

Muskingham College Study Skills Website:  
<http://www.muskingum.edu/%7Ecal/database/>

## Evaluate Initial Skills: A Reflective Survey

Students should answer the questions in this initial evaluation as honestly as possible. Fill in the blanks or check the answer that best describes one's behavior (REFERENCE).

I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week studying outside of class.

I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week sleeping.

I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week relaxing, recreating, and participating in social events.

I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week in extracurricular activities.

I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week at a wage-paying job.

For every hour in class, I spend \_\_\_\_\_ hours studying outside of class on average.

I am late to a meeting, to class, to work, or to an appointment \_\_\_\_\_ times a week.

On average, I am \_\_\_\_\_ minutes late to meetings, class, work, or appointments.

When I am late, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

I have been late to an exam in the last year. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I spend more time on \_\_\_\_\_ courses than \_\_\_\_\_ courses because \_\_\_\_\_.

I use short periods of "down time" (between classes, before meals, etc.) to do simple academic tasks like review notes or write flash cards. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I use short periods of "down time" (between classes, before meals, etc.) to do simple nonacademic tasks like paying bills or cleaning. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I have a semester planner. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I have a monthly planner. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I have a weekly planner. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I work better under pressure. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I check my planned schedule or syllabi for upcoming assignments:

\_\_\_ Everyday \_\_\_ Twice a Week \_\_\_ Once a Week \_\_\_ Every Two Weeks

I would describe myself as a procrastinator. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I have done poorly on assignments (papers, tests, speeches, etc.) in the past because I did not spend enough time on them. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

I have done poorly on assignments (papers, tests, speeches, etc.) in the past because I did not start them early enough. \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

The most time consuming course this term will be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ class is going to require \_\_\_\_\_ hours of work each week.

\_\_\_\_\_ class is going to require \_\_\_\_\_ hours of work each week.

\_\_\_\_\_ class is going to require \_\_\_\_\_ hours of work each week.

\_\_\_\_\_ class is going to require \_\_\_\_\_ hours of work each week.

\_\_\_\_\_ class is going to require \_\_\_\_\_ hours of work each week.

Some ways I can use short periods of down time are:

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I am going to make a semester, monthly, or weekly planner for the upcoming term.

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

Now examine your answers to these questions. What does it tell you about yourself? Are there aspects of time management you hadn't thought of before? Are there aspects of your time management habits that need to be improved?

## Evaluate Initial Skills: A Quantitative Survey

Indicate how often the following statements describe your behavior by writing the appropriate number. This questionnaire is from REFERENCE.

<b>Never</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

1. \_\_\_ I feel I have to "cram" before an exam.
2. \_\_\_ My homework is usually turned in on time.
3. \_\_\_ I think I usually get enough sleep.
4. \_\_\_ I pull all-nighters before mid-terms and finals.
5. \_\_\_ I plan to go out with friends a couple of nights a week, and usually spend the amount of time with them that I originally planned.
6. \_\_\_ When I'm working on a paper, I put off writing until a few days before it's due.
7. \_\_\_ I often cancel social activities because I feel I don't have enough time.
8. \_\_\_ I generally get my papers in on time.
9. \_\_\_ I find myself making a lot of excuses to my instructors about why my work isn't done.
10. \_\_\_ I feel comfortable about how I use time now.
11. \_\_\_ I always feel that something is hanging over my head, that I'll never have enough time to do the work assigned.
12. \_\_\_ I often feel tired.

**Score A:** Add up the numbers for questions **1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11,** and **12.**

**Score B:** Add up the numbers for questions **2, 3, 5, 8,** and **10.**

If score **A** is greater than score **B**, you are probably a procrastinator. If score **A** is less than score **B**, you manage your time well. If the scores are equal, you may procrastinate at times, but procrastination is not a habit.

## Evaluate Progress Toward Improving Time Management Skills

Once students have identified that their time management skills are deficit and that it is affecting their work, and once they have initiated some compensatory strategies, it is very important to evaluate two things: the effectiveness of the strategies employed, and progress toward improving time management skills. Do this over at least a two-week period.

There are several ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the particular time management strategies employed. The first thing to do when one feels the strategies aren't working is to consider if this is because one is trying to do too much. Have you "bitten off more than you can chew?" Do you have unrealistic expectations of the number of classes and activities you can handle? Are you trying to keep up the schedule you established in high school? This may not be feasible in college. Use journals or color-coded schedules to evaluate time spent on academics versus social events. Ask the opinion of an impartial third party, like a coach, advisor, instructor, or tutor.

