

## CHAPTER 2

# Time Management

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**H**ow do you approach time? Because people have different personalities and come from different cultures, they may also view time in different ways. Some of these differences may have to do with your preferred style of learning. Time management involves

- Deciding where your priorities lie
- Understanding when, how, and why you procrastinate
- Anticipating future needs and possible changes
- Placing yourself in control of your time
- Making a commitment to being punctual
- Carrying out your plans

The first step to effective time management is recognizing that *you* can be in control.

How often do you find yourself saying, “I don’t have time”? Once a week? Once a day? Several times a day? The next time you find yourself saying this, stop and think about that statement. Do you not have time, or have you made a choice, whether consciously or unconsciously, not to make time for that particular task or activity? When we say that we don’t have time, we imply that we do not have a choice. But we *do* have a choice. We *do* have control over how we use our time. We *do* have control over many of the commitments we choose to make. Being in control means that you make your own decisions. Two of the most often cited differences between high school and college are increased autonomy, or independence, and greater responsibility. If you are not a recent high school graduate, you have most likely already experienced a higher level of independence. But returning to school creates additional

#### IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN

- How to take control of your time and your life
- How to use goals and objectives to guide your planning
- How to combat procrastination
- How to use a daily planner and other tools
- How to organize your day, your week, your school term
- The value of a “to do” list
- How to avoid distractions

responsibilities above and beyond those you already have, whether those include employment, family, community service, or other activities. Whether you are beginning college immediately after high school, or are continuing your education after a hiatus, now is the time to establish new priorities for how you spend your time. To take control of your life and your time, and to guide your decisions, it is wise to begin by setting some goals for the future.

## Setting Goals and Objectives

What are some of your goals for the coming decade? One goal may be to earn a two-year or four-year degree or technical certificate. Perhaps you plan to go on to graduate or professional school. You already may have decided on the career that you want to pursue. As you look to the future, you may see yourself buying a new car, owning a home, or starting a family. Maybe you want to own your own business someday, want time off to travel every year, or want to be able to retire early. Time management is one of the most effective tools to assist you in meeting these goals.

Your goals can be lofty, but they should also be attainable. You do not want to establish such high goals that you are setting yourself up for failure. Some goals may also be measurable, such as completing a degree program or earning a 3.0 or higher grade point average (GPA). But other goals, like “to be happy” or “to be successful,” may mean different things to different people. No matter how you define success, you should be able to identify some specific steps you can take to achieve this goal. Perhaps one of the goals you will set is to find a good job—or a better one than the one you now have—upon completion of your degree. Now, at the beginning of your college experience, is an important time to think about what that means. A few of your objectives may be to determine what is a “better” job and to make yourself more competitive in the job market.

A college degree and good grades may not be enough. When setting goals and objectives and thinking about how you will allocate your time, you may want to consider the importance of:

- Having a well-rounded resume when you graduate
- Setting aside time to participate in extracurricular activities
- Gaining leadership experience
- Engaging in community service
- Taking advantage of internship or co-op opportunities
- Developing job-related skills
- Participating in a study abroad program
- Pursuing relevant part- or full-time employment while you are also attending classes.

When it is time to look for a permanent job, you want to be able to demonstrate that you have used your college years wisely. That requires planning and effective time management, which in themselves are skills that employers value.

## • Beating Procrastination

You've just begun to study for tomorrow's history test and a friend pops in and asks you to go to a concert. You drop the books, change clothes, and you're out the door.

That's procrastination. It can be an enemy for some and a friend for others. While it is sometimes sensible to delay taking action, most people procrastinate too long and risk the possibility of never getting down to business. Generally, the more you procrastinate, the greater the danger of having tough times in college and throughout life.

Some of the smartest, most committed, and most creative people procrastinate. Being a procrastinator doesn't mean you are lazy or unmotivated. You shouldn't beat yourself up about it. Instead, use that energy to understand what is motivating you to procrastinate, even when you know you're sabotaging your success.

