 at the end of this chapter to gain insights into how you organize your time and the approach you take to completing tasks.)

**Identify *what* specific tasks you need to accomplish and *when* you need to accomplish them.** When we want to remember items we need to buy at the grocery store or people we want to invite to a party, we make a list. This same list-making strategy can be used for tasks we need to complete so we don’t forget about them, or forget to do them on time. One characteristic of successful people is that they are list makers; they make lists for things they want to accomplish each day (Covey, 2004).

### Note

*When we write out things we need to do, we’re less likely to block them out and forget to do them.*



### Reflection 4.2

Do you make a to-do list of things you need to get done each day? (Circle one.)

never    seldom    often    almost    always

If you circled “never” or “seldom,” why don’t you?

**Take advantage of time-planning and task-management tools, such as the following:**

- *Small, portable planner.* You can use this device to list all your major assignments and exams for the term, along with their due dates. By pulling together all work tasks required in each of your courses and getting them in one place, it will be much easier to keep track of what you have to do and when you have to do it throughout the entire term. It will also sync with the same calendar programs available on your desktop or laptop.
- *Large, stable calendar.* In the calendar’s date boxes, record your major assignments for the term. The calendar should be posted in a place you can see it every day (e.g., bedroom or refrigerator). If you repeatedly see the things you have to do, you’re less likely to overlook them, forget about them, or subconsciously push them out of your mind because you’d really prefer not to do them.
- *Smartphone.* This device can be used for more than checking social networking sites and sending or receiving text messages. It can be used as a calendar tool to record due dates and set up alert functions to remind you of deadlines. Many smartphones also allow you to set up task or “to-do” lists and set priorities for each item entered. A variety of apps are now available for planning tasks and



*Using a calendar is an effective way to itemize your academic commitments.*



tracking time spent on tasks (for example, see: <http://www.rememberthemilk.com>). Take advantage of these cutting-edge tools, but at the same time, keep in mind that planners don't plan time, people do. Effectively planning time and tasks flows from a clear vision of your goals and priorities.

### AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

My mom ensured I got up for school on time. Once I got to school the bell would ring to let me know to move on to the next class. When I returned home, I had to do my homework and chores. My daily and weekly schedules were dictated by someone else.

When I entered college, I quickly realized that I needed to develop my own system for being organized, focused, and productive without the assistance of my mother or school authorities. Since I came from a modest background, I had to work my way through college. Juggling schedules became an art and science for me. I knew the things that I could not miss, such as work and school, and the things I could miss—TV and girls. (OK, TV, but not girls.)

After college, I spent 10 years in business—a world where I was measured by being on time and delivering a productive “bottom line.” It was during this time that I discovered a scheduling book. When I became a professor, I had other mechanisms to make sure I did what I needed to do when I needed to do it. This was largely based on when my classes were offered. Other time was dedicated to working out and spending time with my family. Now, as an administrator, I have an assistant who keeps my schedule for me. She tells me where I am going, how long I should be there, and what I need to accomplish while I am there. Unless you take your parents with you or have the luxury of a personal assistant, it's important to schedule your time. Use a planner!

—Aaron Thompson



### Reflection 4.3

Do you have a calendar that you carry with you or use the calendar tool on your phone? If yes, why? If no, why not?

**Prioritize: rank tasks in order of their importance.** After you itemize your work tasks by identifying and listing them, the next step is to *prioritize* them—determine the order or sequence in which they get done. Prioritizing basically involves ranking tasks in terms of their importance, with the highest-priority tasks placed at the top of the list to ensure they're tackled first.

How do you decide on what tasks are to be ranked highest and tackled first? Here are two key criteria (standards of judgment) for determining your highest-priority tasks:

- **Urgency.** Tasks that are closest to their deadline or due date should receive highest priority. Finishing an assignment that's due tomorrow should receive higher priority than starting an assignment that's due next month.
- **Gravity.** Tasks that carry the greatest weight (count the most) should receive highest priority. If an assignment worth 100 points and an assignment worth 10 points are due at the same time, the 100-point task should receive higher priority. We want to be sure to invest our work time on tasks that matter most. Similar to investing money, we should invest our time on tasks that yield the greatest pay-off.

### Note

*Put first things first: Plan your work by identifying your most important and most urgent tasks, and work your plan by attacking these tasks first.*



Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, dramatist, and author of the epic *Faust*

An effective strategy for prioritizing tasks is to divide them into “A,” “B,” and “C” lists (Lakein, 1973; Morgenstern, 2004). The “A” list is reserved for *essential* (nonnegotiable) tasks—those that *must* be done now. The “B” list is for *important* tasks—those that *should* be done soon. The “C” list is for *optional* tasks—those that *could* or *might* be done if there’s time remaining after the more important tasks on lists A and B have been completed. Organizing tasks and time in this fashion helps you decide how to divide your labor in a way that ensures you “put first things first.” You shouldn’t waste time doing unimportant things to deceive yourself into thinking that you’re “getting stuff done”—when, in reality, all you’re doing is “keeping busy” and distracting yourself (and subtracting time) from doing the things that should be done.

