Self-management and time management

It is essential to time management that you aim your actions towards the objectives that you truly wish to accomplish. The best way for this is to determine every morning what the most important thing to accomplish during the day is and then finish it by the afternoon.

The time management video made by Aalto's psychologists provides you with more information about time management (in Finnish).

When realising projects, efforts to meet the objective are made together with the group. Setting a clear goal, agreeing on working methods, dividing and scheduling assignments and assessing the activities make the implementation of projects streamlined.

Self-management is a skill worth developing during studies. Find out how you can set the course to the right direction.

Your studies are a stage of life where learning self-management skills is a part of your life course. Self-management means being able to set realistic goals and aiming to reach them, and in case you encounter some problems along the way, being able to recognise them and seek help and solutions to overcome them.

Clear and fact-based thinking, including the ability to separate personal interpretations and beliefs from facts, are areas of self-management. Skills in regulating emotions form the second area. The third area consists of the ability to make decisions, seek the correct information to support them and be encouraged to trust in one's own judgement. The fourth area includes the ability to regulate one's energy level and take care of one's well-being. It is important to recognise things that bring joy and challenge you positively, and to know when rest is needed.

The fifth dimension is related to the alignment of personal objectives, values and actions. Your calendar and account statement provide information about your activities, making visible what is important to you and where you are actually allocating your resources. From time to time, it is worth checking how consciously you are directing these choices and whether you are happy with them. Sometimes our goals and actions are not in line. We say that something is important to us, but fail to use our time or money on it. This kind of a situation will start to eat at motivation in the long run.

If your values and goals are aligned, finding motivation is easier. You can recognise your personal values, for instance, by using the following exercise:

Think about what has been your so-called 'sweet spot' during the last six months, meaning some fun activity where you have experienced success, enthusiasm and inspiration. Try to find situations where you can participate in such activities and notice how a lot of your values are activated in relation to these things.

Setting goals

Reaching goals is not as easy in a situation where others have set them for you. Sometimes your own values and goals are, for instance, in conflict with the expectations set for you by other people. It is worth stopping to check your personal goals from time to time.

List on a piece of paper the important things that cross your mind on which you would like to spend time.

Group these things so that issues related to the course form one unit, things related to one hobby form another etc.

Prioritisation. Which of these things are the most important?

A-class goals include things that 'create meanings', allowing you to reach your goals and live a life that looks like you. Group your goals into three groups.

- A goals: select four to six core issues to this group, e.g. the most important courses in your major subject and your most important leisure time goal. These are your most important duties from the point of view of results, reaching goals and your future. Use your prime time and energy at a 80–100% performance level.
- B goals: Necessary work, often routines with less significant result impact. Use only a reasonable amount of time and energy at a 60–80% performance level. These necessary routines and support tasks may be interesting as such, but are not as central for your personal goals.
- C goals: things you do if you have some extra time left. When you are in a hurry, you can cut some of these activities. Performance level 0–60%.

Breaking goals down into components

Break assignments down into small enough components so that you will definitely be able to complete them. A suitable unit is e.g. working for an hour. This will ensure that you will get to experience success.

Break your goals down into weekly tasks by asking yourself 'what do I have to do in order to meet the goal?'

- For example, if you aim to pass a mathematics course, your weekly tasks will include attending lectures, acquiring materials, completing calculations, attending calculation practices, participating in a calculation workshop, completing calculations with your friends, asking for advice, learning what you do not know using other websites, revising poorly managed areas.
- For example, if I want to get in shape, my weekly task is to exercise 4 times a week.
- If your task is a 5-credit course, the steadily performed weekly workload in a six-period course is fairly substantial. In total 135 working hours are required for completing the course. Dividing this over six weeks means that there are over 20 weekly working hours, which are recorded in the weekly calendar.

Taking care of your personal well-being as a class A priority

Remember to include things related to taking care of yourself, such as sport and nutrition, in your calendar.

The I Love Arki (in Finnish) pages include information about matters related to well-being and daily life management.

Stopping procrastination

Breaking your goals down into small enough components is the best method for stopping procrastination. Think what could be the smallest possible action towards your goal, set that as your goal and complete it. This will allow the energy to start flowing to the right direction.