If the risks of procrastination are so high and the results so grim, why do we do it in the first place? Often, because as we anticipate meeting a particular obligation, we are struck by fear and its corollaries:

- **Performance anxiety.** Fear of doing a poor job. A lack of self-esteem may result in your believing that you cannot master a task no matter what you do, so you don't even try.
- **Dreading the outcome.** Fear of what will follow. If you do a poor job, you may be scolded by the teacher, or worse, fail the course.
- **Disliking the task.** Fear of specific steps. You may dread the early part of the project but may feel comfortable about what follows.
- **Boredom.** Fear of monotony. You've read the first two assigned articles and almost fell asleep. What's the point of continuing?<sup>1</sup>

Overcoming procrastination takes self-discipline, self-control, and self-awareness. Here are some ways to achieve this state of mind:

- Always anticipate the good that will come from finishing the task on time. Don't slip back into fear or doubt. Focus on your goal and its positive effects. Remind yourself that you can learn skills or gain the knowledge that you need to accomplish a task.

<sup>1</sup>Schwartz, Andrew E. and Dallett, Estelina L. "Procrastinate." *The CPA Journal*, April 1993, v63, n4, p. 83(3). Reprinted with permission.

- Do the awkward or difficult task early in the day. You will then feel the exhilaration that comes with accomplishing a dreaded task. It will carry you through the day and even set you up right for the next one.
- Focus on good results as they occur. Give yourself credit for all that you do. Seek quality overall rather than perfection in everything. Rather than pressuring yourself too much, face your requirements and your talents realistically.<sup>2</sup>

Here are other ways to beat procrastination:

- Say to yourself, “I need to do this now, and I am going to do this now. I will pay a price if I do not do this now.” Remind yourself of the possible consequences if you do not get down to work. Then get started.
- Although it’s tough for procrastinators to do, use a “to do” list to focus on the things that aren’t getting done. Working from a list will give you a feeling of accomplishment and lead you to do more.
- Break down big jobs into smaller steps. Tackle short, easy-to-accomplish tasks first.
- Promise yourself a reward for finishing the task. For more substantial tasks, give yourself bigger and better rewards.
- Eliminate distractions. Say no to friends and family who want your attention. Agree to meet them at a specific time later. Let them be your reward for studying.
- Don’t make or take phone calls or instant messages during planned study sessions. Close your door.

A very different management view describes procrastinators as those who

- Eagerly volunteer for impossible workloads.
- Want to take on more important tasks but seem to lack the ability to succeed.
- Agree to or suggest impossible deadlines.
- Often fail to deliver. His or her procrastination may be due to perfectionism, a fear of failure, or even a fear of success.
- Follow through only when constantly monitored.
- Spend more time on giving the appearance of progress than on actual progress.
- Blame bad luck or others when confronted with failure to deliver, or says, “I knew you’d want it done right.”<sup>3</sup>

Recent research indicates that college students who procrastinate in their studies also avoid confronting other tasks and problems and are more likely to

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Deep, Sam, and Sussman, Lyle. “When an employee says ‘can do’—but doesn’t” [excerpt from *What to Say to Get What You Want*], *Executive Female*, May–June 1992, v15, n3, p16(1).

develop unhealthy lifestyles that include higher alcohol consumption, smoking, insomnia, poor diet, and lack of exercise. If you cannot get your procrastination under control, it is in your best interest to seek help at your campus counseling service before you begin to feel you are losing control over other aspects of your life as well.

## Setting Priorities

This book is full of suggestions for enhancing academic success. However, the bottom line is keeping your eyes on the prize and being intentional in taking control of your time and your life. Keeping your goals in mind, establish priorities in order to use your time effectively.

First, determine what your priorities are: attending classes, studying, working, or spending time with the people who are important to you. Then think about the necessities of life: sleeping, eating, bathing, exercising, and relaxing. Leave time for fun things like talking with friends, watching TV, going out for the evening, and so forth; you deserve them. But finish what *needs* to be done before you move from work to pleasure. And don't forget about personal time. Depending on your personality and cultural background, you may require more or less time to be alone.

If you live in a residence hall or share an apartment with other college students, communicate with your roommate(s) about how you can coordinate your class schedules so that you each have some privacy. If you live at home with your family, particularly if you are a parent, work with your family to create special times as well as quiet study times.

