

The Think Tank

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Jean-Paul Nadeau, Editor



Bryant College
Hall 6, 3rd and 4th Floors
1150 Douglas Pike
Smithfield, RI 02917
232-6746

<http://web.bryant.edu/~ace>

A Note From the Editor

As our campus displays fall's fast flowing palette and we turn our clocks back an hour, this month's *Think Tank* theme of time management seems rather--timely. This issue offers advice on how to make the most of the time you have each day.

Do you make "to do" lists? Do you have a daily planner? How about a desk calendar? Well, all of these things *can* help you become more efficient. The key is doing more than just "having" a planner or calendar; you need to *use* them to your best advantage. In the articles that follow, your fellow students, faculty, and professional staff from the Academic Center for excellence and Writing Center try to help you get everything done on time by using lists, planners, calendars and anything else they've found that works.



A Question of Strategy

by O'Brian Kaufman, Adjunct English Professor

"Why did I get a 'C' on my term paper?"

That's a question students ask often enough and one that can be answered by posing this question back to them: "Why ask why?"

Of course, the response, on the surface, may appear flippant, but a closer reading reveals it as a prompt for reflection and a strategy for saving time.

Busy college students rarely take an initiative to question professors on the reasons assignments are given. Students do not ask *why*!

Instead, students beset with the challenge of papers due query their instructors on assignment length, grading methodologies and the inevitable, “Does spelling count?”

While such interrogative may prove useful, the students fail to seek the keys to the assignments—the intentions, justifications, or motives. Instructors, for the most part, choose assignments which not only provide skill enhancing opportunity and knowledge cultivating practice, but which also have some value-added mechanism. It could be to encourage students to use a library or the Internet, to seek information off-campus from real-world players, or to step outside of the “student box” by taking on the responsibility of teaching their classmates what they themselves have learned.

Yet students rarely ask why an assignment is important. Even when obvious, when an assignment is carefully and thoroughly spelled out, there remains an intangible goal above and beyond the stated objective. By querying professors on the *purpose* of an expected product (a term paper or even group project) students can more accurately zero in on the ‘graded performance function.’ In other words, a professor’s intention is to challenge a student to learn and then demonstrate what is learned—the demonstration being the *performance* of the function. A good way to understand the function is to observe its implementation by a knowledgeable practitioner. As management guru Price Pritchett noted, “*Somebody* knows how to do it better” (27). That somebody, in most cases, is the professor who has given the assignment.

So by asking *why* an assignment has value, students prompt instructors to justify the cause for ascribed readings, the benefits of focused research or the purpose of a given process. Asking why thus becomes a time-saving strategy, as instructors are prompted to divulge their expectations; they must reveal more closely-held thoughts about the

implementation of the given work. As Shakespeare noted, “Thought is free” (*The Tempest*, 3.2.123). Thus asking professors for their thoughts makes economic (or time-saving) sense.

Knowing in advance what an instructor wants allows for more targeted research. Knowing the “graded performance function” clearly provides a blueprint for a product’s development process. Knowing a professor’s thoughts provides a student with justification or motivation for the assigned work. If that doesn’t create a sense of personal ownership, a stakeholding, at the very least it allows students to work towards developing a marketable skill. Skilled leaders know how to ask questions. In a sense, they know when to ask why.

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Battling Procrastination and Winning!

by Jennifer Hanson, Learning Specialist

“I’ll set my alarm and get up early to finish studying before my 9:00 a.m. history class.”

“Just one more video game, then I’ll get to my economics homework.”

“I’ll start that paper as soon as fill in your favorite television show is over.”

Sound familiar? Procrastination is one of your GPA’s biggest enemies. In order to succeed in college you need to produce quality work on

time. Learning to manage your time wisely will help you to combat the habit of procrastination. Here are some tips you may find useful:

1. Figure out what you are avoiding the most, and do that first.

2. Set daily goals for yourself.

Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. You are in college. Is your goal really to e-mail all of your friends tonight or be prepared for class tomorrow? If you prioritize and get the assignments completed, e-mail away!

