

Planning and prioritising FAQs

1. How do I know how long a task will take before I start?

It's always useful to know how long a task will take when planning your time. This is a skill that comes from experience but you can still work out an accurate schedule to work to, even if you haven't completed a specific task before. Reflect on similar projects you've undertaken previously. How complex were they compared to the task you're attempting? Do you think you will need more time, or less?

Break your task down into stages and estimate the time required for each. Then look at your diary and other commitments. When can you realistically expect to have each stage completed? Work backwards from the deadline. You may be surprised at how long a task can take, or how many demands there are on your time.

2. What's the difference between urgent and important?

An **urgent** task is something that needs to be done immediately. It may be time-sensitive, meaning that once the deadline has passed there will be no further opportunity to complete the task. This might be an essay deadline or the date by which you have to pay your rent.

Not all urgent tasks are **important** however. A sale in a clothes shop might end the following day, but that doesn't necessarily mean you should stop researching your dissertation to go shopping, even if your dissertation deadline is several months away. Similarly, not all important tasks are urgent. It's quite easy to find yourself in a cycle of always working on the next thing that needs to be done, even if that task is not important. Meanwhile, there could be something much more relevant to your success that's being neglected.

Sometimes the temptation to procrastinate is strong when a deadline seems far away. If the task is important, make time for it sooner rather than later. Have a look at the guidance on 'Setting your priorities'.

3. How can I be more organised?

Time is difficult to keep track of and you will have many things to remember as a student. Fortunately, there are tools and techniques that will help you stay on top of your studies.

A week-to-view diary or planner is ideal for recording deadline dates and planning tasks. Take your diary everywhere and write down all of your activities in it. This will make it much easier to see what you have on and help you avoid becoming overcommitted. You'll be able to schedule time for working on assignments and so lessen the chances of a stressful 'last minute' rush.

Keep a 'To Do' list in your diary to help you prioritise tasks and record your progress as you work through them. Order the items on your list by priority and group them by what makes sense to tackle together. Refer to your diary to schedule a time when you will do these tasks and cross each item off when complete.

Finally, using 'time blocks' can be a good way of breaking tasks down into manageable chunks.