



# Time Management & Staying Focused

Study Development Factsheet

Managing your time effectively is vital to both meeting your academic deadlines and enjoying your time at university. It also ensures you complete tasks to the best of your ability, and reduces stress and anxiety.

## Plan your time using a planner

- Try and plan each week using a planner or diary (such as '[Study planner](#)' (docx, 94.9 kB))
- Write in your planner when you have lectures, seminars, work shifts or other commitments.
- Work out how many hours do you have available for independent study – remember to allocate time for travel, eating, cleaning and relaxing!
- Work out a priorities list for each week (e.g. 'Prepare presentation for module').
- Turn your priorities into a daily task list (e.g. 'Plan out my presentation slide headings').

## How do I work out what my priorities are?

It can sometimes be difficult to work out what your priorities are, and in which order you should complete your tasks. **Eisenhower's matrix** is a tool that uses four quadrants to help you prioritise your tasks according to how important and urgent they are. Here's a step-by-step guide:

1. Write up a list of tasks you want to complete – this can include non-work related tasks such as seeing friends and family, doing exercise, and other voluntary commitments.
2. Draw a table or matrix (as seen below) with 'important/not important' down the left-hand side, and 'urgent/not urgent' across the top.
3. Allocate the tasks on your list into the quadrant that you think is most suitable.

|               | URGENT   | NOT URGENT  |
|---------------|--|---|
| IMPORTANT     | 1. Important deadlines with high urgency: do these tasks immediately.<br><br><i>e.g. Finish summative essay due tomorrow.</i>          | 2. Important tasks to schedule in: schedule these tasks in.<br><br><i>e.g. Start planning literature review due in two months; go for a run; phone parents.</i> |
| NOT IMPORTANT | 3. Urgent distractions: Delegate or decline these tasks.<br><br><i>e.g. Choose theme for party; meet friend for last-minute lunch.</i> | 4. Time-wasting activities: eliminate or reduce these tasks.<br><br><i>e.g. Watching TV; scrolling through social media.</i>                                    |

Responsibilities and tasks are 'urgent' if they require immediate (or very quick) attention, and 'important' if they contribute to achieving your goals. While a clear goal at university is to perform well in your degree, it is important to also consider overall life goals – including leading a healthy, balanced life.



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## How do I break large tasks down into smaller ones?

Breaking large tasks down into manageable chunks can make them seem less overwhelming and can give a sense of achievement and motivation boost as you tick things off a list.

### SMART Targets

When breaking larger tasks down into smaller ones, it can help to remember keeping your goals SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**imely. Use the template and examples on the SMART worksheet to plan your targets for your next project ([‘SMART worksheet’ \(docx, 24.2 kB\)](#)).

## How do I successfully complete these tasks?

One technique that can help maintain focus is called the ‘**Pomodoro technique**’, outlined below:

1. Choose the task you would like to complete, and set a timer for 25 minutes.
2. Work on the task (and only this task) until the timer goes off.
3. At this point, record that you have completed a pomodoro (and what you have achieved).
4. Take a 5-minute break.
5. Start the process again! After completing 4 pomodoros, take a longer break.

### Key Pomodoro Tips:

- Find the best length of ‘pomodoro’ that works for you – aim for 20 to 40 minutes per block.
- It can be motivating to aim to achieve a specific number of ‘pomodoros’ each day.
- Try not to use your phone on your short break – instead, use this time to stretch or make a cup of tea.
- You can use a physical timer or an app on your computer (e.g. Forest, Be Focused).

## Eliminating distractions

- Try and physically separate working space from living space.
- Put your phone in another room when you are trying to focus.
- Use an online tool (e.g. StayFocusd) that prevents you using time-wasting websites.
- Turn off the Wi-Fi if the task does not require internet.

**Support:** Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small group tutorials.

- Join a tutorial or 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.’