

Time Management Tips

for Overloaded Adult Students

A generation or two ago, college was for the young and inexperienced. Today, people bring wisdom, real-world knowledge, and sometimes decades of work to college.

More than
30%

of today's college students are over the age of 25

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1 in 5

college students are parents

[Learn more](#)



59%

of nontraditional students hold down full-time jobs while going to school

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48.9%

of older students graduate within six years at four-year colleges

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Adult learners juggle myriad responsibilities that can intrude on their educational pursuits.

It's easy to identify the challenges of juggling family, work, education, and a very full life. You may even forget that you bring a wealth of knowledge and skill to your program. The right time management strategies can help you realize your strengths and excel in school.

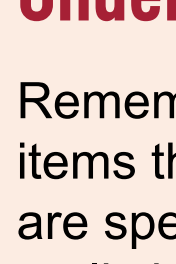
These proven tips can help you regain control over each precious hour.

Time Management Strategies



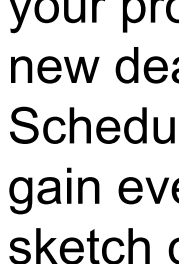
Identify the roles you fill and set goals for each

A long to-do list can feel daunting. Instead, try breaking your next steps down according to your various jobs: parent, employee, student, spouse, etc. Set clear, actionable goals for each, and develop a timeline of smaller steps for achieving these goals.



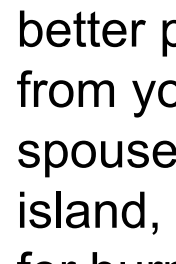
Understand how to set goals

Remember the acronym SMART. Action items that help you achieve your dreams are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Vague pipe dreams and long-term plans set you up for disappointment. Identify clear actions that take you closer to your ideals, then track your progress.



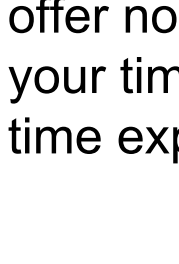
Make planning a regular part of your life

A list of goals is useless if you don't track your progress and adjust your strategy as new deadlines and obligations appear. Schedule a weekly planning session. To gain even more control over your time, sketch out each day's schedule ahead of time, dedicating 5-10 minutes to planning each night or morning.



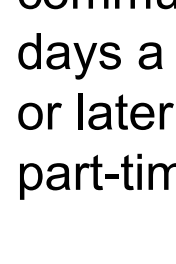
Ask for help when you need it

Going back to school won't just improve your life. It could mean more money for vacations, a bigger house for your kids, or better performance at work. Ask for help from your key stakeholders—kids, family, spouse, or coworkers. No person is an island, and doing it all yourself is a recipe for burnout.



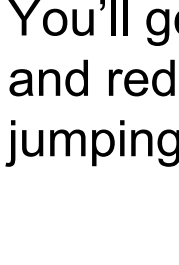
Monitor how you use your time

When you want to make better use of your money, you probably scour through your bank accounts to look for hidden and unnecessary expenses. Time works in much the same way. You might be wasting time on tasks that you don't enjoy and that offer no value. Put some effort into logging your time so you can eliminate needless time expenditures.



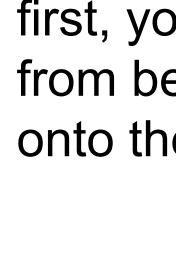
Ask about alternative scheduling at work

Although many returning students work a 9-5, a number of employers can offer alternative schedules that make it easier to juggle your different roles. Eliminate commuting stress by telecommuting a few days a week. Ask about coming in earlier or later or even temporarily scaling back to part-time.



Organize your schedule by task type

Don't send an email, then make a phone call, run a quick errand, come home, work on homework, head out for two more errands, then send another email. That sends you hurtling in too many directions. Instead, group similar tasks together. Schedule a block of time for email, phone calls, errands, homework, and downtime. You'll get more done, sharpen your focus, and reduce the stress and wasted time of jumping from task to task.



Prioritize the most important tasks

Let's face it: if you're busy enough, it might be rare for you to knock out everything on your daily to-do list. Don't waste time with tasks that can wait until tomorrow. Instead, prioritize your most important tasks for each day, week, or month, then work them into your schedule first. This ensures they'll get done. By doing important tasks first, you prevent your most important work from being the most hurried work tacked onto the end of the day.

