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Being prepared: Time management tips and the need for back-up supplies

As a graduate student you read and write all the time. In the first year, you may read between 50-120 books and articles and find that it feels as if you are reading and analyzing information all the time. There is an immense amount of research that a student has to be engaged in and this calls for constant reading and critical thinking. Therefore, organizing one's time is crucial for success especially for students in the online environment. If you have a job and family and educational commitments all clamoring for attention at the same time, then you will benefit from the time management tips and other advice offered for organizing your studies. It matters little if you're full-time or part-time—online or traditional graduate student. Time management skills are important for all student types, despite their preferred learning environment. More importantly, doctoral students are attending conferences and other important academic activities earlier and earlier in their studies, so managing your time and organizing your life becomes pivotal.

There are lots of demands placed on the graduate student, especially for their time and attention. You should begin thinking about how you will manage your time not when you commence your studies, but the moment you apply to graduate school. This means that you have to think about how much time will be given to important aspects of your life—job, family and other commitments. For example, before commencing doctoral studies—my husband and I agreed on how the house work would be shared between the two of us. He understands the huge responsibility that I've undertaken so he does 80% of the house chores. In the work environment—I was granted a reduced workload. As you begin your time management journey in graduate school you will find that there are **ten** important steps to consider.

✚ **Figure out that time of day that suits your learning, reading or study habits.** Evaluate the times of day that you are at your peak in learning—for some graduate students—it can be early morning or late at night. Set a schedule around your learning or reading habits. Dedicate about two-to-three hours in the morning or evening but also factor in breaks to better absorb the information.

✚ **Have a dedicated study space that is free of distractions** (land-line telephone, cell-phone, television). This should also be the area where you keep important reading materials and academic supplies (books, papers, head

phones, web-cam, and other electronics (such as a kindle) that are needed to support your learning). Listening to soft or classical music helps some people concentrate but it's not always a preference.

- ✚ **Weekly reviews and updates are very important.** Each week, like a Sunday night, I review assignments, readings, notes, and my calendar/schedule/planner. To remind myself about deadlines...as a student you have to develop a weekly routine and adapt to it.
- ✚ **Check your emails and calendar frequently** (at least twice daily works) and use a planner. Having one at the office and another at home is ideal. Use technology to stay connected with your peers: Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, or Google Hangouts.
- ✚ **Prioritize your assignments.** Begin those challenging assignments first and build in time for revision. Give yourself time to work on them when you have more energy and can look at materials with a fresh eye.
- ✚ **Achieve “stage one”--get something done.** First, you launch your assignments! Second, by starting, you may realize that there are some things you have not planned for in your process. Details of an assignment are not always evident until you begin the assignment. Build in time for review, draft your ideas roughly and get going! You will have time to edit and develop your ideas further. The key is to revise, then finalize.
- ✚ **Postpone unnecessary activities.** Maintain your focus and be disciplined until all assignments are completed.
- ✚ **Identify resources to help you** – Your e-tutor, a colleague, a more seasoned student or even a librarian are excellent resource persons. In terms of technology and **back-up supplies**—invest in an all-in-one printer, copier, scanner and perhaps a fax machine. Purchasing e-books instead of print materials (can prove to be cost-effective and life-savers for the online learner).
- ✚ Use your “**free**” time wisely. Use a vacation day or holiday to catch up with readings or assignments, if you're behind your schedule. You're not taking classes 365 days, so use term breaks to rest and rejuvenate your mind. Your first semester will probably be the hardest. Finally...
- ✚ **Review assignments, readings and make your own notes.** Preparing your own notes helps to reinforce that you understand the material that you are reading or analyzing. An effective aid for keeping on track with assignments is a to-do-list...I use this aid everyday especially at work so that I'm always reminding myself of what I have to complete next.