The College Works framework for mastering time management.

Learn the secret to making your schedule work for you, no matter how busy you are.

For many of us, time is our biggest enemy. When you're juggling school, work, hobbies, and your friends and family, it's easy to get stuck in a cycle of running from one thing to the next, without ever making real progress. **But it doesn't have to be that way.** Learning to manage your time effectively is the make-or-break factor in reaching your goals—and keeping your sanity.

In this resource, we share our system for making time work for you, not against you. We'll break down how to set priorities, build planning rituals, and create a schedule that puts you firmly in control of your life. Let's get into it.

Learning to prioritize.

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities." — Dr. Stephen R. Covey

Before we dive into the ins and outs of building the perfect schedule for yourself, it's important to understand our basic time management philosophy. Like many business leaders, our approach is inspired by Dr. Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In this book, Dr. Covey established what is now the gold standard for using one's time wisely and effectively: The Time Management Matrix.

This simple but powerful tool divides tasks into four quadrants:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	**Necessities:** Things that must be done now. *Fast-approaching deadlines, emergencies, unforeseen events*	**Effectiveness zone:** Where you plan for success. *Proactive planning, long-term goals, creative thinking, training/learning, relationship building*
Not Important	**Distractions:** Things that steal your focus. *Non-emergency interruptions, busywork*	**Time wasters:** Things that drain your energy. *Social media scrolling, avoidance activities, excessive leisure time*

Most people live in urgency mode—which means they spend the bulk of their time reacting, whether that be scrambling to meet a deadline or allowing every distraction to derail their focus. The goal of mastering time management is to move into the effectiveness zone, where planning, creativity, and growth take place.

Before we dive into how to use this philosophy to build your daily, weekly, monthly, and even yearly schedule, take a moment to try to categorize what's currently on your plate within these four quadrants. If you find you're spending the majority of your time on necessities, distractions, and time wasters, it's time for a wake-up call.

The disbalancing of your priorities can have huge, long-term effects on your overall quality of life. When you have no system in place for time management, stress, conflict, burnout, and dropped balls are inevitable. With a clear system—one that allows you to spend the majority of your time in the effectiveness zone—you can flip that script, enjoy more wins, and fewer regrets.

Time management essentials.

We're about to dive into how to use Dr. Covey's Time Management Matrix and a little bit of self-discipline to create a schedule that sets you up for success. But before we do, here's what you'll need.

1. **A planner you'll actually use.**
   Google Calendar, Notion, a paper planner—what you use to track your schedule doesn't matter, as long as it is something you'll check daily.
2. **A list of your non-negotiables.**
   Class schedules, due dates, work shifts, meetings, family obligations—collect everything you have to do.
3. **A list of your important personal commitments.**
   Birthdays, team events, church, date nights, etc. These are just as important.
4. **The right mindset.**
   Greatness doesn't come from doing what you feel like—it comes from doing what matters, consistently. Discipline is the bridge. If you want the freedom to play, earn it by showing up for your responsibilities first.

Your 5-step time management system.

Setting up your new schedule will take about an hour the first time you do it (it won't take as much time going forward, and we'll get into how to build a time management routine in the next section). So find a quiet spot, and get ready to plan.

Step 1: Schedule your immovables and non-negotiables

Start by adding the things that you can't change and must do to your calendar. For most twenty-somethings, this might include your class schedule for the rest of the semester, existing work shifts, standing meetings for clubs or extracurricular activities you're involved in, and church services. If you have any upcoming events—a family reunion, a planned vacation, a wedding, etc.—add these to your schedule at this time as well.

Step 2: Add deadlines to your calendar

Have an upcoming term paper? Do you need to submit a proposal for next year's club budget by a certain date? Need to pay your car registration? Mark when all of these things must be done by into your calendar. An important note: Adding deadlines to your calendar is separate from scheduling time to actually do the thing that needs to be done. Starting here allows you to work backward and build time to complete those tasks into your schedule.

Step 3: Budget your flex time.

Most people stop after completing the first two steps of this system—and that's where they fail! Break down your deadlines and important projects into bite-sized prep and working sessions, and add them to your calendar—labeling them by subject and task. Doing this means that you're never scrambling to complete something at the last minute, and puts you squarely in the "effectiveness zone" of the Time Management Matrix we discussed earlier.

The key to getting this right is to accurately assess how much time you need to complete each task. For example, if you have an upcoming Spanish final, it's important to understand how much time you need to devote to studying and preparing for the test. Once you have that estimate, you can then break it up into blocks of study time ahead of the test. Our biggest tip? Schedule more time then you think you'll actually need. As you practice time management and maintaining your schedule, you'll get better at accurately assessing how much time it actually takes to complete each task.

