

MANAGING WORKLOAD

The following system is a great way to approach the management of your tests and assignments. Of course everyone works differently so you may choose to take some of these ideas and modify them to suit your own system and existing routines.

Step 1 – Wall or Term Planner

Always have a wall or term planner. Somewhere where you can see at a glance what is happening that term without having to look through your whole diary or online planner. Write the due date for tasks on the planner – highlight tests in one colour and assignments in another colour and cross off each day as you go.

Step 2 – Effective Diary Use

Start changing the way you use your school diary or online planner.

The way this system works is that every time you are told about an assignment, a test, something that will take a few days to complete or something that is not due for awhile, quickly do the following:

RECORD THE DUE DATE

- Using red pen in your diary write in the task on the day it is due eg. English Essay Due today.
- For lots of students this is as far as their planning process takes them! It is not enough.
- Also write it on a wall calendar so you can see clearly what work is coming up.
- For an online diary make sure you make the task due date stand out clearly.

CHUNK DOWN THE WORK

Now stop for a moment and think about what will be involved in that task. Break it into chunks. See the techniques under Chunking and Planning below.

PLAN WHEN YOU WILL DO THE WORK

In your diary or planner record when you will do each section – put a plan of what you will do and when you will do it! You may not be able to stick to this perfectly, but at least you have a starting point and you are more likely to do it if you actually have steps written into your diary. Make your plan realistic, don't put unreasonable amounts of work into unrealistic timeframes. Many students do this in pencil so it is easy to change if necessary. For online diaries it is usually easy to reschedule the work and move it to another day.

Step 3 – Keep Track and Reschedule

Each day when you come home, complete what you can of what has been scheduled for that day. Highlight the work you have completed. Look at the work you didn't complete. Decide when you will now do that work. Maybe it will be tomorrow or maybe later in the week or next week. Write it in as homework in your diary for when you will do it and cross it off today's list. This means that you don't need to keep looking back to see what you haven't done, you have rescheduled the work for when you will do it.

Techniques for Chunking & Planning Work

First step: Write down absolutely everything you need to do! Then use one of the techniques below:

TRADITIONAL CHUNKING

- For a few minutes, brainstorm. This means write down everything you can think of that you might have to do as steps to complete this task.
- Now put all the steps in order: what needs to be done first.
- Finally, see if any of the steps can be broken down further into smaller chunks.

Completing one chunk at a time is much more achievable as it does not seem so huge and overwhelming. It also allows you to set goals along the way to complete certain steps by certain times.

CHIPPING AWAY

- Next to each brainstormed step for the task, estimate how long you think this step will take (better to allocate too much time than too little).
- Looking back from the due date, next to each step put roughly when you would like to have it completed by then write the first few steps into your homework diary.
- Once these are completed, reassess when you would like to complete the remaining steps by (are you currently ahead or behind?).
- Now write the next steps into your homework diary and keep repeating this process.

WORKING BACKWARDS

- Make the decision to aim for completion a few days before the deadline so you will have some spare time up your sleeve.
- Work backwards from the due date. First think of everything you need to do to meet the deadline and how long you think each task will take. Write this down.
- Now decide what you need to get done a few days before your new deadline. What about a few days before that? The week before that? Schedule out what you will need to do in the time available to you to meet the deadline.
- Be flexible and prepared to adjust either your schedule or what you plan to do in order to meet the deadline. Sometimes you may have to make the sacrifice of an early morning or extra work at night in order to stay as close as possible to your plan.
- Always do your plan in pencil – it is guaranteed to need changes as you are really just guessing how long each task will take.

THE SALAMI TECHNIQUE

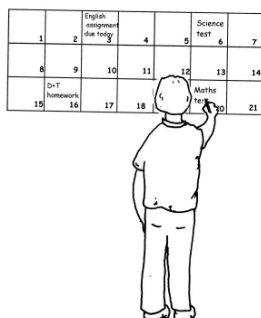
Imagine trying to eat a whole salami at once. Impossible! But slice the salami up and suddenly it is much more palatable and manageable. Many students make the mistake of diving into a large piece of work before having carefully thought through the steps and processes that need to take place to successfully complete the task. Or even worse, they simply don't start the task for ages as it all seems too overwhelming.

- Simply break the task down into the specific stages and manageably sized steps that will be necessary in order to complete the task.
- See if you can subdivide the steps any further (or slice them any thinner!).
- Slice or subdivide large, tough tasks into smaller, easily accomplished parts.
- Tackle them one by one.

The advantage of this is that you can develop a more realistic time estimate of exactly how long each step is likely to take. This helps you in your scheduling and planning of the steps.

In addition to this, it also gives you some mini-goals and tasks to complete. 'Do History project' is a bit difficult to get your mind around but 'Go to the library and find resources for assignment', or 'Read through notes from class and choose research topic' or 'Brainstorm ideas for History topic' are specific action oriented steps that are much easier to pick up and run with.

Yet another advantage of this technique is that as you knock over each step you will feel like you are getting somewhere and you can clearly chart your progress as you work your way through each step.



So how could you improve the way you manage your workload?



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