



# HARNESSING HABITS: A SELF-ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Procrastination commonly results from a tendency to see projects and assignments as tasks that need to be completed from start to finish in one long sitting. The feeling that each project requires a single uninterrupted stretch of time leads us to dismiss the usefulness of the shorter chunks of time that we do have. Most projects need to be split into smaller steps and spread out over multiple sittings. In this exercise, we'll learn how to use time efficiently by developing a realistic work routine that invites productivity even (or especially) when we don't have entire weeks to dedicate to a single venture.

To complete this exercise, you'll need a few copies of the hourly scheduling template provided below, a monthly calendar, a daily agenda planner, coloured pens and all of your course syllabi.

## 1. Getting to know yourself

Using the hourly scheduling template, log your activities for a full week. Live your life as you normally do. At the end of the week, take 20 minutes to reflect on the questions below:

What seem to be your best and worst times of day for completing tasks that are intellectually intensive (e.g. working on essays, cracking a tough programming challenge)?

For how long can you do this kind of intensive work before you start to feel hungry, highly distractible, or antsy and in need of a break? Does this interval lengthen or shorten depending on the time of day?

When do you tend to get hungry? Sleepy? Is there a particular time of day or a particular weekday when you tend to feel an urge to skip your classes?

How much reading can you complete in an hour using active reading strategies?

Are you managing to get regular exercise? How does physical activity affect your mood and mindset? Consider both short- and long-term impacts (e.g. two hours later vs. two days later).

Review your answers and look for common themes. Now, colour-code your log by flagging your highest-quality working hours in green, your lowest-quality working hours in red, the times you get up and go to bed in blue, and your best time of day for completing chores, errands, and passive work in yellow (e.g. buying groceries, doing laundry, organizing email, transcribing definitions onto flash cards, paying bills, photocopying).

## 2. No matter where you go, there you are

Print a clean copy of the same scheduling template. Draw a green border around your optimal working

hours (e.g. late morning, early evening) and a yellow border around your optimal hours for chores, errands, and passive work (e.g. early to mid-afternoon). Draw a blue line across your bedtime. It's okay to be a bit vague—these are guidelines, not rules. The idea is not to wed yourself to this routine, but to map out your natural tendencies so that you can work with them rather than against them.

This map represents the ebb and flow of your mental and physical energy throughout the workweek, and it hints at why certain tasks can feel easy at some times and nearly insurmountable at others. You may wish to pin it up or set it aside as a helpful reference when you find yourself staying up later than you'd like.

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## 3. You are not a machine

You may notice that your academic commitments don't align perfectly with your natural rhythms. Try to build some time into your routine for activities that keep you refreshed, grounded and motivated when the going gets rough. Contrary to popular belief, it's even more important to set aside time to care for yourself during deadline season than during the off season.

In each of the following categories, name at least one activity that you find refreshing, relieving or meaningful. Feel free to tailor the categories to your personality and tastes.

**Physical** (e.g. practicing martial arts, playing soccer, attending a yoga class, taking walks)

**Social** (e.g. having family dinners, playing card games with friends)

**Creative** (e.g. drawing, knitting, tinkering with a personal website)

**Spiritual** (e.g. attending a prayer circle, reading, being politically active)

Weekly activities

Seasonal Activities and Special Events

## 4. Pulling It Together

- Open your monthly calendar and take out your course syllabi.
- Record all of your course-related deadlines (essay deadlines, midterm dates, exam periods and so on). For each one, include both the percentage it is worth and the course it's for.
- Using a different colour, record other regular dates and deadlines (e.g. birthdays, medical checkups, job commitments). Include the seasonal activities and events that you identified in section 3.
- Post your monthly calendar in a prominent spot in your room. This will allow you to see what's coming up well in advance, so you can prepare.
- Transcribe the dates and deadlines from your monthly calendar into your daily agenda planner.
- Mark down all of your fixed commitments for the coming week, such as lectures, tutorials, labs, volunteer shifts and job shifts.
- Refer to the map of natural tendencies that you created in section 2 and then look ahead to what projects are due within the next four weeks. With the assistance of the [Assignment Calculator](#), break those projects down into smaller stages on a separate piece of paper and then allocate your most intellectually fruitful hours (the ones you flagged in green) to these smaller stages on a daily basis (e.g. every morning from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., you'll work on a specific step of a research paper, and at 12 p.m. each day you'll break for lunch).
- Repeat this for each upcoming deadline. You may not have enough "green" hours for all of your intensive work, but the value of knowing when they are is that you'll be less likely to fritter them away on passive tasks.
- Refer again to the map of natural tendencies that you created in section 2. For the next week, mark off your projected bedtimes, meal times, and windows for completing errands, chores and passive work.
- Refer to the wellness activities that you identified in section 3. Allocate at least two hours to at least one of those activities in the coming week.
- At the end of each day, take a few minutes to assess what worked well for you and what didn't work well. It is always a good idea to prepare for the following day the night before (e.g. make your lunch, pack your backpack, charge your phone) so that you can make the most of your mornings.