Step 4: Plan for fun

Time management isn't about all work and no play. Scheduling time to rest and have fun is just as important as finding time to work on a term paper. At this point in the exercise, you should have a pretty good idea of how much free time you have left. Use that time wisely! Make plans to spend time with your friends or family, and add it to the calendar. Block off time to work out, go to a football game, or practice your favorite hobby.

Step 5: Commit, observe, optimize

Now that you have a full calendar in front of you, it's time to commit to sticking to it. For the next two weeks, do your best to follow the schedule you've set for yourself. As you move through each day, pay attention to where you were able to stay on schedule and where you got derailed. Maybe you notice that you didn't budget nearly enough time to do your weekly chores or that you're much more effective at studying when you schedule those sessions in the morning instead of at night. Then, use that data to build an even better schedule going forward.

Creating a time-management habit.

Like any new habit that you're trying to form, following this time management program is going to feel challenging at first. But with enough practice, time management and organization will become part of your routine — something closer to brushing your teeth than a conscious task. To make this system stick, try creating a ritual for yourself.

Weekly check-In

Set aside 30 minutes to an hour at the end of each week to plan the week ahead. We like doing this on Sunday

evenings, but play around to find what works best for you. During this time you will:

- **Review the last week.** Did you forget anything? Did you discover that you actually need 30 minutes to get to work instead of 15?
- **Adjust your calendar.** Did you pick up a shift at work? Is one of your classes canceled? Take stock of your commitments and immovables to make sure they're accurate.
- **Add new tasks and events.** Using the 5-step time management system, block time off for routine study or to work on assignments due that week. And remember, always budget for extra time—assume things will take longer than you think!

Daily check-in

Before you go to bed each night, take 10 minutes to set yourself up for success tomorrow. During this time you should:

- **Review tomorrow's schedule.** Take a few minutes to refamiliarize yourself with the classes, appointments, and work shifts that are on your calendar for the next day.
- **Pick your top three priorities.** Think about the three most important things you'd like to accomplish. This might look like completing an assignment, going to the gym, and doing laundry. Or, they could be to meet with your mentor, have dinner with a friend, and call your mom.
- **Tweak your schedule.** Once you have a good idea of your commitments and priorities, make sure everything is on the calendar, adjusting the schedule you set back on Sunday where needed.

Quarterly or start-of-semester check-in

Setting aside time at the end of each week and each day to get organized will put you light years ahead of your peers. But to really be effective, it helps to do some longer-term planning. At the beginning of each semester (or quarter, depending on your school), set aside an hour or two to build your basic schedule and set some goals that you'd like to achieve. This is when you'll do things like:

- **Add recurring items and upcoming commitments to your schedule.** Block off time for your classes as well as anything big that's on the horizon like the rivalry football game, upcoming holidays, birthdays, etc.
- **Add deadlines.** Once you have your class syllabuses, take a look at any big projects or tests and add those deadlines to the calendar.
- **Set personal goals.** Want to hit the gym? Or commit to a creative hobby? Now's the time to get clear on those personal development goals, and schedule time to work towards them.