Setting priorities is an important step. You are the only one who can decide what comes first, and you are the one who has to accept the ramifications of your decisions.

In setting priorities, you may have to prioritize the assignment that is due tomorrow over reading the chapters that will be covered in a test next week. Understandably, you do not want to procrastinate on all the reading until the night before the exam. Planning is critical or you will always find yourself struggling to meet each deadline.

## Use a Daily Planner

In college, as in life, you will quickly learn that managing time is an important key not only to success, but to survival. A good way to start is to look at the big picture. Use the *term assignment preview* (Figure 2.1) on pages 24–25 to give yourself an idea of what's in store for you. Complete your term assignment preview by the beginning of the second week of classes so that you can continue to use your time effectively. Then purchase a “week at a glance”

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**Figure 2.1 Term Assignment Preview**

Using the course syllabi provided by your instructors, enter all due dates on this term calendar. For longer assignments, such as term papers, divide the task into smaller parts and establish your own deadline for each part of the assignment. Give yourself deadlines for choosing a topic, completing your library research, developing an outline of the paper, writing a first draft, and so on.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 5					
Week 6					
Week 7					
Week 8					

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 9					
Week 10					
Week 11					
Week 12					

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 13					
Week 14					
Week 15					
Week 16					

organizer for the current year or personal digital assistant. Your campus bookstore may sell one designed just for your school, with important dates and deadlines already provided. If you prefer to use an electronic planner, go to the calendar link on your college's Web site and enter the key dates you need to know in your planner. Regardless of the format you prefer (electronic or hard copy), enter the notes from your preview sheets into your planner, and continue to enter all due dates as soon as you know them. Write in meeting times and locations, scheduled social events (jot down phone numbers, too, in case something comes up and you need to cancel), study time for each class you're taking, and so forth. Carry your planner with you in a convenient place. *Now* is the time to get into the habit of using a planner to help you keep track of commitments and maintain control of your schedule.

This practice will become invaluable to you in the world of work. Check your notes daily for the current week and the coming week. Choose a specific time of day to do this, perhaps just before you begin studying, before you go to bed, or at a set time on weekends. But check it daily, and at the same time of day. It takes just a moment to be certain that you aren't forgetting something important, and it helps relieve stress!

## Maintain a "To Do" List

Keeping a "to do" list can also help you avoid feeling stressed or out of control. Some people start a new list every day or once a week. Others keep a running list, and only throw a page away when everything on the list is done. Use your "to do" list to keep track of all the tasks you need to remember, not just academics. You might include errands you need to run, appointments you need to make, email messages you need to send, and so on. Develop a system for prioritizing the items on your list—highlight; use colored ink; or mark with one, two, or three stars, or A, B, C. You can use your "to do" list in conjunction with your planner. As you complete each task, cross it off your list. You will be amazed at how much you have accomplished, and how good you feel about it.

## Guidelines for Scheduling Week by Week

- Begin by entering all of your commitments for the week—classes, work hours, family commitments, and so on—on your schedule.
- Examine your toughest weeks on your term assignment preview sheet (see Figure 2.1). If paper deadlines and test dates fall during the same week, find time to finish some assignments early to free up study time for tests. Note this in your planner.

- Try to reserve two hours of study time for each hour spent in class. This “two-for-one” rule is widely accepted and reflects faculty members’ expectations for how much work you should be doing to earn a good grade in their classes.
- Break large assignments such as term papers into smaller steps such as choosing a topic, doing research, creating a mind map or an outline, writing a first draft, and so on. Add deadlines in your schedule for each of the smaller portions of the project.
- All assignments are not equal. Estimate how much time you will need for each one, and begin your work early. A good time manager frequently finishes assignments before actual due dates to allow for emergencies.
- Keep track of how much time it takes you to complete different kinds of tasks. For example, depending upon your skills and interests, it may take longer to read a chapter in a biology text than in a literature text.
- Set aside time for research and other preparatory tasks. Most campuses have learning centers or computer centers that offer tutoring, walk-in assistance, or workshops to assist you with computer programs, databases, or the Internet. Your campus librarian can be of great help also.
- Schedule at least three aerobic workouts per week. (Walking to and from classes doesn’t count!)