### Note

*Developing awareness of how our time is spent is more than a brainless, clerical activity. When it’s done well, it becomes an exercise in self-awareness and values clarification—how we spend our time is a true test of who we are and what we really value.*

## Create a Time-Management Plan

You may have heard of the old proverb, “A stitch in time saves nine.” Planning your time represents the “stitch” (unit of time) that saves you nine additional stitches (units of time). Similar to successful chess players, successful time managers plan ahead and anticipate their next moves.

Don’t buy into the myth that taking time to plan takes time away from getting started and getting things done. Time-management experts estimate that the amount of time planning your total work actually reduces your total work time by a factor of three: for every one unit of time you spend planning, you save three units of time working (Goldsmith, 2010; Lakein, 1973). For example, 5 minutes of planning time will typically save you 15 minutes of total work time, and 10 minutes of planning time will save you 30 minutes of work time.

Planning your time saves you time because it ensures you start off in the right direction. If you have a plan of attack, you’re less vulnerable to “false starts”—starting your work and then discovering you’re not on the right track or not doing things in the right sequence, which forces you to retreat and start all over again.

Once you have accepted the idea that taking time to plan your time will save you time in the long run, you’re ready to create a plan for effectively managing time. Listed below are specific strategies for doing so.

**Be mindful of time by wearing a watch or carrying a phone that can accurately and instantly tell you the date and time.** This may seem like an obvious “no-brainer,” but time can’t be managed if we don’t know what time it is, and we can’t plan a schedule if we don’t know what day it is. Consider setting the time on your watch or phone slightly ahead of the actual time to help ensure that you arrive to class, work, or meetings on time. You can also equip your phone with apps to remind you of times when tasks are to be completed (e.g., remindme.com or studios app.com).

**Carry a small calendar, planner, appointment book or cell phone at all times, and develop a daily routine of using the calendar or task list functions on your cell phone.** This will allow you to record appointments that you may make on the run during the day as well as enable you to jot down creative ideas or memories of things you need to do—which can sometimes pop into your mind at the most unexpected times.

When I have lots of homework to do, I suddenly go through this urge to clean up and organize the house. I’m thinking, ‘I’m not wasting my time. I’m cleaning up the house and that’s something I have to do.’ But all I’m really doing is avoiding school work.”

—College sophomore

If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

—Benjamin Franklin, renowned author, inventor, civic activist, and a founding father of the United States

“Only boring people get bored.”

—Graffiti appearing in a bathroom stall at the University of Iowa, circa 1977

**Take portable work with you during the day that you can work at any place at any time.** This will enable you to take advantage of “dead time” such as time spent sitting and waiting for appointments or transportation. Portable work allows you to resurrect dead time and transform it into productive work time. Not only is this a good time-management strategy, it’s a good stress-management strategy because you replace the frustration and boredom associated with having no control over “wait time” with a sense of accomplishment.

**Make good use of your free time between classes by working on assignments and studying in advance for upcoming exams.** See **Box 4.1** for a summary of how you can use your out-of-class time to improve your academic performance and course grades.

## Box 4.1

### Making Productive Use of “Free Time” Outside the Classroom

Students’ class schedules in college differ radically from high school. College students are often pleasantly surprised by how much “free time” they have because they’re spending much less time in class. However, students are expected to spend two or more hours outside of class for every hour they spend in class. Thus, using out-of-class time strategically and productively is critical to ensuring college success.

Compared to high school, “homework” in college typically doesn’t involve turning in assignments on a daily or weekly basis. Academic work done outside the college classroom may not even be collected and graded. Instead, it’s often assigned for your own benefit to help you prepare for upcoming exams and complete written reports (e.g., assigned reading and assigned problems in math and science). Rather than formally assigning and collecting this work as homework, your professors expect that you will do this work on your own and without supervision.

“

In high school we were given a homework assignment every day. Now we have a large task assigned to be done at a certain time. No one tells [us] when to start or what to do each day.”

—First-year college student

Listed in this box are strategies for working independently and in advance of college exams and assignments. By building time for each of these activities into your regular schedule, you’ll make more productive use of out-of-class time, decrease your level of stress, and strengthen your academic performance.

