



The University of Sydney

Learning Centre

First Year Experience Series:

Using Planners and Plans

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First Year Experience Series: Using Planners and Plans

Scouller, Karen, *First Year Experience Series: Using Planners and Plans*
ISBN 1 86487 444 5

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This booklet is one of a set of three which deal with organisational and time management skills for first year undergraduate students.

- Booklet 1: **Understanding Yourself**
understanding yourself as a learner
understanding your lifestyle
- Booklet 2: **Being a More Effective Learner**
setting goals and making changes
improving concentration
dealing with procrastination
- Booklet 3: **Using Planners and Plans**
using a semester planner: getting an overview
using a weekly plan: organising your week
using a sessional plan: designing one study session

This first year series was developed as part of the
Sydney Welcome Orientation and Transition (SWOT) program.

Introduction to these Resources

First year undergraduate students are a very diverse group. You may have entered university straight from school or as a mature age student, you may be an international student, or you may have a disability. You also have much in common. You are all in a transitional period as you enter and have to learn the expectations and rules of this new learning environment.

What are your main fears?

Most first year undergraduate students feel both excited and worried when beginning their university studies.

Excited because you have many new experiences and challenges ahead.

Worried because you may feel confused and unsure about the expectations and standards required.

Typical questions are:

What's expected of me?

How am I going to get through all this reading?

How will I be assessed?

How will I know when I have studied enough?

How will I manage my time properly and organise myself?

How is university different from school?

Although you are not all recent school leavers, your last memory of formal learning probably goes back to your school days. So thinking about the differences between university and school is a useful starting point. Some important differences are:

There are many different learning situations; e.g. lectures, tutorials, laboratory sessions.

You have much greater control over your own time, and can make your own decisions about attending lectures, and tutorials and so on.

The campus is much larger - you need to become familiar with buildings sometimes scattered over a wide area (especially for Arts and Humanity students).

Campus life is rich and tempting - there are many associations and clubs that you can join so that you participate fully in university life.

The learning environment is more impersonal.

Your work load is greater and work differs in quantity and quality from that of school.

What can you learn from these resources?

These resources are designed to help you become better at organising yourself and managing your time which are important skills for success at university.

These skills are presented in 3 booklets as listed below.

Booklet 3: Using planners and plans

using a semester planner: getting an overview

using a weekly plan: organising your week

using a sessional plan: designing one study session

Booklet 1: Understanding yourself

understanding yourself as a learner

understanding your lifestyle

Booklet 2: Being a more effective learner

setting goals and making changes

improving concentration

dealing with procrastination

Introduction to Booklet 3

Using Planners and Plans

Booklet 3 looks at ways to help you design useful and workable planners and plans so that you know what you have to do and what time you have available, and you are in control of and manage your study programme.

It aims to encourage you:

- to reflect upon your current work patterns and learning style,
- to identify changes you would like to make,
- to practise new strategies, and
- to reflect upon and monitor your progress.

How can you best use the resources?

Use the diagnostic task (see page 4) as the basis for planning a self study programme.

Design a programme that suits your timetable, and disciplinary and learning demands.

Select, practise and adapt, if necessary, some or all of the suggested strategies.

Persist with some of the desired changes to your work patterns and lifestyle.

Follow up other units (if you wish / need to) which are cross-referenced in the materials.

Continue to monitor your study behaviours long after you have completed these exercises.

Remind yourself of your strengths and academic successes and remember to feel good about yourself as you successfully make the changes you want.

Ask Yourself these Questions

Asking yourself these questions can be the starting point in your journey. They provide an overview of work patterns, study behaviours, and lifestyle issues. They may suggest areas of difficulty you have not previously considered and areas of strength you have not recognised. They suggest which other booklets in this series might be appropriate for you to complete.

Instructions:

Read the following brief descriptions of study patterns and feelings and determine which ones describe you. Refer to Column 2 for planning your self study programme.

Work Patterns	Self Study Resources
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know when, where and how I study best <input type="checkbox"/> I don't understand where the time goes but I haven't done what I needed to do <input type="checkbox"/> I waste a lot of time <input type="checkbox"/> I don't spend enough time on academic work <input type="checkbox"/> I spend too much time on my work which is not reflected in better results <input type="checkbox"/> I want to change my study patterns but don't know how or where to start <input type="checkbox"/> I can't concentrate for long <input type="checkbox"/> I get easily distracted <input type="checkbox"/> I find it hard to get started with my work <input type="checkbox"/> I leave my work to the last moment <input type="checkbox"/> I ask for extensions for my assignments <input type="checkbox"/> I don't keep up with the weekly readings <input type="checkbox"/> I lose track of what I should be doing	Booklet 1 Part 1 - understanding yourself as a learner Booklet 1 Part 2 - understanding your lifestyle Booklet 2 Part 1 - setting goals and making changes Booklet 3 Parts 1-3 - designing planners and plans Booklet 2 Part 1 - setting goals and making changes Booklet 2 Part 2 - improving concentration Booklet 2 Part 3 - dealing with procrastination Booklet 3 Parts 1-3 - designing planners and plans
Feelings	
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel everything is out of my control <input type="checkbox"/> I feel guilty whenever I'm not working <input type="checkbox"/> I resent working more hours than other students to complete the same amount of work	all the booklets will add to your feeling more confident, more in control, less anxious, and less guilty