Use Figure 2.2 to tentatively plan how you will spend your hours in a typical week.

## Organizing Your Day

Being a good student does not necessarily mean grinding away at studies and doing little else. Keep the following points in mind as you organize your day:

- Set realistic goals for your study time. Assess how long it takes to read a chapter in different types of texts and how long it takes you to review your notes from different instructors, and schedule your time accordingly. Give yourself adequate time to review and then test your knowledge when preparing for exams.
- Use waiting time (on the bus, before class, waiting for appointments) to review.
- Prevent forgetting by allowing time to review as soon as reasonable after class.
- Know your best time of day to study.
- Don’t study on an empty or full stomach.
- Pay attention to where you study most effectively, and keep going back to that place. Keep all the supplies you need there and make sure you have

**28 Chapter 2 Time Management****Figure 2.2 Weekly Timetable**

A chart like this can help you organize your weekly schedule and keep track of how you're spending your time. Checking it at the end of each week is a good way to make yourself aware of ways that you may have misjudged how you use and manage your time.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							

adequate lighting, a chair with sufficient back support, and enough desk space to spread out everything you need.

- Study difficult or boring subjects first, when you are fresh. (Exception: If you are having trouble getting started, it might be easier to get started with your favorite subject.)
- Avoid studying similar subjects back to back if you might confuse the material presented in each.
- Divide study time into 50-minute blocks. Study for 50 minutes, then take a 10- or 15-minute break, and then study for another 50-minute block. Try not to study for more than three 50-minute blocks in a row, or you will find that you are not accomplishing 50 minutes' worth of work. (In economics, this is known as the law of diminishing returns.)
- Break extended study sessions into a variety of activities, each with a specific objective. For example, begin by reading, then develop "flash cards" by writing key terms and their definitions or formulas on note cards, and finally test yourself on what you have read. You cannot expect to be able to concentrate on reading in the same text for three consecutive hours.
- Restrict repetitive, distracting, and time-consuming tasks like checking your email to a certain time, not every hour.
- Be flexible! You cannot anticipate every disruption to your plans. Build extra time into your schedule so that unexpected interruptions do not necessarily prevent you from meeting your goals.
- Reward yourself! Develop a system of short- and long-term study goals and rewards for meeting those goals.

## • Making Your Time Management Plan Work

With the best intentions, some students using a time management plan allow themselves to become overextended. If there is not enough time to carry your course load and meet your commitments, drop any courses before the drop date so you won't have a low grade on your permanent record. If you are on financial aid, keep in mind that you must be registered for a certain number of credit hours to be considered a full-time student and thereby maintain your current level of financial aid.

### Don't Overextend Yourself

Learn to say no. Do not take on more than you can handle. Do not feel obligated to provide a reason; you have the right to decline requests that will prevent

you from getting your own work done. If you're a commuter student, or if you must carry a heavy workload in order to afford going to school, you may prefer scheduling your classes together in blocks without breaks.

Although block scheduling allows you to cut travel time by attending school one or two days a week, and may provide more flexibility for scheduling employment or family commitments, it can also have significant drawbacks. There is little time to process information or to study between classes. If you become ill on a class day, you could fall behind in all of your classes. You may become fatigued sitting in class after class. Finally, you might become stressed when exams in several classes are held on the same day.

Block scheduling may work better if you can attend lectures at an alternative time in case you are absent, if you alternate classes with free periods, and if you seek out instructors who allow you flexibility in completing assignments.

## Reduce Distractions

Where should you study? Avoid places associated with leisure—the kitchen table, the living room, or in front of the TV. They lend themselves to interruptions by others. It's not usually a good idea to study in bed. Either you will drift off when you need to study, or you will learn to associate your bed with studying and not be able to go to sleep when you need to. Instead, find quiet places to do your work.

Try to stick to a routine as you study. The more firmly you have established a specific time and a quiet place to study, the more effective you will be in keeping up with your schedule. If you have larger blocks of time available on the weekend, for example, take advantage of that time to review or catch up on major projects, such as term papers, that can't be completed effectively in 50-minute blocks. Break down large tasks and take one thing at a time; then you will make more progress toward your ultimate academic goals.