Fit more tasks into a single time slot with a little ingenuity

Know your most productive times, and spend it on schoolwork

Academic performance may dictate much about the rest of your life. Prioritize it by doing it at points during the day when you're most likely to be productive. Tracking your time and mood for a week or two can help you identify these times. For some people, it's a set period every day, such as in the morning or in the evening. Others find that productivity comes with the right set of circumstances—a fresh cup of coffee, a quiet environment, or after a nourishing meal.



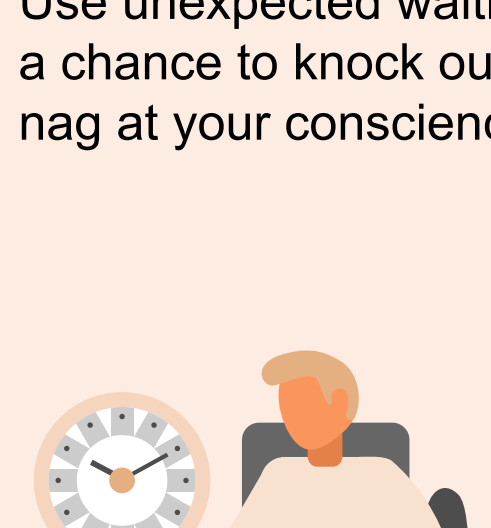
Multitask

It's a myth that you can multitask, especially if you're trying to do several complex tasks—filing taxes, paying bills, and reading for school—all at once. You can, however, fit more tasks into a single time slot with a little ingenuity. Drop off the dry cleaning when you go by the cleaners on the way to work. Send a few quick emails when waiting at the doctor's office. Use unexpected waiting and downtime as a chance to knock out small tasks that nag at your conscience.



Ditch needless responsibilities and busy work

Do you have tasks you complete out of sheer habit? What about busywork at your job? Consider how an in-person meeting can waste significantly more time than a phone call and how many phone calls could move more quickly if you just send an email. Identify time-wasters in your day, and kick them out of your schedule.



Use time management apps

These apps allow you to review all of your goals with a few quick swipes. Try Trello, which allows you to create project management boards for all of your roles and to invite collaborators. Evernote is a versatile note-taking tool that you can integrate with some paper note systems. Remember the Milk transforms the traditional to-do list into something much more manageable.



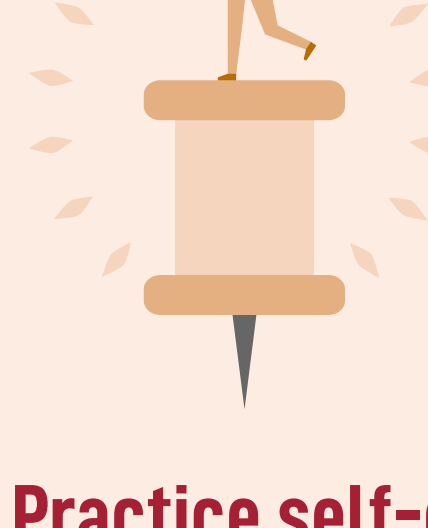
Identify a time management system that works for you

For some students, the right combination of apps is a life-saver. Others find apps frustrating or inadequate. Whether it's a simple traveler's notebook, a combination of apps and paper task lists, or a complex organizer with dozens of tabs, there's a time management system out there that will work for you. Spend some time experimenting. When you begin getting more done, you'll know you've found the right approach.



Eliminate distractions

Some distractions are obvious: the sound of a TV in another room, the endless drone of a busy restaurant. Others are unique to you. What makes you feel most distracted? Do you struggle to get work done when you miss your kids or have bills to pay? Identify these time-wasters, then schedule your productive periods for a time when these distractions are less prominent.



Practice self-care

Sleep, good food, and exercise nourish your body and mind so you can perform better no matter where you are or what you're doing. You also need some time to enjoy life to avoid burnout. Schedule regular self-care. Incorporate your daily workout into your task list to make it easier to get to it. Put gardening or reading on your to-do list to make these enjoyable tasks feel just as important as homework.



Eliminate commuting with online classes

You can easily spend an hour or more each day commuting. Factor in packing your school bag, getting dressed and prepped for school, and unexpected traffic, and you're looking at many wasted hours each week. Online learning allows you to ditch the commute, learn wherever it's convenient for you to do so, and spend more time with your family.

SNU understands the challenges adult learners face. We also embrace the skills and life experience you bring to your coursework.

We partner with you to better understand your dreams for your future, then identify a plan to make those goals a reality. Our students come from all walks of life. We'd love to welcome you to our extended family.

Contact us to learn more.

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