Managing Your Time Effectively

Time management is an important skill for success at university. Students often need to balance study with paid work, family and other responsibilities. These six strategies will help you to make the most of the time you have available for study.

1 Plan study, family, work and leisure activities over seven days rather than five.
   If you plan across a seven day week, then there is flexibility to adjust your weekly plan as the demands of study increase during the semester. Many students find that it helps to plan specific study tasks for the coming week on a Sunday afternoon or evening. The Student Diary or an electronic organiser is essential for recording tasks to do and tasks completed.

2 Use planners and mark in all the due dates for each assessment task.
   Use coloured highlighters to indicate if an assessment task is a shorter or a less time-consuming task or a longer, more demanding one. Also write in the weighting of each task. Highlight examination periods, semester breaks, and work placements; as these will mean fewer formal classes and an increase in the time available for study. You may like to use a large wall planner, a calendar or the general Semester Planner from the Academic Skills Unit website.

3 Use a weekly planner to carry out a review of how you spend your time.
   Make two copies of the Weekly Planner. Look for ways to re-order your time so that study occupies a more prominent place over the seven days. Plan your study time in ‘blocks’ so that you have study periods of two or three hours in length. Then you will have enough time to organise study in your different subject areas, read intensively, or write the first draft for an assessment task. Finally, on the second copy of the planner, re-draw your schedule so that your reorganised weekly plan is in place for the coming week or month.

4 Make the most of your free time by combining leisure activities.
   For example, by walking or going to the gym with friends, combine your social life and your fitness program. If you make the most of your leisure time, you will feel more relaxed and committed when you eventually sit down to revise a lecture, read a journal article, or work on the draft of an essay.

5 Think of ‘high quality’ time for study and ‘low quality’ time for study.
   High quality times are those blocks of time in which you feel you can concentrate the best. Always use high quality time for the more challenging tasks, such as reading journal articles and writing the first drafts of essays. Use low quality time for routine tasks, such as downloading course materials, checking references, deleting e-mails, and organising your notes, readings and computer files.

6 Focus your attention on the task and minimise distractions.
   If you find that your study areas at home are busy or noisy, do the more demanding tasks in the university library or in a local library.

For further information:
- read the ACU Study Guide: Skills for Success
- contact an Academic Skills Adviser.