PART 1

THE SEMESTER
PLANNER:
GETTING AN
OVERVIEW

PART I THE SEMESTER PLANNER: GETTING AN OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVES OF PART I

After you have completed this section, we hope you will

- appreciate the usefulness of a semester planner
- understand the steps involved in designing one
- have designed your planner for this (or next) semester

INTRODUCTION TO PART I

In this section we go through the process of designing a semester planner. Gaining an overview of your whole semester's workload is an important component in being in control and managing your time. Although diaries are useful and can be used concurrently, being able to see all your assignments and assessment tasks on one page will give you a much greater understanding of all your commitments and a greater sense of control over the study process. It is particularly useful if you are in the Arts, Humanities and Social Science faculties since your assignments (which typically consist of essays and tutorial papers) have long-term deadlines for their completion. A semester planner will help you balance your university and non-university commitments. Although the amount of time you spend on private study will vary depending on your immediate and long-term deadlines (some periods are busier than others), the total study time, including classroom attendance, will probably fall within the range of 40-50 hours per week. This pattern should allow you to have a balanced life without feeling guilty when you are not at your desk.

A semester planner gives you the whole picture of your semester's workload. A semester planner allows you

- a. to see all your commitments at once:
 - i. the deadlines for major and minor assignments and tutorial presentations, and the dates for tests and exams
 - ii. your busiest periods
- b. to plan the time needed for completing each assignment and task by the deadline taking into account all your other assignments and tasks
- c. to list the steps (or subtasks) required to complete each assignment
- d. to plan the revision sessions for your examinations from the beginning of the semester so that you revise notes and other materials early and regularly

You can also use it as the basis for your weekly plan.

[Adapted from Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney]

Examples of a Semester Planner

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 represent two stages in designing a 14-week semester planner.

The first stage (Table 3.1) includes:

- a) information about the semester itself,
 - a. dates for each week to quickly orientate students,
 - b. dates of breaks (semester/mid-year), STUVAC (Study Vacation), examinations.
More space has been provided for the Easter break, STUVAC and the 2 examination weeks since they are free of set classes and allow for more private study time.
- b) information about the courses and the assessment tasks,
 - a. the name of each course,
 - b. the due date for each assignment in the appropriate week,
 - c. the week to commence each one with lead-up line to each due date,
 - d. the exam times (can be added later when the examination timetable is available).

In our examples, William, a first year Arts student, is doing 4 subjects all requiring him to write essays and tutorial papers. He can decide which assignment to start working on first, when to start, and how long he needs for each one. He can monitor what he is doing during the semester and make necessary changes and additions to his planner as he goes.

The second stage (Table 3.2)

For some students the planner on Table 3.1 is enough - it gives them a visual overview of the semester's workload and the due dates for their various assignments. Other students prefer a more detailed version as seen in Table 3.2. This includes the subtasks for completing each assignment and becomes a very useful basis of a weekly plan.

⌘ Exercise 1

- a) Examine the semester planner on Table 3.2 and consider how William has organised his workload and varied the subtasks. How realistic is this planner for you?

Comments on Exercise 1

William knows he must work concurrently on several essays but he does not want to be doing the same activity (for example, researching) during the one week. He therefore has designed his planner to vary his activities as much as possible.

In week 6 (week beginning 3 April), for example, he is

- choosing topic for and brainstorming his English essay,
- writing and editing first draft of his History tutorial paper,
- writing / editing final draft of his Government essay
brainstorming and researching his Government tutorial paper topic,
- planning the presentation of his Anthropology tutorial paper.

Notice also that he has:

- included exam revision throughout the semester which becomes more focused as other tasks are completed,
- used different lines to distinguish tasks, writing essays (dashed line) and tutorial papers (small dotted line), revising for exams (dashed/dotted line). Colours are effective too.

b) If you are not an Arts / Humanities student jot down some ideas below how you can adapt the planner to suit your academic requirements.