### Doing Out-of-Class Work in Advance of Exams

- **Complete reading assignments** relating to lecture topics *before* the topic is discussed in class. This will make lectures easier to understand and enable you to participate intelligently in class (e.g., by asking meaningful questions and making informed comments during class discussions).
- **Review class notes** from your last class before the next class to build a mental bridge from one class to the next. Many students don’t look at their class notes until they study them right before an exam. Don’t be one of those students; instead, review your notes before the next class. Rewrite any class notes that may have been sloppily written the first time. If you find notes related to the same point all over the place, reorganize them into the same section. Lastly, if you find any information gaps or confusing points in your notes, seek out the course instructor or a trusted classmate to clear them up before the next class takes place.  
By reviewing your class notes on a regular basis, you will improve your ability to understand each upcoming lecture and reduce the total time you’ll need to spend studying your notes the night before an exam.
- **Review your reading notes and highlights** to improve retention of important material. If you find certain points in your reading to be confusing, discuss them with your course instructor during office hours or with a fellow classmate outside of class.
- **Integrate class material with reading material.** Connect related information from your lecture notes and reading notes and get them in the same place (e.g., on the same index card).
- **Use a “part-to-whole” study method** whereby you study material from your class notes and assigned

**Box 4.1** (continued)

reading in small pieces (parts) during short, separate study sessions in advance of the exam; then make your last study session before the exam a longer review session during which you restudy all the small parts (the whole) at the same time. Don't buy into the myth that studying in advance is a waste of time because you'll forget everything you studied by test time. As will be fully explained in Chapter 5, material studied in advance of an exam remains in your brain and is still there when you later review it. Even if it doesn't immediately come back to mind when you first start reviewing it, you'll relearn it much faster than you did the first time.

**Doing Out-of-Class Work in Advance of Term Papers and Research Reports**

Work on large, long-range assignments due at the end of the term by breaking them into smaller, short-term tasks

completed at separate times during the term. For instance, a large term paper may be broken up into the following smaller tasks and completed in separate installments.

1. Search for and decide on a topic.
2. Locate sources of information on the topic.
3. Organize information obtained from your sources into categories.
4. Develop an outline of your paper's major points and the order or sequence in which you plan to present them.
5. Construct a first draft of your paper (and, if necessary, a second or third draft).
6. Write a final draft of your paper.
7. Proofread your final draft for spelling and grammatical errors before turning it in.

(For a detailed discussion of strategies for writing papers and reports, see Chapter 7, pp. 163–169.)

**Reflection 4.4**

Do you have time gaps between your classes this term? If you do, what have you been doing during these "free" periods between classes?

What would you say is your greatest between-class time waster?

Do you see a need to stop or eliminate it?

If yes, what could you do to convert your wasted time into productive time?

**A good time-management plan transforms intention into action.** Once you've planned the work, the next step is to work the plan. A time-management plan turns into an action plan when you: (a) preview what you intend to do, (b) review whether you actually did what you intended to do, and (c) close the gap between your intentions and actions. The action plan begins with your *daily to-do list*, bringing that list with you as the day begins, and checking off items on the list as they're completed during the day. At the end of the day, the list is reviewed to determine what got done and what still needs to be done. The uncompleted tasks then become high priorities on the following day's to-do list.

If, at the end of each day, you find many unchecked items still remaining on your daily to-do list, this probably means you're spreading yourself too thin by trying to do too many things in a single day. You may need to be more realistic about how much you can accomplish per day by shortening your daily to-do lists. Not being able to complete many of your intended daily tasks may also mean that you need to modify your time-management plan by adding more work time or subtracting some nonwork activities that are drawing time and attention away from your



work (e.g., responding to phone calls and text messages during your planned work times). If you're consistently falling short of achieving your daily goals, honestly ask yourself if you're spending too much time on less important things (e.g., TV, video games, Facebook).



### Reflection 4.5

At the end of a typical day, how often do you find that you accomplished most of the tasks you intended to accomplish? (Circle one.)

never    seldom    often    almost    always

If you circled "never" or "seldom," what strategies could you use to move the bar toward "often" or "almost always"?

“

#### Murphy's Laws:

1. Nothing is as simple as it looks.
2. Everything takes longer than it should.
3. If anything can go wrong, it will.

—Author unknown (Murphy's Laws were named after Captain Edward Murphy, a naval engineer)

**A good time-management plan includes reserving time for the unexpected.** Always hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. Your plan should include a buffer zone or safety net that contains extra time in case you encounter unforeseen developments or unexpected emergencies. Just as you should plan to have extra funds in your account to pay for unexpected expenses (e.g., auto repair), you should plan to have extra time in your schedule for unexpected events (e.g., personal illness or family emergency).

A good time-management plan should also contain time for work and play. Your plan shouldn't consist solely of a daunting list of work tasks you have to do; it should also include fun things you like to do. Plan time to relax, refuel, and recharge. Your overall time-management plan shouldn't turn you into an obsessive-compulsive workaholic. Instead, it should represent a balanced blend of work and play, including activities that promote your mental and physical wellness—such as recreation and reflection. Consider following the daily “8-8-8 rule”—eight hours for sleep, eight hours for school, and eight hours for other activities.