3. Break down a large project into smaller pieces and just do it.

Don't know where to start? Give yourself deadlines for each section of the project and work on one piece at a time.

4. Reward yourself.

Your favorite dessert, extra time with friends or a phone call home are all great rewards for following your planned, weekly schedule.

5. When you need help – ask.

Be sure to read all directions before beginning an assignment. If you don't understand what the instructor is looking for, ask! If you need additional assistance from a Tutor or a Learning Specialist, call x6746 or visit Hall 6, 3rd floor. Need help from a Writing Consultant or Writing Specialist? Call x6567 or visit Hall 6, 4th floor.

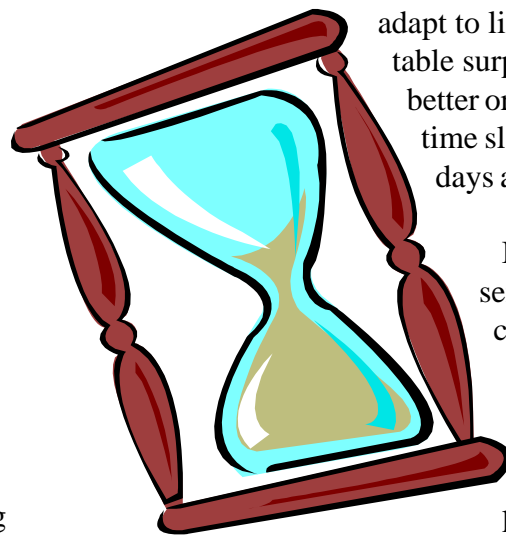
What Are Your Priorities?

by Shannon Naujock, Writing Consultant

What do you want in life? Asking yourself this question is the first step in learning to manage your time wisely. Not until you align your roles and responsibilities with your goals and aspirations can you begin to be more productive during the course of an average day.

Before climbing out of bed each morning, I think about what I *have* to accomplish and what I *want* to accomplish. For example, if it is a weekday I know that part of my time will *have* to be spent in class, another portion at work, and so on. In addition to these responsibilities, I may *want* to have time to write a quality essay for one of my classes, go for a three-mile run, talk with my friends, or get a good night's sleep. My mental grid of open hours quickly becomes full as I plan to satisfy the demands and desires for my time. I allow this mental grid to stay flexible and

unbounded, so I can adapt to life's inevitable surprises and better organize the time slots in the days ahead.



In the absence of a clear, working knowledge of what I want in my life, I would never be able to allocate my time effectively. Knowing where my priorities lie allows me to filter through infinite choices and avoid procrastination, because I know what outcomes I want to materialize and which I want to avoid.

Indecisiveness, hesitation, and complacency are natural states of mind, but if allowed to shape your personal state of being, will prevent you from realizing your full potential. Focus on your goals and dreams, be honest in your assessment of where your priorities lie, and realize the power of applying free will to personal time management.

Getting the Most Out of the Writing Center: It's All About Planning

by Jean-Paul Nadeau, Ph.D.

The Writing Center can help you make writing assignments more manageable. Upon receipt of such an assignment, students may be tempted to put off getting started, as they believe they “work well under pressure.” And sometimes they are right. But other times...

You will learn more about yourself as a writer if you leave yourself time to reflect upon what you are writing. You'll get more out of each writing assignment if your writing process includes getting feedback from someone on the Writing Center staff.

Writing always involves a process, involving activities such as identifying the guidelines and demands of a written assignment, gathering ideas in response to those demands, organizing ideas, writing a piece of--or entire version of--the paper, reading over that piece or version, and so on until an acceptable version is created. The “process” of many struggling writers is to sit down at a blank computer screen the day before a paper is due to produce a final draft.

Writers are most successful when they recognize that 1) the writing process takes time, as it is often more cyclical than linear and 2) starting early means that they can take more time with each activity.

Writing well often involves going backward to move forward. In other words, you may decide that you need to generate additional evidence, an extended explanation, or an additional point after you have written a rough draft. Alternatively, you may decide that the argument you've constructed lacks a logical structure, so you make an outline from your draft and rework your organizational strategy. Just because you've got a version of your paper doesn't mean you can't continue to brainstorm, outline, and scribble.