Here are some more tips to help you deal with distractions:

- Don't snack while you study. (Ever wonder where that whole bag of chips went?) However, it's fine to take your textbook with you to lunch or dinner, if you're dining alone. With a healthy meal in front of you, you can multitask, feeding your mind while you're feeding your body.
- Leave the cell phone, TV, CD player, tape deck, and radio off, unless the background noise or music really helps you concentrate on your studies or drowns out more distracting noises (people laughing or talking in other rooms or hallways, for instance).
- Don't let personal concerns interfere with studying. If necessary, call a friend or write in a journal before you start to study, and then put your

worries away. You might actually put your journal in a drawer and consider that synonymous with putting your problems away.

- Develop an agreement with the people you live with about “quiet” hours.

## Time and Critical Thinking

Few questions in higher education have a right or wrong answer. Good critical thinkers have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Confronted by a difficult question, they suspend judgment until they can gather information and weigh the merits of different arguments. Thus, effective time management does not always mean making decisions or finishing projects hastily. Effective critical thinkers resist finalizing their thoughts on important questions until they believe they have developed the best answers possible.

This is not an argument in favor of ignoring deadlines, but it does suggest the value of beginning your research, reading, and even the writing phases of a project early, so that you will have time to change direction if necessary as you gather new insights. Give your thoughts time to incubate. Allow time to visit the library more than once. Talking about your ideas with other students or your teacher can also be helpful. Sometimes insights come unexpectedly, when you are not consciously thinking about a problem. If you are open-minded and prepared to let your mind search for new insights, you may experience an epiphany—a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence. If you begin a project as early as you can, you will have time to give it the level of thought it deserves.

### YOUR PERSONAL JOURNAL

Following are several topics you can write about. Choose one or more. Or choose another topic related to time management.

1. Before you completed this chapter, how successful were you at managing your time?
2. What have you learned from this chapter that will help you apply good time management skills to your college courses?
3. How can you modify the ideas in this chapter to fit your own habits and biological clock?
4. What behaviors are you thinking about changing after reading this chapter? How will you go about changing them?
5. Is there anything else on your mind this week that you'd like to share with your instructor? If so, add it to your journal entry.

## READINGS

### How to Manage Your Time\*

By Andrea Matetic

When Dennis Hensley tells people they can better manage their time, he's speaking from experience. He has a Ph.D. He teaches English and writing at Taylor University—Fort Wayne and has managed to write one book every year he has been there. He has been a full-time freelance writer and has published 44 books, 3,000 newspaper and magazine articles, several songs, short stories, and scripts.

He has been married to Rose for 32 years and has two grown children, Nathan, 29, and Jeanette, 26.

He served in Vietnam for almost two years and managed to read more than 125 books, see 85 movies, travel to Thailand and Taiwan, keep a daily journal, study the Vietnamese language, earn a brown belt in tae kwon do, and write devotions, articles, and comedy pieces while he was there.

Who is this guy? Superman?

No, but he did write a book called “How to Manage Your Time.” In that book, published in 1989, Hensley says you don't have to be Superman to get things done. “So, get it straight in your mind right from the start,” he challenges. “There are enough hours in the day to do whatever you want to do, but you've got to have discipline.”

Hensley illustrates his point by breaking up a typical day into time segments. If you work eight hours, sleep eight hours, and do whatever you want for six hours, you would still have two hours to work on a special goal or project, like writing a book or fixing up an old car.

If you do follow this plan for five days a week, four weeks a month, after one year you will have logged 480 hours—a total of three work months—of progress toward your goal or project. However, he warns, you may have to sacrifice “time-wasting activities,” such as channel surfing or Internet browsing, to stay on track.

When his children were young, Hensley would write from 10 p.m. until 3 a.m., sleep until 10 a.m., and write again until 3 p.m. when his children got home from school. Although it was a strange schedule, Hensley was able to write full time and spend evenings with his family.