Table 3.1 Example of a Basic Planner (Dates: Semester 1 2000)

Dates	Course 1 English	Course 2 History	Course 3 Government	Course 4 Anthropology
28 feb				
6 mar				
13 mar				
20 mar	Tutorial paper			
27 mar		Essay 1 (750 words)		
3 apr				Tutorial paper
10 apr			Essay 1 (750 words)	
17 apr		Tutorial paper		
21 - 28 apr				
Easter Break				
1 may	Essay (2000 words)		Tutorial Paper	
8 may				
15 may		Essay 2 (1500 words)		Essay (2000 words)
22 may			Essay 2 (1000 words)	
29 may				
5 - 9 june				
STUVAC				
	Exams	Exams	Exams	Exams
12 - 18 jun	1st exam (3 hrs)		1st exam (3 hrs)	1st exam (2 hrs)
19 - 24 jun	2nd exam (2hrs)	1st exam (2hrs) 2nd exam (2 hrs)	2nd exam (2 hrs)	2nd exam (2 hrs)
26 jun-7 jul				
Mid Year Break				
10 jul	Semester 2 begins			

[Adapted from Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney]

Table 3.2 Example of a Detailed Planner (Dates: Semester 1 2000)

Dates	Course 1 English	Course 2 History	Course 3 Government	Course 4 Anthropology
28 feb		Choose topic Brainstorm/Res		
6 mar	Choose topic Brainstorm/Res	Research Write/edit 1st draft	Choose topic	Choose topic
13 mar	Write/edit 1st draft Write/edit final dr		Brainstorm Research	Brainstorm Research
20 mar	▼ Plan presentation Tutorial paper	Write/edit final ▼ draft Choose topic	Research	Write/edit 1st draft
27 mar		Essay1 Brainstorm (750 wds) Research	Write/edit 1st draft Choose top	Write/edit final draft
3 apr	Choose topic Brainstorm	Write/edit 1st draft	Write/ Brainstorm edit final dr Res	▼ Plan presentation Tutorial paper
10 apr	Research / plan Write 1st draft	Write/edit final draft	Essay1 Research (750 wds)	Choose topic Brainstorm
17 apr	Edit 1st draft	Plan presentation ▼ Choose Tutpaper	Write/edit 1st draft	Research
21 - 28 apr Easter Break	Write final draft	topic Brainstorm Research	Write/edit final draft Plan presentation Choose topic ▼	Write/edit 1st draft
1 may	▼ Edit final draft Essay (2000 wds)	Research Write/edit 1st draft	Brainstorm Tut Research Paper	Write final draft
8 may		Write/edit final ▼ draft	Research Write/edit 1st draft	Edit final draft ▼
15 may	Exam prep	Essay 2 (1500 wds) Exam prep	Write/edit final ▼ draft	Essay (2000 wds) Exam prep
22 may	Exam prep	Exam prep	Essay2 (1000 wds) Exam prep	Exam prep
29 may	Exam prep	Exam prep	Exam prep	Exam prep
15 - 9 june STUVAC	Exam prep	Exam prep	Exam prep	Exam prep
12 18 jun	Exams 1st exam (3 hrs)	Exams	Exams 1st exam (3 hrs)	Exams 1st exam (2 hrs)
19 - 24 jun	2nd exam (2 hrs)	1st exam (2 hrs) 2nd exam (2 hrs)	2nd exam (2 hrs)	2nd exam (2 hrs)
26 jun-7 jul Mid Year Break				
10 jul	Semester 2 begins			

[Adapted from Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney]

Breaking Tasks into Subtasks

The process of planning how much time is required to complete a task involves:

- a. breaking tasks into smaller units of work (subtasks), and
- b. giving each subtask a time estimate.

The skill of breaking a task into subtasks is important because it:

- a. encourages you to get started (some students put off starting their work because they do not know where to start),
- b. prevents you from being overwhelmed by a large task, and
- c. allows you to complete a large task over a time period in a logical and systematic way.

Exercises 2 and 3 below are designed to provide practice in these skills.

⌘ Exercise 2

- a) Examine the task time plan on Table 3.3.

This plan:

- breaks the task of essay writing into subtasks, such as analysing the topic,
- has estimated the amount of time each subtask will involve, and
- allows the student to monitor her progress by noting down the actual time it has taken*.

- b) Reflect on how realistic such a time plan would be for you - Keeping in mind you are usually working on many tasks (not just one task) at the same time.
- c) If you are not required to write essays in your courses but you have other kinds of assignments to write, such as reports, case studies, literature reviews and reflective journals, reflect on the subtasks involved in completing your written assignment. Do you have to adapt the task time plan (Table 3.3) very much? In what ways?

* Self-monitoring is important because it provides useful feedback as to how long tasks typically take. This awareness, over time, enables you to be more accurate in estimating the time you require to complete your various tasks.

Table 3.3 Model of a task time plan

Sample Essay:	"What do you consider are the most important roles and responsibilities of the teacher?"
Length:	2,000 words
Field:	Education
Time to Complete:	4 weeks
Due Date:	_____

Estimated Time (days)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

Analyse topic	Find sources	Write essay plan	Write 1st draft	Write final draft
Write preliminary ideas	Select sources	Write position statement	Edit 1st draft	Edit final draft
	Read and make notes			

Actual Time (days)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

--

⌘ Exercise 3

- a) Nominate an assignment or academic task that you are currently working on or you are about to commence, for example, writing an essay / report or preparing for a tutorial / laboratory session. Follow the steps given below:
- i. break the task up into the various subtasks involved in its completion,
 - ii. sequence the subtasks in logical order,
 - iii. list them on Table 3.4, and
 - iv. give each subtask a time estimate.