If you schedule things you like to do, you're more likely to do the things you have to do. You're much more likely to faithfully execute your plan if play time is scheduled along with work time and if you use play as a reward for completing your work.

### Note

*An effective time management plan helps you stress less, learn more, and earn higher grades while reserving time for other things that are important to you; it enables you to attain and maintain balance in your life.*



### Reflection 4.6

What activities do you engage in for fun or recreation?

What do you do to relax or relieve stress?

Do you build these activities into your daily or weekly schedule?

“

It is important to allow time for things you enjoy doing because this is what will keep you stable.”

—Advice to new college students from a first-year student



**A good time-management plan has some flexibility.** A time-management plan shouldn't enslave you to a rigid work schedule. The plan should be flexible enough to allow you to occasionally bend it without breaking it. Just as work commitments and family responsibilities can crop up unexpectedly, so, too, can opportunities for fun and enjoyable activities. Your plan should allow you the freedom to modify your schedule to take advantage of these enjoyable opportunities and experiences. However, you should plan to make up the work time you lost. In other words, you can borrow or trade work time for play time, but don't "steal" it; plan to pay back the work time you borrowed by substituting it for play time that was planned for another time. If you decide not to do work you planned, the next best thing to do is re-plan when you'll do it.

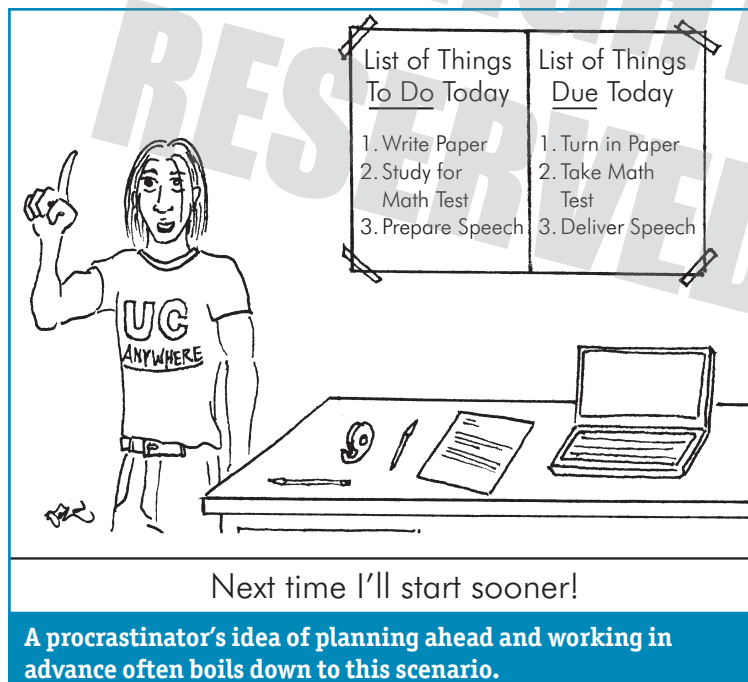
### Note

*When you create a personal time-management plan, remember it's your plan—you own it and you run it. It shouldn't run you.*

## Dealing with Procrastination

A major enemy of effective time management is procrastination. Procrastinators don't abide by the proverb: "Why put off till tomorrow what can be done today?" Instead, their philosophy is just the opposite: "Why do today what can be put off till tomorrow?" Adopting this philosophy promotes a perpetual pattern of postponing what needs to be done until the last possible moment, forcing the procrastinator to rush frantically to finish work on time and turn in work that's inferior or incomplete (or not turn in anything at all).

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Research shows that 80% to 95% of college students procrastinate (Steel, 2007) and almost 50% report that they procrastinate consistently (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Procrastination is such a serious issue for college students that some campuses have opened "procrastination centers" to help them (Burka & Yuen, 2008).

Many people take no care of their money 'til they come nearly to the end of it, and others do just the same with their time."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, dramatist, and author of the epic *Faust*

I believe the most important aspect of college life is time management. DO NOT procrastinate because, although this is the easy thing to do at first, it will catch up with you and make your life miserable."

—Advice to new college students from a student completing his first year

## Myths That Promote Procrastination

To have any hope of putting a stop to procrastination, procrastinators need to let go of two popular myths or misconceptions about time and performance.

**Myth 1. “I work better under pressure” (e.g., on the day or night before something is due).** Procrastinators often confuse desperation with motivation. Their belief that they work better under pressure is usually a rationalization to justify the fact that they *only* work under pressure—when they have to work because they’ve run out of time and are under the gun of a looming deadline.