Now, as a professor, Hensley posts his available hours on his office door and does not carry a cell phone. “I do not own a cell phone because I simply do

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\**Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, August 3, 2004, p. K1495. Copyright 2004 Knight Ridder/Tribune. Reprinted with permission.

not want to be accessible 24/7. Sometimes I just want total privacy, so I go into my office, lock the door, turn off the phone, and I read and write. . . . I keep my weekends for myself and my wife,” he said. In this way, he avoids distractions.

He also advises people to avoid wasting time by getting rid of all “clutter” in the office and home. “Throw out outdated files. Give away books you’ve already read. Rip outdated materials off bulletin boards. Empty wastebaskets. Donate clothes that no longer fit. Gut the in-files. Pitch old manuals and outdated reference materials, including disks and floppies and tapes,” Hensley says. By doing this, he says, “You’ll be able to locate vital materials much faster” and save time.

### SETTING PRIORITIES

Hensley offered these additional tips on how to manage time wisely:

1. Set goals regarding family, career, and health and prioritize those goals. Each day, do at least one thing to get closer to accomplishing your goal. “Tasks are not goals,” he said. “Stay focused on goals, not busy work. Your goals are what will advance you in life, whereas your tasks are what will eat up your life.”
2. Delegate minor activities to others. “Save your prime time for your prime tasks. Hire someone to mow your lawn, deliver your dry cleaning, wash your windows, tune your engine and anything else whenever possible,” he said. This will allow you to focus on your more important goals and responsibilities.
3. “Follow yourself around for two days,” he advises. Keep a journal of everything you do to see what activities need to be eliminated. Some questions to ask are: “How often do you get interrupted by people or cell phones? What jobs are you doing that really are not your responsibility? How are your top-priority goals taking a back seat to daily busy work? What bad habits do you have regarding eating, wasting time, daydreaming, or visiting with other people? Once you see your problems, take positive steps to solve them,” he said.
4. Find out when your peak hours of productivity are and do your most important work then. Do you work best in the early morning, in the afternoon, or late at night?
5. When sitting in waiting rooms, at the airport, standing in lines, or driving to work, have something to do on hand at all times. Some ideas to consider are bringing a tape recorder in the car and dictating speeches, letters, or reports on your way to work; taping key words on paper to your dashboard and brainstorming when you stop at traffic lights; having books or reports with you to read or review; and writing business letters longhand.
6. Use your relaxation time wisely as well. Hensley says there’s nothing wrong with relaxation, but he does believe some activities, like channel

surfing or coffee breaks, just waste time. More purposeful activities to do during free time, he recommends, are reading, exercising, spending time with friends or family, and even taking brief naps to re-energize yourself.

### **Getting Started**

Sometimes one of the biggest challenges a person faces when starting a project is taking that first step, Hensley writes. “Like everyone, I have certain jobs I must do that I dread. I don’t look at the overall task, but at a lot of little ‘projects,’” he said. “For example, in writing a book, I won’t tell myself that I have to produce 300 pages of finished manuscript. Instead, I’ll say that it is going to consist of 24 chapters and that each chapter is actually no more than one good-sized article. So, by doing one article every two weeks—an easy schedule—I wind up with a book completed at the end of each year.

“I do everyday life the same way. If I need to get my yard in shape, I won’t look at the whole yard as two days of arduous work. I’ll just say that one morning I will trim all the bushes, hedges, and trees. That’s enough. The next morning it will be time to weed the garden. Another morning it will be time to edge the lawn. Thus, over a week or so, it all gets done, but I still have a lot of time left each afternoon and evening for other things. “Divide and conquer is the answer to big hateful jobs,” he explained.

Taking breaks also can add to wasting time, said Hensley. “When I am really ‘in the zone’ of writing, I sometimes don’t come up for air for two hours at a time. Usually, however, I will take pauses. Instead of a half-hour coffee break that stops all momentum . . . I just pause for five minutes to stretch a bit, refill my coffee mug, grab a granola bar or cheese stick, and then I go back to work,” he said.

“The key is to not lose that forward momentum, which is what happens when someone else interrupts you, or you allow yourself to get on a totally different mind-set, as when you turn on the TV or stop by the water cooler to chat with someone for 20 minutes. Not good! Stay on task.”