- b) When you are actually working on this assignment monitor your progress by keeping a record of the actual time spent on each subtask and the task as a whole.
- c) When the task is complete evaluate your task plan and reflect upon how realistic it was. What changes would you make to improve it?

Table 3.4 Task plan

Type of Task = _____

	Subtasks	Estimated Time	Actual Time
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Designing Your Semester Planner

Designing a planner does not take long - perhaps an hour at the beginning of each semester. A blank planner is provided on Table 3.5. If this blank planner fits your needs (e.g. number of courses), photocopy it many times before filling it in so that you have a planner ready for the beginning of each semester. If it is not appropriate because you have more courses or a different number of lecture weeks draw up your own and get many copies of the blank version.

When filling in your planner use a pencil to facilitate making changes.

⌘ Exercise 4

On the planner provided (Table 3.5) or your own planner:

- a) list the dates and breaks for your current (or next) semester,
- b) write in the names of your courses at the top of columns 2 - 5,
- c) write in the assessment tasks for each course in the week they are due, that is, your essays/ reports, tutorial papers, tests, quizzes, seminar presentations, exams,
- d) estimate how much time you need to complete each task,
- e) draw in a line showing when to start and finish work on each task, and
- f) write in the subtasks (optional).

Evaluating Your Semester Planner

⌘ Exercise 5

- a) When you have finished designing your planner, evaluate it by asking yourself the following questions.
 - i. Have I included all my assessment tasks for each course?
 - ii. Have I selected the most appropriate task as my first one?
 - iii. Have I taken into account all the assignments and assessment tasks when planning how long I need for each one?
 - iv. Is my planner realistic? That is, have I given myself enough time to complete each task by the deadline and at an appropriate level of quality?
 - v. Have I considered how to monitor my progress?
- b) At the end of the semester reflect back on the effectiveness of your semester planner. Consider some of these questions.
 - i. How realistic was my semester planner? Was I able to follow it relatively easily? Did I complete all my assignments by their deadlines? Was I satisfied with the quality of my completed assignments?
 - ii. Did I feel more in control of the process?
 - iii. Did my planning result in better marks or performance?
 - iv. Can I improve the way I organised the whole semester? What improvements could I make?

Table 3.5 A blank semester planner

Dates	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4
STUVAC				
	Exams	Exams	Exams	Exams

SUMMARY OF BOOKLET 3: PART I
The Semester Planner: Getting an Overview

The semester planner allows you to:

1. plan your academic activities across the whole semester, and
2. be (and feel) in control of everything.



PART 2

THE WEEKLY PLAN:
ORGANISING YOUR
WEEK

PART 2 THE WEEKLY PLAN: ORGANISING YOUR WEEK

OBJECTIVES OF PART 2

After you have completed this section, we hope you will

- appreciate the usefulness of a weekly plan
- understand the steps involved in designing a weekly plan
- have designed your plan for this (or next) week

INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

In this section we go through the process of designing a weekly plan. It assumes you have completed Booklet 3 Part 1, Getting an Overview: the semester planner. A week is the most commonly used time unit for tertiary students. Your lectures and tutorial/laboratory/ clinical sessions are scheduled at the same time each week. And usually your non-university commitments are also scheduled on the same days or evenings. Thus your activities are relatively stable from one week to another across the semester and once you are familiar with them, it is a quick task for you to identify the blocks of time available for private study.

Your weekly study plan should be based on:

- a. the university commitments as seen from your semester planner,
- b. your knowledge of non-university commitments, e.g. sport / recreational activities,
- c. the time you have available.

Steps Involved in Designing a Week's Private Study Plan

Step 1: Identify your university commitments for the current week

Set out below in Table 3.6 is an example of a weekly list of university commitments based on the activities depicted for week 6 of the semester planner (from Booklet 3 Part 1, Table 3.2, see page 10). By moving horizontally across the semester planner it is possible to identify what tasks need to be done for all your courses.

The weekly list below is William's courses, the subtasks and time-estimates for each subtask. You can see that in this week much less time is spent on English than Government, Anthropology and History. You do not have to spend exactly the same time on each course since the balance may vary from week to week. However, make sure that over a period of time you balance your efforts across your courses.

Your time estimates may not be very accurate at first. If, however, you start noting the actual time taken, you will slowly get a clearer idea of how long each task typically takes.

