Starting Tasks and Making Progress

Study Development Worksheet

Study Development offer a few different resources to help with planning your university work and managing your time in our worksheets. However, it can be difficult to stick to schedules. Think about what helps you focus – and what distracts you – using the following questions. Prepare yourself to make starting a study session as easy as possible.

1. What are the basics you need in place to start work?

Ideas: Laptop, notebook, pen, water bottle, essay plan, library card….

Keep this basic kit in your bag/at your desk so you are ready. Then you don't have to prepare anything before getting started, and you won't forget something essential.

My work basics:

Now you are ready to work. If your problem is procrastination, you might stop here and get going!

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2. What distracts you? How will you remove it?

Distraction	Removal
Phone	*Place in different room / give to friend / use focus app e.g. Forest*
Getting a drink/snack	*Have a drink and snack ready / plan this for a break*
Housemates or friends talking to you	*Tell them you're working / wear headphones to block out noise / choose a different location*
Mind wanders to other pressing tasks/ worries	*Plan in time to deal with these issues after work time (even if it is in 25 minutes)*
Your answers…	

3. How long will you focus on work for?

Decide on a time that is *realistic* for how you are feeling now. This might be as little as 10 minutes, to begin with – you can work up to longer periods. There are various tools and techniques that may help:

- The Pomodoro technique: named after a kitchen timer, this study technique involves working in 25-minute blocks, with 5-minute breaks in between. Try 3 lots of 25 minutes, followed by a longer break.

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- <u>Focus apps</u>: find an app that prevents you looking at your phone/the Internet/social media for a certain amount of time: Forest, StayFocusd, Be Focused.
- <u>Accountability</u>: tell someone you're going to be working for a certain amount of time and will check in with them afterwards. You might have a study buddy on your course, you could text a family member, or you could even post on your social media. There's also FocusMate which matches you for a video session with someone else working quietly.
- <u>Calendar/planner and reminders</u>: perhaps getting started at the right time is more of an issue. Use the reminders on your phone, watch or computer to set an alarm reminding you to start work at the time you've planned. Or print out reminders for your wall or by your mirror – somewhere you look every day.

I will focus for …

I'll take a break….

4. How are you going to reward yourself, and when will this be most motivating?

On the way to starting work? *Ideas: walk along the City Walls to the library, get to university early to secure your favourite seat, choose a new café to work in.* Good if you need help getting going in the morning.

While you're working? *Ideas: using a special notebook, having your favourite drink, listening to new music…* Just make sure it's not distracting.

After you've completed a certain task? *Ideas: get a cup of tea after 3 focus sessions; put £1 towards a special purchase when you've written each section of your dissertation; watch a video/TV programme.* Something to work towards that is more immediate than your deadlines.

Your answer:

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5. Do you want to form a habit, or do you need novelty?

- If you work best with routines and habits: which spaces in your day are you going to designate as your work time? Stick with this for a month, and you'll find it easier to get going every day.

- If you respond better to changing environments and more spontaneity: can you note down a few different answers for the questions above? Then you can circulate between strategies, places, and rewards, keeping things fresh each time.

Remember: you won't reach the same level of productivity every day. Some days it will be much harder to focus, or you'll have less energy. But even one short session will help you make progress, and also make it easier to get going next time.

Support: Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small group tutorials.
- Book a tutorial or join a workshop on the Study Development tutorial and workshop webpage or search 'YSJ study development tutorials.'
- Access our Study Success resources on the Study Success webpage or search 'YSJ study success.'