How did Hensley learn to be so focused?

While he was working on his doctorate at Ball State University, he was a reporter at the *Muncie Star*. “I was paid according to how many articles, interviews, and features I wrote and turned in,” he said. “That taught me two things: Only what you finish in life really counts; and deadline is a literal, not a figurative term, in that it means, ‘Go past this line and you’re dead.’”

This is something he emphasizes with his students at Taylor. “It’s good that I teach at a private college, because I would never be able to get away with my style of teaching at a public school,” he said. “My students are never allowed to come to class late. If a class starts at 9 a.m., I close and lock the door at 9 a.m. Anyone on the wrong side of that door misses that day’s lecture and gets an ‘F’ in the grade book for that day. Similarly, papers may not be

turned in late for any reason except death (one's own). In the real world, that's the way it works, so students need to learn that right away.

"Students discover that I am not bluffing about this, so they rise to the challenge. Later, when they go out on internships, their supervisors call me and praise the students for coming every day and coming early. It always makes a good impression and often leads to career job offerings after college."

For those who think they aren't capable of being that focused, determined, and organized, or who make other excuses, Hensley says time management is a choice. "You can always make productive use of your time if you choose to do so. Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*, 'You can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven. It's all in your mind.' He was right about that."

### **When Mom Goes Back to School\***

*Middle-aged students are going to college in record numbers, and inspiring younger classmates, including their own kids, to hit the books harder than ever.*

By Jennifer Wagner

Vicki Smith stands in line with the other students at the University of Northern Iowa's bookstore, waiting to purchase class materials for her Humanities I and Personal Wellness classes. The petite blond is a sophomore majoring in art education who dreams of one day teaching at the college level. But this undergraduate is a little different from the other coeds: she's 44 years old and the single mother of five children. Her oldest son, Jared, is actually enrolled at the same university.

Returning students like Vicki were for years referred to as "nontraditional," but according to recent studies that phrase may no longer apply. Adult students are in fact the fastest-growing educational demographic in the United States. Between 1970 and 1993, the number of students 40 and older increased a whopping 235 percent, according to statistics gathered by the Education Resource Institute. Attendance is on the rise among students with dependents, as well as among single parents, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics.

Being a student can be difficult enough in terms of balancing hectic class schedules, homework, tests, employment, and social life. Add being a mother and homemaker to the mix, and the thought of going back to school may seem overwhelming at best. And yet each year thousands of these women strap on their backpacks and head off to class.

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Jared admits he doesn't know how his mother handles it all. "I take a lot more classes than her, but I don't have as many responsibilities like raising a family and all the things a single mom has to do," he says. "And she spends so much time studying! I like good grades too, but I would never push myself that hard." But Vicki, who says she runs "a pretty tight ship" at home, feels studying is a great example she can set for her children. "Seeing Mom studying is a positive thing for kids."

That certainly was the case with Denise Alexander. The 43-year-old single mother went to college for the first time at the encouragement of a supervisor at her full-time job in New Carrollton, Maryland, where she works as a product analyst. At the same time her daughter, Sheina, had decided to take time off from school and wasn't sure when or if she'd go back.

"I really felt she needed me. I thought that if I could go to college, Sheina might be inspired to go too, get some incentive to go back," says Denise. She was right. Not only was she able to encourage her daughter to go back to school, but Sheina enrolled at her mom's school, Prince George's Community College. What's more, the two even took a couple of classes together. Denise graduated in May 2004. Sheina, who currently has a 4.0 grade point average, will graduate next year.

## BACK TO SCHOOL

There's no one reason why women return to school. But divorce, widowhood, and wanting to improve career options number among the most typical motivators. According to the Institute for Higher Education Policy, going back to school provides private and public benefits. College graduates generally enjoy higher salaries and benefits, are employed more consistently, and work in nicer conditions. College-educated people vote more, give more to charity, rely less on government support, and have lower incarceration rates.