Table 3.6 Weekly list of university commitments
 (Based on Week 6 Semester Planner Booklet 3 Part 1, Table 3.2, page 10)

Courses	List of Tasks / Subtasks	Time Estimate
1. English	exam prep: revise lectures 1-3, Topic 1 essay: choose topic / brainstorm	45 mins 1 hour
2. History	tutorial paper: write / edit first draft exam prep: revise lectures 1-4, Topic 3	6 hours 1 hour
3. Government	essay: write / edit final draft tutorial paper: brainstorm / research exam prep: revise lectures 3-6 Topic 2	2 hours 6 hours 1 hour
4. Anthropology	exam prep: revise lectures 1-4, Topic 2 tutorial paper: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • final proof-reading of paper • prepare / rehearse spoken version 	1 hour 45 mins 3 hours
	Total hours	22.5 hours

Total number of study hours required (week 6 semester planner) = 22.5 hours.

⌘ Exercise 1

On Table 3.7 design your plan for this week by following the procedure below.

- a) In column 1 fill in the names of all your courses.
- b) Look at your completed semester planner for the current week (see Booklet 3 Part 1, The Semester Planner, Table 3.5, page 15). Each week's work can be found by locating the week's date and moving horizontally across your various courses.
- c) For each course list the subtasks below that are your university commitments for your current week and write these in column 2.
- d) For each subtask estimate how much time is required for its completion (column 3).
- e) Then calculate the total amount of time required to fulfil that week's commitments and write your total here.

Total number of private study hours required: _____

Table 3.7 Your weekly list of university commitments

Courses	List of Tasks / Subtasks	Time Estimate
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
	Total hours	

Step 2: Identify your non-university commitments for the current week

The next step is to identify your non-university activities for the current week. These will consist of some of the following: recreational activities, sport, family commitments, paid work, religious observances and so on.

⌘ Exercise 2

- a) In column 1 on Table 3.8 list the non-university commitments you are aware of for the current week.
- b) Calculate and write in column 2 how much time will be needed for each activity.
- c) Calculate and write below the total number of hours required for your non-university commitments.

Total number of non-university hours required: _____

Table 3.8 Weekly list of non-university commitments

Non-university Commitments	Time Estimates
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
Total hours	

Step 3: Identify the time available for private study

Overpage (Table 3.9) is an example of the process of identifying available time.

- a) Most of it has been shaded in - all the shaded parts represent non-available time. That is, time that is already taken up in formal classes (lectures, tutorials, laboratory sessions); normal life tasks such as meals, travel, sleep; or in non-university activities such as paid work, sport, recreation and so on. Each activity is not named here since this student is mainly interested in identifying the blocks of time available for private study.
- b) The non-shaded parts, which total 41 hours, is time available for private study.

William only needs 22.5 hours (see Table 3.6 above) to complete the work required for that week so he does not need to use it all for private study.

Table 3.9 An example of a weekly plan showing (non)available time

Time	Mon	Tues	Wednes	Thurs	Fri	Satur	Sunday
6am	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
7am	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
8am	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
9am	Shaded	White	White	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
10am	White	White	White	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
11am	White	Shaded	White	White	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
12noon	White	Shaded	Shaded	White	White	Shaded	Shaded
1pm	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
2pm	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	White	White	White	Shaded
3pm	Shaded	White	Shaded	Shaded	White	White	White
4pm	Shaded	Shaded	White	White	White	White	White
5pm	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	White	Shaded
6pm	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
7pm	White	White	White	White	Shaded	White	Shaded
8pm	White	Shaded	White	White	Shaded	White	Shaded
9pm	White	Shaded	White	White	Shaded	Shaded	White
10pm	White	White	White	White	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
11pm	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
Hours Available	7	5	8	8	4	6	3

Time available (total of non-shaded areas) = 41 hours

Table 3.10 is a blank weekly chart. You are obviously not going to use all this time for your studies. But it is useful to know which blocks of time are available so that you are in a position to select which blocks you wish to use.

⌘ Exercise 3

- a) On Table 3.10 shade in those times that are not available for private study, taking into account all your university and non-university commitments. It is unnecessary to write in the details of your weekly commitments such as the names of your courses since you have a copy of your timetable elsewhere. Nor is it necessary to detail your non-university activities, unless you think it is useful to keep a record of it here. You are really concerned now with the unshaded blocks of time.

All the unshaded area is time available for private study.

When shading in the non-available time on your table keep the following in mind.

- Consider your natural patterns of studying (from Booklet 1 Part 1, Understanding Yourself as a Learner). For example, do not identify as available time, periods such as 6am - 8am or 10pm - 12 midnight if you know you will never use them.
- Identify small blocks of time as well as the larger ones. Small blocks, such as one hour between lectures or half an hour before a tutorial can still be used productively if needed; e.g. reading lecture notes for the day, finding or checking references at the library, reflecting on some aspect of your work...
- Remember that you need breaks. You are not a machine so this plan must be realistic and flexible and something you can and will follow.

- b) Calculate how many hours are available for private study by totalling the number of hours that remain unshaded.