If one still feels the schedule is realistic and the strategies are the problem, try using other time management strategies. Add [motivational strategies](#), or techniques for improving one's [attention and concentration](#).

To evaluate one's progress with time management strategies, consider how one planned to spend time and how that time was actually spent. Use two copies of the weekly schedule; one copy is the planned schedule and the other is a record of how time was actually used. Compare the two after a few weeks. Did you accomplish all you set out to do? If no, why not? Was the schedule unrealistic? It could be that the time required to complete tasks was underestimated, that unexpected activities were assigned, or that one is trying to do too much. Or, it might be the case that study times were put-off for nonacademic activities. If so, what types of nonacademic activities were done during scheduled study times? Did you spend twice as many hours studying outside of class as were spent in class? If no, why not? What academic consequences resulted?

Another approach is to use just one copy of the schedule. Each time a task is completed by the scheduled time, check it off. If one ends up with a lot of checks, one is probably managing time efficiently. If there are few checks, one is not managing time well. Why not? Was the schedule unrealistic? Or did you forego studying for other activities?

### Spacing Reviews and Activities

Learning occurs in spurts. The best way to use study time is to work for short periods of time on different subjects or tasks. Spacing reviews and activities is important because it helps to maintain interest and concentration. It also enhances comprehension and retention of the information covered.

The attention span of most people is 20 to 30 minutes. Therefore, study time should be divided into half-hour sessions for working on different activities or subjects. Switching from one subject to another avoids boredom and daydreaming. Mixing up activities helps one process information in a variety of ways.

To avoid forgetting information that is uninteresting or unfamiliar, the student must review periodically. "Retention begins anew each time a memory is fully re-registered. Review often until you recall at the level of accuracy required; subsequently, you may review less frequently as long as you continue to recall adequately. It is wise if your review involves some of your original registration manipulations, such as strength, attribute, association, and retrieval structure. - Prevents loss from decay, distortion, interference, suppression, and unlearning" (Herrmann, Raybeck and Gutman, 1993, p. 110).

Consider the following example. A student sets aside three hours to study one night. Because studying for six half-hour sessions is much more effective than studying for three straight hours, the student plans this study schedule. Notice that different activities are mixed up in the plan.

- 6:30-7:00 -- History: Preview Chapter 6 and read first section
- 7:00-7:30 -- History: Review and reorganize today's lecture notes
- 7:30-8:00 -- Psychology: Make flash cards for Chapter 3
- 8:00-8:30 -- Reward: Watch favorite TV show
- 8:30-9:00 -- History: Read second section of Chapter 6
- 9:00-9:30 -- Physics: Preview tomorrow's lab assignment
- 9:30-10:00 -- History: Read last section of Chapter 6 and review

The following tips can help students space reviews effectively, to enhance encoding of information into memory.

- Develop a plan of action.
  - Develop a plan for studying, considering what must be done and how much time one has to do it.
  - Any combination of these activities may be included in the study plan: complete reading assignments, complete lab assignments, complete homework problems, meet with the instructor or tutors, meet with study group members, reorganize or recopy lecture notes, review information in the notes and the readings, and prepare study aids (flash cards, practice questions, visual aids, etc.).
  - The activities selected will depend on the task(s) to be accomplished (e.g. exam preparation, preparation for class), the nature of the information, and personal learning styles.
- Budget the time.
  - Estimate how long it will take to complete each of the activities in the study plan.
  - Organize your hours to include ample time for completing the activities, relaxing, and sleeping.
  - Daily and weekly grids are effective means of budgeting time. Examples are given elsewhere in this page.
  - Make up a schedule and stick to it. Allowing for rewards or considering how your goals will be fulfilled by sticking to the schedule are good ways to get motivated.
- Space reviews.
  - Break the study time into manageable amounts of time to avoid boredom and loss of concentration, and, in turn, to improve encoding. Sessions lasting twenty to thirty minutes are best.
  - Mix up activities (outlining, reviewing, organizing, etc.) so that the information is processed in a number of ways.
  - Studying for six half-hour sessions is much more effective than studying for three straight hours.
- Repetition.
  - Encoding is enhanced when one reviews the material several times.
  - The key to making repetition effective is to space the reviews so different material is covered in consecutive review sessions.
  - Or, mix up the activities so one is processing the information in a variety of ways in each study session.
- Use spare time wisely.
  - Short periods of "down time" between classes or before meals may be used effectively as review sessions.
  - Use such opportunities for simple tasks, like flipping through flash cards or working a few math problems.

## Procrastination

People often put off tasks they dislike, such as paying bills, washing dishes, doing laundry, repairing things, and writing letters.

