Where does the time go?

Our urge to multitask is not at all unusual, and I cringe when thinking of the numerous times I’ve found myself making this fundamental mistake. We all try to get things done in overly-distracting settings or at inopportune times. But effective learning is **not a task that can be squeezed** into the cracks and crevices of our busy lives. Students benefit from identifying an appropriate time for some focused learning.

*Remember! You want to work smarter, not harder…*

Right now, students are either learning remotely in a *synchronous* fashion - logging on to classrooms, workshops, or chats at specific times to do work “in sync” with their classmates - or *asynchronously* - accessing assignments to complete more independently.

*When independent work is required, you’ll benefit from structuring your time and committing to one task without distractions.*

*A lesson from Simplify - the first S in *SYNAPSE* - offers some inspiration!*

**Do One Thing**

- Commit time for a single task.
- Allow time for uninterrupted learning.
Students often spend too much time on individual assignments, working inefficiently and becoming too tired to finish the rest of their studies. Another common mistake is to procrastinate and then decide to “plow through” their assignments, overestimating the number of hours a human being can work effectively. Students who segment their studies into time “on” and “off,” for mini-breaks, tend to stay energized and effective.

A reasonable study schedule might break down as follows:

- Focused study: 45-60 min
- Break: 15-30 min
- Focused study: 30-45 min

When planning for the weekend, it’s helpful to break it up into small time blocks. It’s important to schedule long lunches and dinners on the weekend. This is our time to relax, rejuvenate, and socialize with friends. Even with long, leisurely meal breaks, three large chunks of time remain in the morning, afternoon, and night.

Automatically, cross one of these three daily blocks off for relaxation and fun. Two 3 hour blocks still remain - a lot of time! If spent on focused work, it’s more than enough for one day.

Let’s try it out! Consider the weekend ahead. Make a realistic deal with yourself about the work you’d like to accomplish before Monday morning rolls around. If there’s an activity you’d like to do on Saturday, plan to enjoy it!

It’s important to be OFF when we are off and ON when we are on.

Schedule your work accordingly and then buckle down, giving full attention to your work during study blocks. This approach earns you guilt-free time for fun. The most miserable weekends are those when students are unproductive at both work and play, giving in to distractions and procrastination, only to feel guilty while out with friends because of all the work they didn’t do.

So....before any socializing begins, plan a reasonable amount of focused work, with breaks to keep you feeling refreshed, connected, and happy.
A sample “block” plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9am-noon</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>OFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-2pm</td>
<td>Classes</td>
<td>Brunch / Exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7pm</td>
<td>Dinner / Exercise</td>
<td>Dinner / Exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10pm</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>OFF</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write up a draft plan for yourself, and post it someplace you’ll be sure to see it. Cut yourself some slack, too! It’s ok if your plan doesn’t work out perfectly.

**DON’T** beat yourself up…**instead, spend your energy reflecting on why it didn’t work.**

- Were your expectations unrealistic?
  - Did you end up abandoning your goals to follow others?
  - Did something “suddenly come up?”

**This is not about judgment!** Be honest with yourself about what kept you from meeting your work commitments. Then, and only then, will you be able to improve your study habits in future weekends.

*Modified from Dr. M’s blog post on 3/23/20 ([www.laboratoryforlearning.org](http://www.laboratoryforlearning.org))*