

Time Management for Graduate Students

APSU Writing Center Handout

Without intentional time management, writing projects can quickly become overwhelming. The strategies below will help you stay productive, reduce stress, and maintain balance throughout your program.

Set Clear Goals for Writing Assignments

Clear, actionable goals make large projects manageable and help maintain motivation. Consider using the SMART framework:

Specific: Clearly define what you need to accomplish.

Measurable: Identify how you'll track progress (500 words, one section draft).

Action-oriented: Focus on actions you can take.

Realistic: Set goals that fit your schedule and capacity.

Time-targeted: Assign a deadline.

Break large assignments into smaller, achievable steps.

Use Time Blocks and the Pomodoro Technique

Structure your writing time to maintain focus and prevent burnout. Short, focused intervals can make difficult tasks feel more manageable and improve concentration.

Time Blocking

Divide your writing into sections.

Assign specific time slots to each section.

Treat those blocks like appointments.

Pomodoro Technique

Work for 25 minutes.

Take a 5-minute break.

After four cycles, take a longer 15–30-minute break.

Creating a Productive Work Environment

Your workspace directly affects your ability to focus.

Aim for a space that is:

Quiet and free of distractions

Clear and uncluttered

Comfortable and ergonomically supportive

Also consider your most productive time of day.

Do you focus best in the morning, afternoon, or evening?

Schedule demanding writing tasks during your peak energy hours.

Use the "Eat the Frog" Technique

Start with your most important or most challenging task of the day.

Avoid procrastinating by completing easier, lower-priority tasks first.

Finishing a major task early builds momentum and reduces stress for the rest of the day.

Back plan from the Due Date

Instead of focusing only on the final deadline, work backward.

Identify the final due date.

Break the assignment into stages (research, outlining, drafting, revising).

Set mini deadlines for each stage.

Consider scheduling an appointment at the Writing Center or with a peer reviewer well before the final due date.

Prioritize with the Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower Matrix (Urgent–Important Matrix) helps you decide what deserves your attention:

- **Do First:** Urgent and important
- **Schedule:** Important but not urgent
- **Delegate:** Urgent but not important
- **Eliminate:** Neither urgent nor important

This tool prevents reactive decision-making and helps you focus on high-impact work.

Reward Progress, Not Just Outcomes

Graduate school often involves long-term projects with delayed rewards.

To stay motivated:

Create small rewards for completing milestones.

Focus on skill development (improving your research or grant writing abilities).

Celebrate process-based achievements, not just final results.

References

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