There are several reasons why one should avoid procrastination. First, procrastinators who do poorly on an assignment may attribute the failure to lack of ability rather than poor time management. Once one loses confidence in one's abilities, it is difficult to get it back. Second, putting off tasks until the last minute often results in stress and anxiety, which affect one's performance and even one's health. Third, procrastination often leads to feelings of guilt as one thinks about all the things one should be doing. Fourth, procrastinators are particularly susceptible to Murphy's Law, "if something can go wrong, it will," because they don't leave enough time to complete a task let alone make allowances for unforeseen difficulties. Finally, habitual procrastination negatively impacts the way one is viewed by others.

There are varying degrees of procrastination. One way to "measure" procrastination is the frequency with which an individual puts off tasks. Some people only procrastinate occasionally and sporadically, or they may put off certain tasks but are able to complete other tasks on time. Serious procrastinators, on the other hand, habitually put off all kinds of tasks; their behavior may become so predictable that they are labeled as habitual procrastinators. Another way to measure procrastination is to consider the consequences of such behavior. If one is satisfied with one's achievements and performance on assignments, and if one can complete late assignments without getting "stressed out," then procrastination may not be too serious a problem. Only minor behavioral changes may be necessary to avoid procrastinating in the future. However, if grades suffer and stress results from putting things off, then procrastination is a serious problem. In this case major behavioral modification is probably necessary.

So how can one avoid falling into the downward spiral brought on by procrastination? The guidelines below may provide procrastinators with the strategies needed to break out of that behavioral cycle.

### **A Non-Procrastination Plan**

#### **Make a Schedule**

Allocate specific times to complete tasks using semester, monthly, weekly, or daily planners.

#### **Get Motivated**

It does no good to make a schedule unless it will be followed. Work with a friend to motivate each other. Consider how long-term and short-term goals will be fulfilled by getting things done on time. Visualize how it felt to get tasks done on time in the past, and remember how stressful it was to put off work.

#### **Reevaluate Your Priorities**

How do you prioritize success in school, social life, work, and other activities in your life? If school is your first priority, that work must come before any other activities. If you decide success in school is not your first priority, then don't expect high grades.

#### **Take Responsibility**

Don't make excuses to yourself for procrastinating, and don't blame others when distracted. Saying "I'm so busy I never get to..." is just an excuse and form of procrastination. Staying on track is a personal responsibility. It's in your hands.

### Cause and Effect Relationships

Step back and critically examine cause and effect relationships in your life. How do you explain failures? To what factors do you attribute them? Be honest. Did you receive a poor grade on a project because you started it late or didn't put in enough time? Avoid rationalizations like "The prof hates me" or "I didn't understand the assignment." Thoughtfully examine the consequences of your behavior.

### Working "Under Pressure"

Some people describe themselves as "working better under pressure." If you feel this way, honestly critique the validity of this statement. When you work under pressure, are you really turning in your best work? If not, procrastination is having a negative impact on you. If you really think you are doing your best, make sure the pressure comes from you and not someone else.

### Variety is the Spice of Life

Make two activity lists: "Things I like to do" and "Things I have to do." Mix up activities from both lists and work on each activity for a short period of time. Alternating between fun and distasteful tasks helps to maintain motivation and interest.

### Think Small

Because it is easier to put off overwhelming tasks than small ones, divide major assignments into smaller parts and work on one part at a time.

### Be Realistic

Some people procrastinate because they have too much to do. They have every intention of doing things in a timely manner, but they run out of time. There are only 24 hours in a day. Thoughtfully examine your obligations and responsibilities. Is your schedule realistic? Are you involved in too many activities? Don't "spread yourself too thinly" because none of your projects will get the full attention they deserve.

### Focus on Assets

Some people are good at summarizing major ideas. Others write exceptionally well. Some people work well with others. Find out what your assets are. Then work them into everything you do. This will improve your confidence and motivation for tackling a distasteful job.

### Rewards

Reward yourself lavishly when tasks are completed on time. Make the reward appropriate for the difficulty and boredom of the task.

## **Summary: A Seven Day Non-Procrastination Plan**

- **Monday:** Make tasks meaningful
- **Tuesday:** Divide large assignments into smaller parts
- **Wednesday:** Write an intention statement
- **Thursday:** Tell everyone about your schedules and plans
- **Friday:** Find a reward for doing things on time
- **Saturday:** Settle any problems now
- **Sunday:** SAY NO!

# Color Coding and Homework Organizers

## Color Coding

With respect to time management, color coding has two applications. Color coding may be used to organize information on time planners and to evaluate one's use of time.