It’s true that when people are under pressure, they will start working and work with frantic energy, but that doesn’t mean they’re working more *effectively* and producing work of better *quality*. Because procrastinators are playing “beat the clock,” they focus less on doing the job well and more on beating the buzzer. This typically results in a work product that’s incomplete or inferior to what could have been produced if they had begun the work process sooner.

**Myth 2. “Studying in advance is a waste of time because you will forget it all by test time.”** This myth is used by procrastinators to justify putting off all studying until the night before an exam. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, studying that’s distributed (spread out) over time is more effective than massed (crammed) studying all at one time. Furthermore, last minute studying before exams often involves pulling “late-nighters” or “all-nighters” that result in sleep loss. This fly-by-night strategy deprives the brain of dream sleep (a.k.a. REM sleep), which it needs to retain information and manage stress (Hobson, 1988; Voelker, 2004). Research indicates that procrastinators suffer from higher rates of stress-related physical disorders, such as insomnia, stomach problems, colds, and flu (McCance & Pynchyl, 2003). Working under time pressure also increases performance pressure by leaving the procrastinators with (a) no margin of error to correct mistakes, (b) no time to seek help on their work, and (c) no chance to handle random catastrophes or setbacks that may arise at the last minute.

## Psychological Causes of Procrastination

Sometimes, procrastination has deeper psychological roots. People may procrastinate for reasons that relate more to emotional issues than poor time-management habits. Studies show that some people procrastinate as a psychological strategy to protect their self-esteem. Referred to as *self-handicapping* (Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005), this strategy is used by some procrastinators, often unconsciously, to give themselves a “handicap” or disadvantage. By starting their work at the last possible moment, if their performance turns out to be less than spectacular, they can always conclude (rationalize) that it was because they were performing under a handicap—lack of time rather than lack of ability (Chu & Cho, 2005).

For example, if they receive a low grade on a test or paper, they can “save face” (self-esteem) by concluding that it was because they waited until the last minute and didn’t put much time or effort into it. In other words, they had enough ability or intelligence to earn a high grade; they just didn’t put in enough time. Better yet, if they happen to get a good grade—despite their last-minute, last-ditch effort—it proves just how smart they are. It shows they were able to earn a high grade, even without putting in much time at all. Thus, self-handicapping creates a fail-safe or win-win scenario that always protects the procrastinators’ self-image.

“Haste makes waste.”  
—Benjamin Franklin

“Procrastinators would rather be seen as lacking in effort than lacking in ability.”

—Joseph Ferrari, professor of psychology and procrastination researcher



### Reflection 4.7

Do you tend to put off work for so long that getting it done turns into an emergency or panic situation?

If your answer is yes, why do you think you put yourself in this position?

If your answer is no, what motivates or enables you to avoid this scenario?

In addition to self-handicapping, other psychological factors have been found to contribute to procrastination, including the following:

- **Fear of failure.** The procrastinator feels better about not turning in work than turning it in and getting negative feedback (Burka & Yuen, 2008; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984);
- **Perfectionism.** The procrastinator has unrealistically high personal standards or expectations, which leads to the belief that it's better to postpone work or not do it than to risk doing it less than perfectly (Kachgal, Hansel, & Nuter, 2001);
- **Fear of success.** The procrastinator fears that doing well will show others that he has the ability to achieve success, leading others to expect him to maintain those high standards in the future (Beck, Koons, & Milgram, 2000; Ellis & Knaus, 2002);
- **Indecisiveness.** The procrastinator has difficulty making decisions, including decisions about what to do first, when to do it, or whether to do it (Anderson, 2003; Steel, 2007), so they delay doing it or don't do it at all; and
- **Thrill seeking.** The procrastinator is hooked on the adrenaline rush triggered by rushing around to get things done just before a deadline (Szalavitz, 2003).

If these psychological issues are at the root of procrastination, they must be uprooted and dealt with before the problem can be solved. This may take some time and assistance from a counseling psychologist (either on or off campus) who is professionally trained to deal with emotional issues, including those that underlie procrastination.

Striving for excellence motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing."

—Harriet Braiker, psychologist and best-selling author



### Reflection 4.8

How often do you procrastinate? (Circle one.)

rarely    occasionally    frequently    consistently

When you do procrastinate, what's the usual cause?

## Strategies for Preventing and Overcoming Procrastination

**Consistently use effective time-management strategies.** When effective time-management practices (such as those cited in this chapter) are implemented consistently, they turn into regular habits. Research indicates that procrastinators are less likely to procrastinate when they convert their intentions or vows ("I swear I'm

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

—Aristotle, influential Ancient Greek philosopher

“The secret to getting ahead is getting started.”

—Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), American humorist and author of the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), a.k.a. “the Great American Novel”

“Did you ever dread doing something, then it turned out to take only about 20 minutes to do?”