Procrastination is often driven by a fear of not being able to cope with something; a task feels too big and difficult. Often this fear itself is actually worse than the possible negative consequences. Recognise your avoidance methods. Gaming? Social media? Jumping from one thing to the next? Social outings?

The best time to start is NOW.

Use the pomodoro technique – try to focus for half an hour: http://pomodorotechnique.com/

Reward yourself after meeting small goals.

Making a weekly plan

Devote time to making a weekly plan every week. Record your goals in your weekly plan, break them down into concrete tasks and write the tasks down in your calendar. Some of the tasks, such as participating in a lecture, can be carried over to the calendar as they are. It is impossible to know the exact time of some tasks, and in this case, it is worth recording this as the main task of the day at the beginning of the day. You can automatically copy your lectures and practices in the My Courses system e.g. to Google calendar. Ask your tutor group for advice if you have issues with the technical execution.

- Check the calendar daily.
- In the morning, reflect on the main task of the day
- Check the list of goals weekly (print it on your wall)
- Recognise the most important goals for you
- Make sure that you have a good idea of

–   what you will do today and what the main thing of the day is

–   what you will do this week

'Recognize your prime time and defend it ruthlessly' Professor Randy Pausch

Every person has a prime time during the day. Recognise your prime time and use it for doing things that mean the most to you. Be firm and say no to other things at this time. Remove distractions. Also turn off communications devices. After each interruption, it will take 15 minutes until your mind will return to the difficult task you were performing.

Making an independent study plan in your calendar

Most university studies are conducted independently. Write down, e.g. the time you use for getting ready for a lecture. You will make more out of lectures when you have familiarised yourself with the material beforehand. Also write down the time used for revising the lecture contents, e.g. on the day after the lecture. This will make it a lot easier to study for the exam. As a part of your revision, you can make a summary of the key contents of the lecture, e.g. by using some visual method.

Use these tips compiled by students for help.

Follow your time use

For a few weeks, write down what you actually did and how much time you spent on studying. You may notice that you did not use as much time to active studying as you thought.

- Evaluate your success – how well were you able to stick to your plan. Where did I succeed? Where did I waste my time? Were there any time thieves, i.e. matters that took considerably more time than you had thought? What was challenging? Was my plan realistic and useful? If I deviated from my goals, did I do this consciously or without noticing? What must be changed? What was realised differently than I expected? Was the plan overly detailed? Or too concise?
- The students who follow their time use for four weeks during their first year complete their studies more quickly than the average student.

Use the Goals and tasks model for help.

Outsourced memory

Use collection points: calendar and to do lists

Outsourcing your working memory will save your resources to more important matters

- The more you have on your mind, the less you will be able to accomplish
- Compile all the issues that you must get out of your schedule – now, later, sometime, small, big and medium-sized issues
- Organise them logically, clearly and concretely in order to get them out of your mind

You must remove any unfinished task from your mind, into a reliable system, a collection point

- If it takes less than 2 minutes to take care of the issue, do it immediately
- If it takes longer than 2 minutes, it is put to the collection point

- The collection point is a system to which you will regularly return to sort the tasks that have been put there
- The issues are stored in the collection point until you decide on further actions
- Collection points must be 'cleaned out' once a week

Most of stress stems from things going through your mind that your should do but which you keep pushing forward. Try to recognise the things you feel responsible for and which set your alarms on. Compile them and organise them into an entity. Decide what you will do with them. This will help you better manage stress related to workload with the help of your time management skills.

Perseverance

Thing do not always go easily. When something does not work out, you will need the ability to cope with disappointments as well as perseverance to try again. You can combine firmness with perseverance: when something important to you is going on, it is time to learn to say no to other people's expectations. When you are focusing on an examination, some other things can wait.

Take the time management questionnaire and find out what are your strengths and development areas in time management.

Read more:

David Allen: Getting things done, 2015

Graham Alcott: How to be a Productivity Ninja: Worry Less, Achieve More and Love What You Do, 2015

Implementing projects

Project competence is one of the most important working life skills, and focus should be put on learning it already during studies. Many courses include group assignments, and project management tools can be applied in these.