Total number of hours available for private study _____

- c) Record here the two main totals of concern.

a. Total hours required:
[based on your two totals: Exercises 1e) and 2c)] _____

b. Total hours available:
[based on Exercise 3b)] _____

Table 3.10 A plan for your current week

Time	Monday	Tues	Wednes	Thurs	Fri	Satur	Sunday
6am							
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
Noon							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							
9pm							
10pm							
11pm							
Hours Available							

Step 4: Identify the blocks of time you wish to use for private study

Over a week you should normally have more time available than required.

- If this is so, you can now calculate how much of the available time and which blocks of time you wish to use for private study.
- If this is not so, go back over your non-university commitments and decide which ones may have to be temporarily put aside. You have now released blocks of time that can be added to those you have already identified as available for private study.

⌘ Exercise 4

- a) Reflect upon the two totals you calculated in Exercise 3c (time required and time available). Do you have more or less time available than required?
- b) From all the blocks of time identified as available highlight those blocks that you wish to use in this current week for private study.

A suggestion for highlighting blocks is to box each block in with highlighter colours - use different colours for each course so that it is quickly and visually identified.

Step 5: Write in the academic tasks for the current week

Once you know which academic tasks you wish to complete during the week you can write these tasks into the appropriate block of time. You now have a weekly plan.

⌘ Exercise 5

In the highlighted blocks of time (already identified on Table 3.10 as those you wish to use in this current week) write in the course names and academic tasks that you wish to work on (identified on Table 3.7).

Step 6: Evaluate your weekly plan

Consider these questions.

- a) Is it realistic, achievable and workable for *YOU*?
- b) Does it take into account all *YOUR* university and non-university commitments?
- c) Does it give *YOU* a balanced life across all your activities?

See Booklet 1 Part 2, Understanding Your Lifestyle, for more assistance on understanding where your time is going and for achieving a balanced life.

Step 7: Monitor your progress

Monitor your progress during the week. If unexpected events force you to change some aspect of your plan, you should normally have other blocks of time available to slot into.

A Cautionary Note

You want this plan to be flexible but be careful not to be too flexible either. Making changes to your plan should be a rare event and done only in exceptional circumstances.

Some Further Suggestions

The process of designing a weekly plan is a useful exercise to go through. However, you do not have to design such a formal weekly plan once you have gone through this process for a week or two. Once you know which blocks of time are available each week you can adapt this plan as you wish.

Some suggestions follow.

- Keep a copy of Table 3.10 with your non-available blocks of times shaded in. Get many photocopies of the weekly plan at this stage, that is, before you have filled in your private study activities. You now have this available at the beginning of each week so that all you have to do is highlight which blocks of time you wish to use in that week and fill in the courses and tasks that you wish to work on.
- If your weekly commitments are not stable (for example, your paid work hours change from one week to another) photocopy your weekly plan at the stage where it is most stable - the shaded areas might only include your set class times. Then at the beginning of each week add (or shade in) the non-available blocks for that week.
- You do not have to write in your private study tasks onto the shaded weekly chart at all. You can simply use it in a form like Table 3.9 as a guide to remind you of the available times for that week. You can list your academic tasks elsewhere.
- This weekly plan becomes the basis of your daily or sessional plan.
- Keep a copy of each week's plan in an obvious place in your study area, such as on a notice board above your desk or taped on your desk. You want to be able to see it easily and quickly.

A blank weekly plan has been provided for future plans as Appendix 1.

SUMMARY OF BOOKLET 3: PART 2
The Weekly Plan: Organising Your Week

The weekly plan:

1. is based on the semester planner,
2. consists of the subtasks you wish to complete in a week,
3. allows you to complete your commitments in a logical and systematic manner,
4. allows you to achieve a balance between your university and non-university commitments, and
5. must be flexible and workable for you.

APPENDIX 1

A Weekly Plan

Week _____ Semester _____ Year _____

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6am							
7am							
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
Noon							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							
9pm							
10pm							
11pm							
Hours Available							



PART 3

THE SESSIONAL
PLAN:
DESIGNING ONE
STUDY SESSION

PART 3 THE SESSIONAL PLAN: DESIGNING ONE STUDY SESSION

OBJECTIVES OF PART 3

After you have completed this section, we hope you will

- appreciate the usefulness of a sessional plan
- understand the steps involved in designing a sessional plan
- have designed your plan for today's or tomorrow's private study session

INTRODUCTION TO PART 3

In this section we go through the process of designing a plan for one private study session. It assumes you have completed Booklet 3 Part 1, The Semester Planner: Getting an Overview and Booklet 3 Part 2, The Weekly Plan: Organising your Week. Having a plan for each private study session is an essential aspect of being an efficient and effective student. When you sit at your desk and commence your work you should know what you want to achieve by the end of that session, that is, you set short-term goals based on your knowledge of the work you must complete for that week.