—Conversation between two college students overheard in a coffee shop

going to start tomorrow”) into concrete action plans (Gollwitzer, 1999; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). When they repeatedly practice effective time-management strategies with respect to tasks they tend to procrastinate on, their bad procrastination habits gradually fade and are replaced by good time-management habits (Ainslie, 1992; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994).

**Make the start of work as inviting or appealing as possible.** Starting work—getting off the starting blocks—is often the major stumbling block for procrastinators. It’s common for procrastinators to experience what’s known as “start-up stress”—when they’re about to start a task, they start having negative feelings about it—expecting it to be difficult, stressful, or boring (Burka & Yuen, 2008).

If you have trouble starting your work, sequence your work tasks in a way that allows you to start on tasks you find more interesting or are more likely to do well. Beginning with these tasks can give you a “jump start,” enabling you to overcome inertia and create momentum. You can ride this initial momentum to motivate you to attack less appealing or more daunting work tasks that come later in your work sequence, which often turn out not to be as unpleasant or time-consuming as you thought they would be. Like many events in life, anticipation of the event turns out to be worse than the event itself. In one study of college students who didn’t start a project until just before its due date, it was found that they experienced anxiety and guilt while they were procrastinating, but once they began working, these negative emotions subsided and were replaced by more positive feelings of progress and accomplishment (McCance & Pynchyl, 2003).

You can also reduce start-up stress by beginning your work in an environment you find pleasant and relaxing (e.g., working in your favorite coffee shop while sipping your favorite beverage). In other words, if you have trouble starting work, start it in a place you enjoy while doing something you enjoy.

**Organization matters.** Research indicates that disorganization is a factor that contributes to procrastination (Steel, 2007). How well you organize your workplace and manage your work materials can reduce your tendency to procrastinate. Having the right materials in the right place at the right time can make it easier to get started. Once you decide to start working, you don’t want to delay acting on that decision by looking for the tools you need to work with. If you’re a procrastinator, this slight delay may provide the time (and excuse) to change your mind and not start working.

### Note

*The less time and effort it takes to start working, the more likely the work will be started.*

One simple, yet effective way to organize academic materials is to develop your own file system. Start by filing (storing) materials from different courses in different colored folders or notebooks. This not only enables you to keep all materials related to the same course in the same place, it also gives you immediate access to them when you need them. A file system helps get you organized, gets rid of the stress associated with having things all over the place, and reduces your risk of procrastinating by reducing the time and effort it takes to get started.

**Location matters.** *Where* you choose to work can influence *whether* your work gets done. Research indicates that distractions promote procrastination (Steel, 2007). Thus, working in an environment that minimizes distraction and maximizes concentration will reduce the risk of procrastination.

Arrange your work environment in a way that minimizes social distractions (e.g., people nearby who are not working), and media distractions (e.g., cell phones,



e-mails, text messages, music, and TV). Remove everything from your work site that's not relevant or directly related to the work you're doing.

Your concentration will also improve if you work in an environment that allows you easy access to (a) work-support materials (e.g., class notes, textbooks, and a dictionary), and (b) social-support networks (e.g., working with a group of motivated students who help you stay focused, on task, and on track toward completing your work).



### Reflection 4.9

List your two most common sources of distraction while working. Next to each distraction, identify a strategy you might use to reduce or eliminate it.

Source of Distraction

Strategy for Reducing this Distraction

1.

2.

**If you have difficulty maintaining or sustaining commitment to your work until it's finished, schedule easier and more interesting work tasks *in the middle or toward the end of your planned work time*.** Some procrastinators have difficulty starting work, others have trouble continuing and completing the work they've started (Pierro, et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, if you have trouble starting work, it might be best for you to start with tasks you find most interesting or easiest. In contrast, if you tend to experience procrastination by not completing your work once you've started, it might be better to schedule tasks of greater interest and ease at later points during your work session. Doing so can restore or revive your interest and energy. Tackling enjoyable and easier tasks last can also provide you with an incentive or reward for completing your less enjoyable and more difficult tasks first. (Take a look at the Persistence Preference results of your My PEPS Learning Style Inventory. What do the results say about your inclination to finish tasks and activities?)

**If you're close to completing a task, "go for the kill"—finish it then and there—rather than stopping and completing it later.** Completing a task that's almost done allows you to build on the momentum you've already generated. In contrast, postponing work on a task that's near completion means that you have to overcome inertia and regenerate momentum all over again. As the old saying goes, "There's no time like the present."

Furthermore, finishing a task gives you a sense of *closure*—the feeling of personal accomplishment and self-satisfaction that comes from knowing you've "closed the deal." Checking off a completed task can motivate you to keep going and complete the unfinished tasks ahead of you.

**Divide large work tasks into smaller, bite-sized pieces.** Work becomes less overwhelming and stressful when it's handled in small chunks or segments. You can conquer procrastination for large tasks by using a "divide and conquer" strategy: divide the large task into smaller, more manageable subtasks; then tackle and complete these subtasks one at a time.