Planning projects is recommended as, in interesting projects, there is often a danger that things are first done and only thought about afterwards. A job well conceived is a job half done!

The stages of project work:

1. Start: setting a goal

2. Breaking down the project into main goals and sub-goals

3. Scheduling the project

4. Implementing the project and backlog

5. Leading the project

6. Dealing with conflicts

7. Ending the project and evaluation of results

The stages of a project

1. **Start: setting a goal**h

Defining the project: goal, output and criteria for success

The first task is to determine what you wish to accomplish.

What is the group's mission and how well do you aim to perform. For example, the goal of the project may be to complete given assignments.

The output may be, for instance, a solved problem, a report of the work and a presentation on the topic, or a product idea pitched to angel investors.

The criteria for success refer to the goals set for the project by teachers or, e.g. companies. It is also worth considering whether the group members have different/similar goals for the project. One person may just wish to pass the assignment, while another aims to get a good grade and high-quality results. Finding a mutual level to aim for is important.

2. Breaking down the project into main goals and sub-goals.

Once the goal has been set, the group can first compile a list of what they want to do or what should be done to reach the goal. After devising the initial list, the group outlines the main goals and drafts more detailed ideas below them.

Each group member considers what the group needs to do in order to accomplish each goal. Groups are formed out of the answers.

Breaking down a project means perceiving the overall picture formed out of task entities and sub-tasks. In the following example, the group had been assigned to produce a video of a management situation to a management course. After forming groups out of the answers, an image is formed out of how the project has been broken down and names of those responsible for each duty are written down on the paper.

3. Scheduling

Visualising the timetable on a shared form helps everyone see the significance of their personal output. If the camera is not ready, it is not possible to take a picture and the project will fail.

4. Implementing the project and backlog

It is a good idea to create a shared folder for the duration of the project, e.g. on Google Drive, and give everyone user rights to it.   This plan is called Project Backlog. The Backlog will help everyone perceive the current state of affairs and how everyone's work affects the participation of others.

In case of long-term projects (e.g. 10 credits), it is advisable to check at times whether the backlog is up-to-date and should it be changed based on what has been learned so far. If this is a long project, it is worth dividing the project into sprints, e.g. month-long work stages. After the sprint it is a good idea to check what has been learned, and how this affects what will be done next (=retro)

 One characteristic of an agile project is checking the goal and the means to reach it along the way and making the changes required by this. Learning occurs during projects, and this can be used to direct the actions in the project in a new way.

5. Leading the project

The work of the group will be more efficient if you choose someone to lead the project. The project leader's role can also be rotated, e.g. on a weekly basis. In addition to his or her own responsibilities related to the contents of the project, the leader's duty includes making sure that the process is moving forward, not getting stuck, and that no area is left undone. The leader:

- makes sure that breaking down tasks into sub-tasks is accomplished

- keeps in touch with the members of the group and makes sure that everyone knows the status of the project

- is responsible to make agreements on meeting times and places as well as keeping everyone updated on them

- if a group member loses track of what is going on or does not take care of his or her duties, contacts the person

- perceives which sub-tasks have already been completed and what has not yet been done

- tries to recognise if someone is having problems and attempts to help the person

- organises a Retro, i.e. a midterm review when the group will check

    - where we are now, what have we done
    - what is going well
    - what must be developed
    - what still needs to be done

- at the end of the project, the leader organises a final review, which involves going through how the project was accomplished.

- The leader will also get a good opportunity to practise management. When distributing duties, it should be taken into account that the leader will have to spend time on managing the project. This can also be written out in the report in case one is prepared.

6. Dealing with conflicts

Members of a creative team may disagree, and there is no reason to be afraid of conflicts. In order to succeed, it is important to make sure that everyone's opinions are heard and no one dominates the work too much. Difficult issues can be discussed with the help of rounds. A round means that

- each person gets a turn to share his or her view and others will listen to him or her

- no one will interrupt or reject the person speaking

- each speaker will get an equal amount of time to share his or her perspective

- the discussion is started only after everyone has been heard

7. Ending the project and evaluation of results

In the end, the project is evaluated by discussing how the goal of the project was reached, how the cooperation went, how leading the project was accomplished, and what was learned from all of this.