## Organizing Information

When recording information on semester, monthly, weekly or daily grids, use different colors of ink to designate different types of activities. For example, one may record classes in black ink, assignments in red ink, work in green ink, and social activities in blue ink. A related approach is to write all activities in one color of ink but use different highlighters to distinguish types of activities.

## Evaluating Time Management

Color coding also provides a means of quickly evaluating how effectively time is used.

- Try highlighting all classes in one color and all studying outside class in another color. If time is used effectively, there should be twice as many hours of the latter than the former.
- Or, highlight all academic activities in one color and all social events in another color. If there are more hours of the latter than the former, one should reexamine one's priorities and budget more time for academics in the future.
- A third approach is to photocopy the original planner and then use highlighters to keep track of when tasks were accomplished. If a task was completed on or before the due date, mark it with one color. If a task was completed one to two days after the due date, mark it with another color. Use a third color to mark tasks completed three or more days after the due date. If there is more of the third color than the others, one is not managing time very well

## Introduction to Time Management Planners

There are four major types of time management planners: semester (or quarter), monthly, weekly, and daily. Semester and monthly planners allow one to record the due dates of major assignments, while weekly and daily schedules are used to record regular activities as well as due dates of assignments. Each of these is discussed and illustrated in subsequent sections.

Once the student has selected the type(s) of planners that will best suit his/her needs, he/she should design a planner with the characteristics needed or make copies of the templates provided in this page. There are a variety of bound time planners available at book stores that may be used as well. If a homemade planner is preferred, consider what structure and features are best for personal needs. For example, with weekly grids one must decide between hour long or half-hour long blocks of time. If the former is selected, decide if each block will start on the hour (e.g., 8:00-9:00) or on the half-hour (e.g., 8:30-9:30). One should also consider what information is to be recorded, and how much space will be needed to hold that information.

If a homemade planner is used, photocopy several copies so they may be used in the future and they may be used to compare how one actually spent time and how one planned to spend time. To save time, fill in all the regular activities that do not change before photocopying weekly or daily grids.

Once the planner(s) has been selected and photocopied (if necessary), information may then be recorded. Consider what types of information will be entered on the planner, and what abbreviations will be used. Check course syllabi for due dates of assignments, and break large tasks into several smaller ones before putting them on the schedule. Estimate how long it will take to complete each task and set aside that much time in the schedule. One may wish to color code the different activities on the planner. For example, write classes in black ink, assignments in red ink, and social events in blue ink. Or, write the activities in one color and use different highlighters to distinguish among types of tasks.

In order to be an effective time management strategy, planners must be checked every day or every few days. Make this part of one's routine. Additionally, it is often necessary to update and revise the planners as due dates change or as new tasks are assigned.

It is very important to evaluate periodically how well one is sticking to the schedule. Are tasks completed by the due dates on the planner? Is study time being used for studying? For more information on evaluation, see the Self-Evaluation section.

### **Semester Planners**

The purpose of semester (quarter) planners is to give the student an overall idea of when major school projects and social events are scheduled. Semester planners give an overview of the major commitments one has during the course of the term.

Semester planners are useful because they help the student to see when he/she will be the most busy during the term. Detailed plans then may be made ahead of time to complete all the assignments and activities in a timely manner. Another benefit of semester planners is that they help to reduce the tensions associated with procrastination. Finally, semester planners give the student a sense of control over his/her academic and social affairs.

## **Directions for Creating Semester (Quarter) Planners**

Buy a large calendar or desk blotter. Or make a homemade template to meet personal requirements.

Write in the dates and times for major school projects, including:

- examinations and quizzes
- speeches
- research papers
- lab assignments
- class projects
- field trips

Write in the dates of important social events that can't be missed. Be selective, you can't do everything!

- major athletic events
- weddings
- school dances
- club meetings and events

Put the calendar in a prominent place in your room where you may refer to it often.

## **Monthly Planners**

Monthly planners are similar to semester planners, except that they allow one to plan academic and social events in more detail. More types of information and events can be organized on monthly planners.

This time management technique is useful because it encourages the student to divide major tasks into smaller parts and to develop a schedule for completing each part. Another benefit of monthly planners is they help to reduce the tensions associated with procrastination. In addition, monthly planners are portable, unlike most semester planners. Finally, monthly planners give the student a sense of control over his/her academic and social affairs.