The advantages of designing and following a plan are:

- a. your study becomes more organised and systematic,
- b. your concentration and motivation are enhanced,
- c. you feel more in control, and
- d. you feel a sense of satisfaction and achievement when you have achieved your set goals.

What does a sessional plan look like?

A sessional plan, based on your semester planner and weekly plan, should contain:

- a. a list of the tasks you wish to accomplish during one study session,
- b. a priority ranking for each task,
- c. an estimation of the time each task should take if you are working efficiently,
- d. a record of the actual time taken.

Writing a plan for one private study session is a relatively simple procedure. You know from your weekly plan the tasks for each subject that you need to accomplish each day and how much time you have available for each block of private study. However, whereas the weekly plan describes tasks in broad categories such as English: poetry or History: tutorial readings, your sessional plan will be more specific. For example, for English you now specify which poems you will read, and for History you name the chapter or journal article(s) you will read. You then give each task a priority ranking and a time estimate.

[Adapted from Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney]

⌘ Exercise 1

On Table 3.11 below is Sharon's, a first year student, plan for a private study session lasting 4 hours. The plan appears to be an appropriate one. It lists the tasks, and the priority rankings and time estimates for each task. It also has a record of the actual time taken to complete each task. Examine both the goals for and the reality of this session carefully and overpage jot down the strengths and weaknesses of this plan. What improvements could you suggest?

Table 3.11 An example of a sessional plan

Tasks	Priority Ranking	Estimated Time	Actual Time
Government: read ch 4 of xx for tut tomorrow	1	45 mins	1 hr 30 mins
English: read poems y and yy for tut on Friday	1	1 hour	(didn't do)
Government: revise ch 4 of zz for quiz tomorrow	1	30 mins	40 mins
Anthropology: revise lectures 1-5, Topic 5	2	45 mins	1 hour
History: plan essay due in 4 weeks time	3	30 mins	30 mins
History: consider question 10 for next Tuesday	2	30 mins	20 mins (didn't finish)

[Adapted from Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney]

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Improvements:

Comments on Exercise 1

Strengths

- a. The priority rankings are generally OK.
- b. This student completed most of her priority 1 tasks, the two tasks due the next day.

Weaknesses

- a. She did not complete all her priority 1 tasks
- b. Sharon should not have engaged in a priority 3 activity before all priority 1 and 2 tasks were complete. She had 4 hours of tasks and activities and 4 hours available. It is very important to always do your priority 1 tasks first, followed by priority 2 tasks and then if there is still time available, your priority 3 tasks.
- c. Her time estimate for the first task was very wrong. It is not possible in this situation to know if this was caused by her inability to estimate time accurately or whether she used her time ineffectively by not concentrating well. See Booklet 2 Part 2, Improving Concentration, for strategies to improve levels of concentration.

Other

In general this student appears to underestimate how long tasks will take but time estimates can be difficult to make. A chapter of one book might take you 45 minutes, yet a chapter of another book might take you 1.5 hours. It is however possible that by noting down the actual time and becoming more conscious of time, and by skimming first, you will become more accurate in estimating time.

Steps Involved in Designing a Plan for One Private Study Session

Step 1: List the tasks to be completed

You can base these on your weekly plan. Since you know what you want to achieve by the end of each week you can decide how to break these tasks up across the different blocks of available time each week.

⌘ Exercise 2

- a) Examine your weekly plan (see Booklet 3 Part 2, The Weekly Plan: Table 3.10):
 - i. identify a block of time available today or tomorrow - how long is it?
 - ii. consider what tasks you wish to complete during this study session.

- b) In column 1 on Table 3.12 (below) list all those tasks you wish to complete in this session.

Table 3.12 Your plan for your next study session

Tasks	Priority Ranking	Estimated Time	Actual Time

Step 2: Prioritise your tasks

Prioritising tasks and activities is an important part of good time management. It forces you to make relative judgements about your tasks and provides motivation for their completion.

Your priority rankings should range from 1-3 as follows.

Priority 1.	high priority	you must do
Priority 2.	middle priority	you should do
Priority 3.	low priority	you will only do if there is still time

⌘ Exercise 3

- Consider the important factors involved in assigning priorities to your academic tasks.
- Solve the following problem:

You have 45 minutes left for private study today. You look at your list for the session and read the tasks that have not yet been completed and their time estimates and priority rankings. Below is the list of tasks not yet completed, decide quickly which one(s) to tackle. In the space provided below comment on which one(s) you would choose and why?

List of Tasks	Priority Ranking	Estimated Time
Read chapter x of Government text	1	1 hour
Write summary of History lecture notes	2	15 mins
Go to the library and borrow x	3	20 mins
Write introduction to English essay	3	45 mins
Write the plan for Anthropology essay	2	30 mins

Choice: _____

Reason(s):

Comments on Exercise 3

- a) Priority rankings are usually based on the weekly plan and on such factors as your perception of each task's relative importance, how close it is to the deadline, how well you are going in the course already, how many marks it is worth, whether this course is a prerequisite for next semester's course and so on.
- b) You should have selected the priority 1 task even if its completion requires more time than what is available. This is the whole point of prioritising tasks. It means that in the next study session you have already commenced this task and will be able to complete it more easily.

