



Organisation

A key aspect of academic life is organization and the ability to prioritise tasks. This can be compounded by difficulties with executive functioning skills. Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions and juggle multiple tasks successfully. Struggling with these issues can lead to increased anxiety (Hastwell et al 2012). One student described this aspect of university life as leading to:

“...high pressure, having to cope on your own with everyday tasks, eg eating, travelling etc!”. (Hastwell et al., 2012, p. 60).

According to the Aspect consultancy report, (2007), unstructured work and workload can be a particular struggle for students. According to Howes and Cage (2020), students are often under prepared for the demands of university. One student stated that:

“What I found difficult was the amount of independent study and the fact we were supposed to be doing so much of it ourselves”.

However, with support and implementation of a few key strategies, many of these difficulties can be reduced.

Ridout (2018, p. 23) states that:

“A must have for students is a diary, whether this is on your phone or a hard copy”.

She recommends looking at your diary the evening before, in order to prepare for the following day. It can be very beneficial to have a daily timetable, weekly timetable, and termly overview.

Ridout (2018) goes on to advise planning:

“a timeline for your work. This is very important as you may have more than one assignment at once and this entails you working on sections gradually to progress your work.” (p. 24)

Further top tips:

- When implementing strategies, it is important to use them consistently as good habits take a while to establish.
- Predict busy times, identifying clashes in deadlines early. Proactive steps to reduce pressure on yourself is highly recommended. This may mean working on an assignment before it is due. However, this will reduce your workload at a later date.
- Colour coding can help to visually prioritise tasks or the sequence of tasks.
- Lists are a student’s friend! Written down schedules or utilizing phone apps or laptop calendars. Prompts on post it notes or notice boards are helpful. If auditory processing is more beneficial, then recorded messages on phones or dictaphones can help. Set reminders of tasks on phones and laptop calendars with a notification sound.
- Always break down tasks into manageable chunks to reduce overwhelm.
- Make a clear list at the beginning of the day, cross off or cover up as you complete.
- Lists are beneficial but don’t overdo it! Stick to a manageable amount of items.
- Structure your weeks, days and terms with timetables. Insert key elements such as lectures, assignment deadlines, tutorials, mentoring/study support appointments.
- Don’t forget to schedule time to relax and do things that you enjoy!
- File and organize your notes and reference materials. Notes and paper everywhere are not conducive to good organization!

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