## **Directions for Creating Monthly Planners**

- Buy a portable, notebook-sized monthly calendar with boxes that are large enough to hold several pieces of information. Or make a homemade template.
- Look at the major academic assignments listed on the semester planner (or course syllabi). Break each task into smaller parts. For example, a research paper may be divided into these activities: choose topic and clear it with the instructor, library research, write first draft, type first draft, have first draft proof-read, make revisions, and print final draft.
- Develop a schedule for completing each task. Make one's own due dates for each part and write them on the monthly planner. Using the research paper example: topic by week 2, research by week 6, first draft by week 8, type by week 9, proof-read by week 10, turn in final draft by week 11.
- Regularly evaluate one's progress on the tasks against the due dates on the monthly planner. A good time to do this is every Sunday night. Treat yourself when a major assignment has been completed according to the schedule.

## Weekly Activity Grids

The purpose of weekly activity grids is to plan activities in a very detailed manner in order to make the most of one's time. The strategy is particularly useful during finals week or before major business activities, when one has "a million things to do" in a short period of time.

When recording upcoming activities on the weekly grid, be as specific as possible. Each entry should identify two things. For students, these are the topic to be studied and how it will be studied. Examples are: library research for speech, write first draft of sociology paper, read physics chapter 7, do accounting problems 1-5, start ceramics project, and identify memory aids for marketing test. For employees, the two necessary data are the project to be worked on and the nature of the task. Examples are: prepare data tables for next year's budget, prepare visual aids for sales presentation, write correspondences about renovation project, or finish bid for bridge replacement project.

Weekly activity grids may be purchased in a bookstore or made by the individual. Bound planners purchased in the store have the advantage of durability and portability. Homemade planners, on the other hand, offer the benefits of flexibility, low cost, and more detailed planning. Homemade planners also save time because activities that don't change week to week can be written on the planner before photocopying, eliminating the need to enter the same data every week.

Weekly activity grids may be arranged in one of two formats. They are usually blocked out in one-hour chunks of time. Each one-hour block may begin on the hour (8:00-9:00, 9:00-10:00, etc.) or on the half-hour (7:30-8:30, 8:30-9:30, etc.), depending on the school's class schedule or the employer's schedule. A less common but perfectly acceptable format is by the half-hour. For this type of weekly activity grid time is blocked out as follows: 7:00-7:30, 7:30-8:00, 8:00-8:30, etc. The half-hour style allows one to record activities in more detail, but the hourly format takes up less space.

Remember this rule of thumb when planning and coordinating weekly activities: spend two hours studying outside class for every hour spent in class.

## Directions for Creating Weekly Planners

Directions for completing weekly activity grids are given below. A sample homemade grid and a completed homemade grid are then illustrated. Examples of bound planners will be scanned at a later date.

- Design a weekly activity grid to meet personal requirements, or purchase a bound planner. Arrange the grid blocks on an hourly or half-hourly basis. Label the days of the week, starting with Sunday or Monday.
- The first thing to record on the grid is those regular activities whose times do not change week to week. For homemade planners, record this data before photocopying the chart for future use. Examples of regular activities are:
  - meals
  - sleep
  - class or lab
  - worship services
  - club meetings
  - work
  - tutoring sessions
  - athletic practice, games or exercise
- Record all other activities that are not regular events. Consult the monthly planner (or course syllabi) to determine the due dates of all activities, not just the major ones. Break

major assignments into smaller tasks, and identify your own due date for each part. Estimate how long it will take to complete each task. If unsure, err on the side of overestimating. Write short descriptions of each activity in the appropriate places on the weekly chart. Examples of activities are:

- reading assignments
  - athletic games or exercise
  - study groups
  - listening to lecture tapes
  - recopying or reviewing notes
  - relaxation and recreation
  - reorganizing information
  - developing memory aids
  - reviewing notes or readings
  - club meetings or activities
  - review sessions
  - meetings with instructor, coach or advisor
  - library research
  - lab work
- Keep the completed grid, or copies of it, in a prominent place where one may refer to it often. Make it a habit to check the grid periodically, such as every morning or evening.

### **Daily Activity Grids**

Daily activity grids serve the same function as weekly schedules - to plan in detail the activities to be completed during the day. The only difference between the two is that daily grids show only one day at a time while weekly grids display seven days of activities on one chart.

Daily activity grids may be purchased or made by the individual. The former often span the hours of 8:00 am and 5:00 pm and come in portable and desk-top styles. The latter may be designed to start and end at any hour. Time blocks are usually an hour long and start on the hour, but this format may be modified to suit personal preferences. Various types of information may be recorded on daily charts, including school work, social events, appointments, and work duties. Tasks should be described in as much detail as possible; include the subject of the task and the specific activity to be performed. See the section on Weekly Activity Grids for more directions.