Juggling Life: How to manage your time as an adult learner

The beginning of a new college semester can be exciting. Yet, for the student with a job, kids, busy schedule or all the above, the new semester has the potential to be daunting. Non-traditional learners, those who didn’t follow the “traditional” route of college right out of high school, can have several other responsibilities to maintain while attending classes. At LC State CDA, our average age of student is 34 years and often, our students are working full-time jobs or being full-time parents; often both at the same time. To be successful, many of our students adopt time-management strategies to keep up on school work and be present in their work and family lives. While everyone *knows* that time-management is important as a college student, it can be harder to find out what works for you and where to even start amidst all the options. Here are some suggestions for strategies that can help you be more successful in managing your time at LC State.

Prioritized To-Do lists

Prioritized To-Do lists can help you decide on what to do next. Putting the most important items first can allow you to focus on what really matters next. To-Do lists can be done virtually, like on a phone or tablet, or with just a simple pen and notebook. You may opt to do a new one each week or each day. When writing your to-do list, make sure to make the tasks more detailed rather than vague. For example, instead of writing down “Work on mid-term paper” try listing “write two paragraphs for my first point on my English mid-term paper”. A more detailed to-do can help you stay on task and avoid “decision paralysis”, which can occur when you get too overwhelmed if there are too many options. By being unspecific, you are giving yourself too many options when you sit down to work on a paper or assignment.

Utilize a Planning Tool

Planning tools are a great way to organize your tasks, due dates, and schedules in one place to free your mind for productivity.

Planning tools include…

* Planners
* Calendars
* Phone apps
* Wall charts
* Index cards
* Notebooks
* Online printouts

Jot down your due dates, homework assignments, exams, work hours, and study sessions using any of these planning tools. Even schedule out time for relaxation. This can help you get time to wind down and avoid burn-out while still maintaining productivity to get tasks done on time.

While you might think a fancy, expensive planner is a needed planning tool, there are several free resources that you can use if a planner isn’t helpful for you. Check out these free printouts from Passion Planner! <https://passionplanner.com/collections/free-downloads>.

Take Time for Self-Care

Self-care is a crucial part of productivity. Self-care can keep burnout at bay. Burnout “is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress”, (Smith & Reid, 2024). Burnout can affect every part of your life, including sleep, relationships, and school work. By planning self-care into your schedule, you are offering your body and mind time to relax and wind-down. Self-care is similar to taking in a big deep breath of fresh air after being in smog for a while. Breathing smog and nothing else for too long can make us sick, so ensuring we have fresh air often can keep us happy and healthy. Self-care can allow you to maintain productivity while you are doing work, meaning your time is used better than if your productivity is impacted by burnout.

Focus on One Task at a Time

While some of us are self-proclaimed multitaskers and feel like we can do it well, that might not always be the case. Multitasking can cause us to take longer to do things. This can impact our productivity and how many things we can complete in a time-frame. According to the National Library of Medicine, multitasking requires our brain to switch between things often, causing a “switch cost”, which is “a reduction in performance accuracy or speed that results from shifting between tasks,” (Madore & Wagner, 2019).

One of the biggest influences that cause us to multitask is our cellphones and/or tablets. During a study session, turn off or set aside all devices that you aren’t using to study or finish assignments. Taking away your option to scroll social media or answer a text can keep your brain from switching so often.

Take Breaks and Take Them Often

While you may think that you don’t want to take too many breaks while you have time to do work, taking breaks can increase your productivity. According to the Pomodoro Technique, popularized in the 1990’s, breaks are important for effective time management. This technique includes a method of setting a timer and taking breaks in between each timer, taking longer breaks as time goes on. You can check out this technique here: <https://www.pomodorotechnique.com/>.

Overall, each student utilizes different methods and one method that might work for another student might not work for you. Give yourself grace as you navigate life as a college student and remember that you have a support system at LC State in Counseling Services, our Writing Center, Tutoring Center, and the LC State CDA faculty and staff.

Sources:

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