However, although completing priority 1 tasks is paramount, there are of course times when you need to re-prioritise your activities. There must be some flexibility involved and in the situation above you may choose to complete another activity. For example, you might skim the government text for 10 minutes (your priority 1 task) and get an overview of the content in preparation for reading it tomorrow, and then choose to plan your Anthropology essay (30 minutes) which is a priority 2 task.

If you do decide to re-prioritise your tasks make sure that you can justify your decision. It should not be done lightly.

⌘ Exercise 4

Refer again to your sessional plan on Table 3.12 (page 34) where you have already listed your tasks for that session. Reflect briefly on each task's relative importance and add your priority rankings for each of the tasks you have listed.

Step 3: Give your tasks time estimates

Time estimates are an important component of a good plan. They make you conscious of time before and while you are working, they put some (but not too much) pressure on you and enhance your concentration and motivation. Some pressure is invaluable. Most people find it hard to get motivated if they have no pressure on them at all and find it debilitating if they are under too much stress. So you will need to find your own optimal amount of pressure that allows you to perform at your best without causing too much anxiety.

⌘ Exercise 5

Refer again to Table 3.12 (page 34) and write in your time estimates for each task. You now have your plan for your next study session.

Step 4: Evaluate your plan

You can evaluate your plan at two stages:

- a. when you have completed writing the plan (practised in Exercise 6), and
- b. when you have finished your session (practised in Exercise 7).

⌘ Exercise 6

Evaluate your plan by considering the following questions.

- a) Are all the appropriate tasks included?
- b) Is the priority ranking of each task appropriate? Have you considered all aspects?
- c) How realistic are your time estimates in terms of your knowledge of your work patterns, your levels of concentration and your study requirements at the moment?

Step 5: Monitor your progress

You can monitor your progress by recording the actual time taken for the completion of each task and by reflecting on how realistic the plan was. This helps you evaluate how accurately you are estimating the time required to complete your various tasks and will make your future estimates more accurate.

⌘ Exercise 7

- a) On Table 3.12 (page 34) keep a record of the actual time each task took you to complete.
- b) Reflect on the differences between the estimated and the actual times and consider how realistic your sessional plan was. What changes would you make?

Changes:

SUMMARY OF BOOKLET 3 PART 3 The Sessional Plan: Designing One Study Session

1. Always have a plan for each session of private study.
2. This should include:
 - a. a list of tasks to be completed,
 - b. a priority ranking for each task,
 - c. a time estimate for each task, and
 - d. a record of the actual time taken.
3. Complete tasks according to the priority rankings assigned.

An Overview of Booklet 3

The three parts in this booklet require you to slowly go through the steps involved in planning and balancing your university and non-university commitments at three different levels: getting an overview of all your semester commitments, organising yourself on a weekly basis, and designing one study session. They are closely related, the semester planner becomes the basis of the weekly plan which in turn becomes the basis for designing each study session.

The planning process has been broken down into small steps and while completing each step you may feel that you do not have the time to do this every semester, week and session. It is of course up to you how much and how thoroughly you intend to plan.

However, planning at all three levels is not as time-consuming as first appears.

- a. The semester planner can be done very quickly and usually during the first two weeks of semester when you are initially informed about your course assignments. If you start each semester with a blank planner it does not take long to fill in the assignments as they come.
- b. The weekly plan is already half designed. You know what you need to do for each course (vertical line) by looking up each week (horizontal line) on the semester planner. Again if you start off each week with a blank weekly plan with the available blocks of times unshaded then you can quickly work out when you wish to complete your various tasks.
- c. The sessional plan is basically a 'things to do' list with priority rankings and time estimates. It is best designed at the end of each study session, that is, as your last task of the session when you know what you have achieved and what you still have to do next time. In addition having your plan ready before you sit down at your desk helps you get started in the next session. See Booklet 2 Part 3, Dealing with Procrastination.

A Cautionary Note

It is possible to spend a great deal of time designing beautiful plans which you will not follow. This can become a form of procrastination. You may feel good about being so well organised but if you are not actually doing your university work you are wasting your time.

It is best to develop a time management scheme that you feel comfortable with and that is workable and flexible. Ideally you should end up with your own adaptation of these various plans and strategies. Select, practise, reflect and then select again those strategies that work best for you and suit your learning style.

Acknowledgement

Three tables in these materials are adaptations of diagrams in Orr, F. (1984) *How to Pass Exams*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney. Permission was granted from Allen & Unwin for their inclusion. They are a) Table 3.1 on page 9, b) Table 3.2 on page 10, and c) Table 3.6 on page 19.