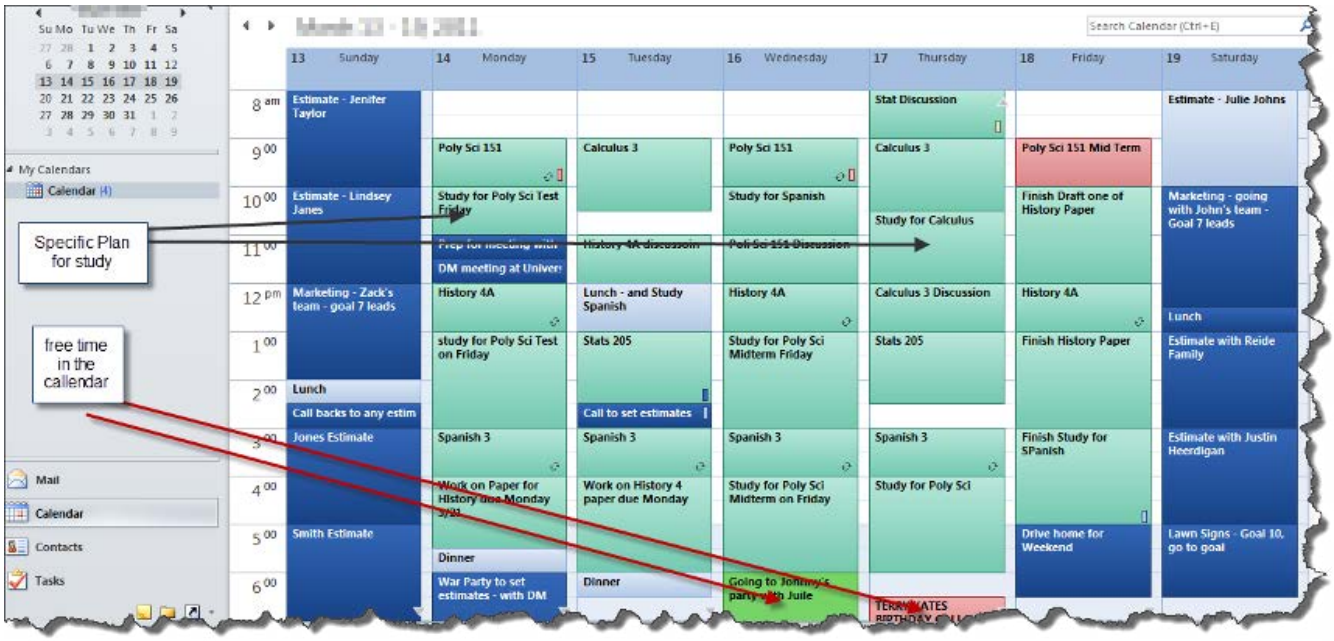
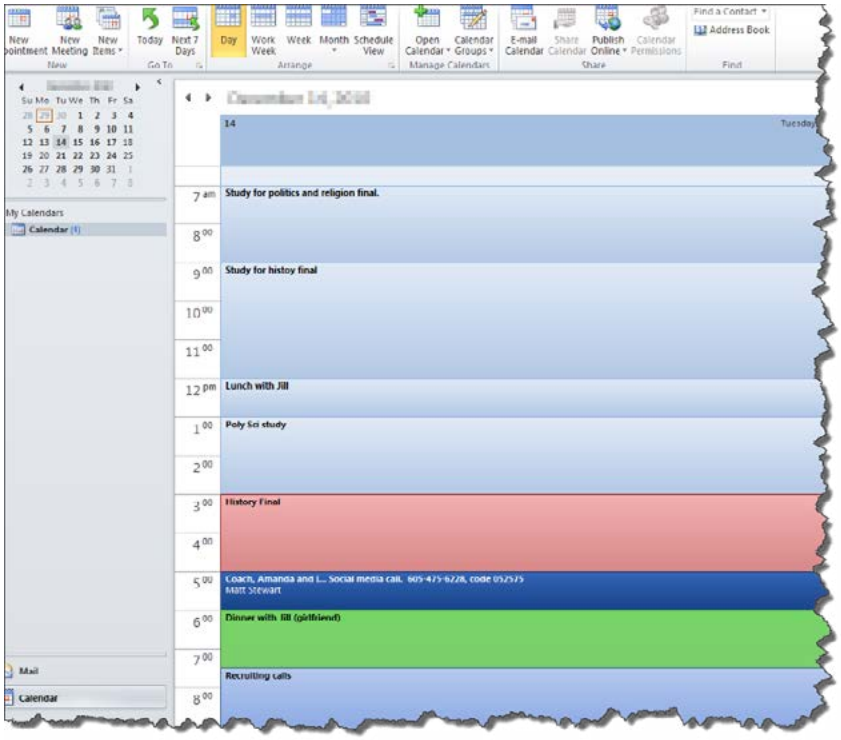
Time management tips & tricks.

Like anything you need to be successful, getting good at time management takes practice and diligence. But, there are a few tricks that you don't need to learn the hard way that can make getting your time management started much easier.

1. **Always give yourself a buffer.**
   This is your secret weapon against stress! Overestimating how much time it will take for you to complete each

task can help ensure you're not overscheduling yourself, and is a great way to prevent emergencies from completely derailing your day or week.

2. **Never block anything for less than 30 minutes.**
   Having a bunch of small tasks blocked on your calendar in 5-minute increments is a great way to stress yourself out. Instead, bundle similar tasks into 30 minute blocks where you can, and again, use our rule of always overestimating how long things truly take.
3. **Get specific.**
   It's not enough to simply block off two hours to "study" on a Monday. Instead, go in with a game plan for exactly what you're going to do based on upcoming tests or projects that you're working on. That way, you can break down your day and week into chunks of time that accurately reflect what's actually on your plate.
4. **Commit to fun.**
   Don't forget to schedule some downtime for yourself—and treat those blocks just as seriously as you would your class or work schedule! Making sure you're balancing work and play is key to long-term happiness, and success.
5. **Color code.**
   Come up with a system for color coding your calendar so that it is easy for you to understand what you have on your plate with a quick glance. This can also help you easily assess if you're tipping the scales of your work-life balance too far in either direction.
6. **Ditch the to-do list.**
   Every task that you need to accomplish lives on your calendar now. Getting them out of a generic list and onto your schedule is how you guarantee time to get them done.

Sample schedules.

Wondering how all of this looks in practice? Here, we've created a few sample schedules that turn the College Works time management system into actionable plans.