When I suggest that you start papers early, I mean that you should start to think seriously about the assignment the day you receive formal instructions from your professor. Faculty don't haphazardly assign writing in their courses; your management professor has reasons for giving you the low-down on your team project two months in advance. One reason, of course, is that s/he thinks it should take a student that long to produce a successful paper.

Once you receive your instructions, try breaking the paper or project down into a series of deadlines in your daily planner. Force yourself, for example, to have an informal outline in a week and a rough draft in two weeks.

If you do so, you'll find that you have plenty of time to visit the Writing Center and have time to make necessary changes once you've received feedback. Too often students find themselves disappointed and frustrated because they realize too late that they haven't answered the question their professor asked...and their paper is due in two hours. Take my advice, and you'll reduce your chances of being in this rather hopeless situation.



Distractions 101

by Courtney Zullo, Writing Consultant

When I think back to my freshman year, a smile forms on my face, followed by some laughter, as I remember how *awful* I was at getting things accomplished. I recall being amazed at how much free time I had. Six-hour days, nosy teachers, and detention slips were in the past, and I loved every second of my freedom. Not that I did anything with it.

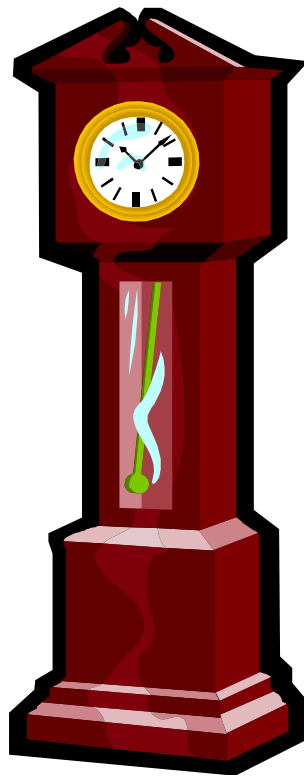
Somehow, with only three hours of class a day, I could not find an hour to sit down and work. Then exams started coming. I laugh even harder when I call to mind the day I got my microeconomics test back. My exact words were, “How did I get a seventy? I studied two whole *hours* for this thing!” Well, I quickly learned that my study habits from high school were not going to cut it here. I had to learn how to overcome many distractions.

In the residence halls, there were many things that distracted me from getting work done. One procrastinating tool I used frequently was the phone. I would sit down to do work, but the phone would ring and it would be my best friend from home calling to tell me about a guy she met at school. These types of “quick” chats usually turned into three-hour deep conversations about life. And no work got done.

Another distraction was the television. I’d try to sit down again to do some studying when my roommate would run in to tell me that the season premiere of *Friends* was on. There was football in the fall, basketball in the winter, and baseball in the spring. The television was also directly

connected to Playstation and Dreamcast. I distinctly recall the guys down the hall having ten-hour tournaments.

Napping was my number one diversion. Before college, it took me an hour to fall asleep during the day. At Bryant, I became the queen of fifteen-minute “power naps.” These little *siestas* were necessary after staying up until 3 a.m. to talk with my best friend on the phone, watch my favorite movie on HBO, or partake in an all-night Playstation tournament.



After a few months of unsatisfying test grades, I finally adopted some useful time management skills. I make lists now and live by them. I admit it. I create a schedule before bed. I fill in my class times and leave space for lunch and dinner. Then, I fill in any meetings or hours for work--any time left over is for studying.

The key is to be specific. I write down the page numbers I have to read and the papers I need to write. The hardest part is sticking to the list. People will call, naps will be needed and season finales will air, but stay on track. Don’t put off reading or studying, because you will regret it later. You will regret putting off reading a book when you have four hundred pages to read for 8 a.m. the next morning. You will regret not having made time to study for that finance exam when your professor hands you a big, red “D.”

Use whatever routine works for you, but remember that procrastination only brings stress and pressure the night before. Lists help if you can stick to them and there aren’t many distractions. Remember, in the library there is no television, phone, Playstation, roommates or bed!