Don't underestimate the power of short work sessions. They're often more effective than longer sessions because it's easier to maintain concentration and mo-

To reduce distractions, work at a computer on campus rather than using one in your room or home."

—Advice to new college students from a student finishing her first year in college

I'm very good at starting things but often have trouble keeping a sustained effort."

—First-year college student

Just do it."

—Commercial slogan of Nike, athletic equipment company named after the Greek goddess of victory

“

To eat an elephant, first cut it into small pieces.”

—Author unknown

mentum for shorter periods of time. By dividing work into short sessions, you can take quick jabs at a tall task, poke holes in it, and shrink its overall size with each successive jab. This reduces the pressure of having to deliver one, big knockout punch right before the final bell (deadline date).

### AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE

The two biggest projects I've had to complete in my life were writing my doctoral thesis and writing this book. The strategy that enabled me to complete both of these large tasks was to set short-term deadlines for myself (e.g., complete five to ten pages each week). I psyched myself into thinking that these little, self-imposed due dates were really drop-dead deadlines that I had to meet. This strategy allowed me to divide one monstrous chore into a series of smaller, more manageable mini-tasks. It was like taking a huge, indigestible meal and breaking it into small, bite-sized pieces that could be easily ingested and gradually digested over time.

—Joe Cuseo

”

I long to accomplish some great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”

—Helen Keller, seeing- and hearing-impaired author and activist for the rights of women and the handicapped

## Chapter Summary and Highlights

Effective goal-setting gets you going, but effective time management gets things done. To manage time effectively, we need to

- *Analyze* it. Break down time and become aware of how we spend it;
- *Itemize* it. Identify the tasks we need to accomplish and their due dates; and
- *Prioritize* it. Tackle our tasks in order of their importance.

Developing a comprehensive time-management plan for academic work involves long-, mid-, and short-range steps that involve:

- Planning the total term (long-range steps);
- Planning your week (mid-range steps); and
- Planning your day (short-range steps).

A good time-management plan includes the following features:

- It transforms intention to action.
- It includes time to take care of unexpected developments.
- It contains time for work and play.
- It gives you the flexibility to accommodate unforeseen opportunities.

The enemy of effective time management is procrastination. Overcoming it involves letting go of two major myths:

- Better work is produced “under pressure”—on the day or night before it's due.
- Studying in advance is a waste of time—because you'll forget it all by test time.

Effective strategies for beating the procrastination habit include the following:

- Organize your work materials to make it easy and convenient for you to start working.
- Organize your work place or space so that you work in a location that minimizes distractions and temptations not to work.

- Intentionally arrange your work schedule so that you are working on more enjoyable or stimulating tasks at times when you're less vulnerable to procrastination.
- If you're close to finishing a task, finish it, because it's often harder to restart a task than to complete one that's already been started.
- Divide large tasks into smaller, more manageable units and tackle them in separate work sessions.

Mastering the skill of managing time is critical for success in college and beyond. Time is one of our most powerful personal resources; the better we manage it, the more likely we are to achieve our goals and gain control of our life.

Doesn't thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of."

—Benjamin Franklin, 18th-century inventor, newspaper writer, and cosigner of the Declaration of Independence

## Learning More through the World Wide Web: Internet-Based Resources

For additional information on managing time, and preventing procrastination, see the following websites:

*Time-Management Strategies for All Students:*

[www.studygs.net/timman.htm](http://www.studygs.net/timman.htm)

[www.pennstatelearning.psu.edu/resources/study-tips/time-mgt](http://www.pennstatelearning.psu.edu/resources/study-tips/time-mgt)

*Time-Management Strategies for Adult Students:*

[www.essortment.com/lifestyle/timemanagement\\_sjmu.htm](http://www.essortment.com/lifestyle/timemanagement_sjmu.htm)

*Beating Procrastination:*

[www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE\\_96.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_96.htm)

<http://success.oregonstate.edu/learning-corner/time-management/managing-procrastination>

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## Chapter 4 Exercises

### 4.1 Quote Reflections

Review the sidebar quotes contained in this chapter and select two that were especially meaningful or inspirational to you. For each quote, provide a three- to five-sentence explanation why you chose it.

### 4.2 Reality Bite

#### Procrastination: The Vicious Cycle

Delayla has a major paper due at the end of the term. It's now past midterm and she still hasn't started to work on it. She keeps telling herself, "I should have started sooner," but she continues to postpone her work and is becoming increasingly anxious and guilty. To relieve her growing anxiety and guilt, Delayla starts doing other tasks instead, such as cleaning her room and returning e-mails. This makes her feel a little better because these tasks keep her busy, take her mind off the term paper, and give her the feeling that at least she's getting something accomplished. Time continues to pass; the deadline for the paper grows dangerously close. Delayla now finds herself in the position of having lots of work to do and little time in which to do it.

