

# Using Planners and Calendars

Between rigorous classes, assignments and studying, friends and social events, and extracurricular obligations, managing time in high school can be a challenge. However, managing your schedule in high school doesn't have to be overwhelming; with a little planning and structure, you can own your time, live a balanced life, and stay on top of your work. And it pays off: studies have shown that students who plan their time were more efficient in allocating their individual study time, prepared more appropriately for the tutorial group meeting, and achieved higher scores on cognitive tests (Van den Hurk, 2006).

This handout shares several types of planning that you can do to manage your time and connects you with resources to help you make the most out of each day. Note that you can use an online calendar (e.g., Google calendar, Outlook, etc.) for semester planning and weekly planning as well.

## Semester planning

Whether you're using a wall calendar, a hard-copy planner, or an online calendar, it's good to have a way to keep an eye on the big picture for your semester.

Here are some steps to effectively plan for your semester using a calendar:

- Review your syllabi and Google Classroom to enter the dates of all exams, papers, projects, events, and travel into your planner or semester-at-a-glance calendar.
- Work backwards from each due date or exam to plan when you want to start working on each task. For example, for papers, you may want to map out when you'll do research, when you'll start your draft, when you want to finish your first draft.
- You can also use a semester-at-a-glance calendar to look ahead when you are doing your weekly planning (see following section).

## Weekly planning

Students generally benefit from regularly setting aside time to think ahead and plan for the week ahead. This kind of planning helps you make sure you allocate enough time for each of your courses and helps avoid unforeseen pile-ups of work.

You can use whatever hard copy or electronic calendar you chose for weekly planning. Find whatever works for you.

Here are some steps to effectively plan for the week:

- Have a regular time each week (budget 15–30 mins) to look at your assignments and obligations and map them out over the week.
- Mark and label time slots occupied by classes, employment, sports, extracurricular activities, and other regular commitments. If you're using an electronic calendar, it's easy to make these occurrences recurring events over many weeks or months.

- For each class, create a weekly to-do list, estimating how much time to allot for each reading, assignment, paper, project, and study prep. Insert these tasks into open slots on your weekly planner, building in buffer time.
- Use color to differentiate classes and activities visually.
- You may also want to set aside a shorter amount of daily time to make your plan or to-do list for the day.

## Tips to make your weekly planning work

Reduce your tasks to manageable steps or segments, rather than doing assignments in long sessions. Work backwards from a target date and distribute the load across your schedule. Example: Rather than reading 20 pages of a dense textbook in one sitting, try 5 pages at a time.

Know when and where you work best. Plan for your hardest studying when you know you're most alert and focused. Select a study location where you can stay productive.

Maximize breaks in your schedule. Work for no longer than an hour at a time before taking at least a quick break. Incorporate movement or exercise into your breaks to help you stay focused during study time.

Strive for balance. Don't just assume you'll find time to take care of yourself – schedule time for self-care (exercise, meditation, etc.) and even for free time if you want it.

Adjust your schedule as needed. Unexpected events can interrupt even the best-made plans. Flexibility and creative thinking prevent unforeseen circumstances from derailing your daily or weekly goals. If your schedule gets thrown off, readjust and keep going as best you can. Regular interaction with your calendar is important in helping you be realistic and in helping you get into the habit of using a calendar.

Set a stopping time at night. Sleep deprivation affects attention, cognition, and memory. Mark your goal bedtime on your calendar each night and try to stick to that time. Similarly, set a time to wake up every morning, mark that on your calendar, and try to stick to it.

Keep your planner with you. If you're using a hard-copy planner, it's important to have it with you at most times so you'll have it when you need it. Refer to it and update as needed. Electronic calendars that are on your phone make this easy.

## Works consulted

Van den Hurk, M. (2006). The relation between self-regulated strategies and individual study time, prepared participation and achievement in a problem-based curriculum. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 7, 155-169.

"Tips & Tools." Learning Center, [learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/](http://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/).