Making the switch from being supported to supporting oneself can be a challenge, but often a necessary one. Financial independence for women is key, says Nancy Schlossberg, professor emerita at University of Maryland and author of *Overwhelmed: Coping with Life's Ups and Downs*. "I think it's important for women to do some direct achievement, because chances are women will live alone in later life, either divorced, widowed, or never married."

To Schlossberg, who developed a framework of questions that may assist women in deciding if the time is right to go back to school, education is critical in the long run. "There are times when you have to work, when you will work," she says. "You are going to do much better if you have an education, and you're going to be happier if you have the education that enables you to do what you have to do in life. The question is if you are ready at this time to go for it."

Answering that question may bring into play a whole host of worries, like how to balance the homework with the work at home, how to pay the bills,

and how to muster the confidence needed to succeed alongside often-years-younger peers. Yet time after time women around the country rise to meet these challenges head on. Here are a few of the tips that help women go back to school and to keep their personal lives balanced as they do it.

### *Set Up a Daily Study Time*

Time management is an essential issue for all students, and returning women in particular are usually balancing a heavy load of other commitments. Having an assigned time to study in your daily schedule, and making sure everyone in your family knows when that time is, is crucial to keeping up with class expectations.

### *Redistribute Housework and Chores Whenever Possible*

Any extra assistance a spouse, partner, or child can contribute is an added benefit. If the family recognizes that mom is adding on some responsibilities and challenges to her life, they can help by pitching in.

Everything won't happen the same way it did before you went to school. The bathroom might not get cleaned as often, and the meals might not be as elaborate. Family support is key, but each woman needs to recognize her own limits in her daily duties. **DON'T OVERCOMMIT.** Being overcommitted is a big trap for women returning to school. Something will have to give, whether it's cutting back on work hours or volunteering at a child's school. Don't feel you have to sign up for the same number of courses as a full-time student. It may take you a couple of years longer to get through a traditional four-year program, but you'll be more likely to succeed and you'll be able to work at a pace that won't grind you down. Cutting back on other responsibilities will help a woman succeed in the path to getting a degree.

### *Consider Doing Homework Together with Children*

Clean off the dining room table and sit down together with your books. Children need to see that their parents are in school and are also responsible for doing well at their studies. Share with the children what it's like to be in school. Show them your campus too.

"My daughter and I have study habits that are too different for us to be able to study together," says Denise Alexander. "But we can still talk about our classes and our experiences. Sharing that has been really important, for both of us."

### *Plan Ahead*

Schedule your week ahead of time. Hang the family calendar on the refrigerator so everyone can be aware of each other's schedules, including study times, exams, work hours, and extracurricular activities. Use weekends to plan meals and do grocery shopping for the next week.

### *Get Technical*

Cell phones and email will help keep you connected. Don't worry if you don't have a computer, but be prepared to spend more time away from home in labs or libraries using their equipment for assignments. Schools should be able to help the less technically savvy get up to speed.

### *Ask for Help*

Coping with the transition back to school can be quite daunting, and many schools have systems or personnel in place to help returning women face the new challenges. Norma Kent, a vice president at the American Association of Community Colleges, suggests women ask schools about special programs tailored for either single or returning adult mothers, pointing out that some programs may assist with child care and transportation needs. "For some of them, this is a very courageous thing to go back to college," she says. "In community colleges, women find a real team spirit to help each other succeed. This will make a difference."

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## DISCUSSION

1. Discuss some of your challenges in dealing with procrastination. How do you attempt to manage it, if you do—or at times, how does it seem to manage you?
2. How are your time management challenges different now that you are in college? How are your coping mechanisms different from or similar to your previous strategies? Share your self-evaluation with some class members and compare notes.
3. Discuss whether on balance you feel that your time demands control you as opposed to your controlling them. After talking about this with other students and noting common themes, check out the concept of "locus of control" for additional insights on how you are doing in this area of self-management.
4. Discuss some of the suggestions in the chapter for time management. How do you think you can or should improve on them or adapt them to your circumstances? Swap some good ideas with other students.
5. Discuss the recommendations from the articles "How to Manage Your Time" and "When Mom Goes Back to School" and develop a list with fellow students of which ones you buy and which ones you don't. Prioritize them if you can.