Adapted from *Procrastination: Why You Do It, and What to do about It* (Burka & Yuen, 2008).

#### Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What do you expect Delayla will do at this point? Why?
2. What grade do you think she'll end up receiving on her paper?
3. Other than simply starting sooner, what else could Delayla (and other procrastinators like her) do to break the cycle of procrastination?
4. Can you relate to this student's predicament, or do you know other students who often find themselves in this predicament?

### 4.3 Procrastination Self-Assessment

Look at the results of your My PEPS Learning Style Inventory, under the section of Persistence Preference.

What did you learn about your inclination to finish tasks and activities?

How likely are you to procrastinate?

How could you incorporate some of the suggestions offered to you increase your persistence?

### 4.4 Developing a Task-Management Plan for Your First Term in College

1. Review the *course syllabus (course outline)* for each class you are enrolled in this term and highlight all major exams, tests, quizzes, assignments, and papers and the dates on which they are due.
2. Obtain a *large calendar* for the academic term (available at your campus bookstore or learning center) and record all the highlighted information for your exams and assignments for all your courses in the calendar boxes that represent their due dates. To fit this information within the calendar boxes, use creative abbreviations to represent different tasks, such as RA for reading assignment, E for exam, and TP for term paper. When you're done, you'll have a detailed chart or map of deadline dates and a master schedule for the entire term.
3. Activate the calendar and task lists functions on your smartphone. Enter your schedule, important dates, deadlines, and set alert reminders. By carrying your phone with you regularly, you will always have this information at your fingertips.

## Reflections

1. Is your overall workload what you expected? Are you surprised by the amount of work time you will need to devote to your courses?
2. At this point in the term, what course is demanding the greatest amount of out-of-class work time? Have you been able to put in this time?
3. What adjustments or changes (if any) could you make to your personal schedule this term to create more time to handle your academic workload?

## 4.5 Time Management Self-Awareness

Take the online *My PEPS Learning Style Inventory* tool that accompanies this text.

Did the results provide you with helpful insights on how you organize your time and the approach you take to completing tasks? If yes, why? If no, why not?

## 4.6 Time Analysis Inventory

1. Go to the following website: <http://tutorials.istudy.psu.edu/timemanagement/TimeEstimator.html>
2. Complete the time management exercise at this site. The exercise asks you to estimate the hours per day or week that you engage in various activities (e.g., sleeping, employment, and commuting). When you enter the amount of time devoted to each activity, this website will automatically compute the total number of remaining hours you have available in the week for academic work.
3. After completing your entries, answer the following questions (or provide your best estimate).
  - a) How many hours per week do you have available for academic work?
  - b) Do you have two hours available for academic work outside of class for each hour you spend in class? If you don't, what activities could be eliminated or reduced to create more time for academic work outside of class?

## 4.7 Developing a Time-Management Plan for Your First Term in College

Keep in mind the task-management plan you developed in Exercise 4.4, use the following *Week-at-a-Glance Grid* to map out your typical or average week for this term. Start by recording what you usually do on these days, including the times you're in class, when you work, and when you relax or recreate. You can use abbreviations (e.g., CT for class time, HW for homework, J for job, and R&R for rest and relaxation). List the abbreviations you created at the bottom of the page so that your instructor can follow them.

If you're a *full-time* student, plan for 25 hours in your week for homework (HW).

(If you're a *part-time* student, find 2 hours you could devote to homework for every hour you're in class—for example, if you're in class 9 hours per week, find 18 hours of homework time).

These homework hours could take place at any time during the week, including weekends. If you combine 25 hours per week of out-of-class school work with the amount of time you spend in class each week, you'll end up with a 40-hour academic workweek—comparable to a full-time job—which is how college should be viewed.

**”**  
The amount of free time you have in college is much more than in high school. Always have a weekly study schedule to go by. Otherwise, time slips away and you will not be able to account for it.”

—Advice to new college students from a first-year student (Rhoads, 2005)

### Week-at-a-Glance Grid

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7:00 a.m.							
8:00 a.m.							
9:00 a.m.							
10:00 a.m.							
11:00 a.m.							
12:00 p.m.							
1:00 p.m.							
2:00 p.m.							
3:00 p.m.							
4:00 p.m.							
5:00 p.m.							
6:00 p.m.							
7:00 p.m.							
8:00 p.m.							
9:00 p.m.							
10:00 p.m.							
11:00 p.m.							

### Reflections

- How likely are you to put this time-management plan into practice?  
Circle one: Definitely Probably Unlikely
- What would *promote or encourage* you to put this plan into practice?
- What would *prevent or discourage* you from putting this plan into practice?
- How do you think other students would answer the above-three questions?

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