

10 Dealing with deadlines

A note to readers. It is suggested that you increase magnification to 125% or 150% to read the guide on screen. Click on the magnifying glass icon at bottom left of the screen and select your magnification.

Key points in Chapter 10

- Take control and make a study programme for each assignment.
- Break the study task into small segments that correspond to the study structure in this guide.
- Set realistic tasks for your programme of assignments for each day and when completed end your study.

DEADLINES FOR WORK ASSIGNMENTS haunt the advanced students' study years. Time can be spent worrying about the deadline and as the date approaches the anxious concern increases. There is, however, a way to deal with this situation: it is to break a task into stages and complete them at a steady pace. This will not mean the abandonment of the freedom for spontaneity in life.

Setting your programmes of study

You should aim to take control of the deadlines for written work by assigning a programme for each deadline. You may prefer to make this programme in your head, or scribbled on a scrap of paper, or yet more formally in a diary. The programme for any assignment starts from the day the study task is set and runs to the date it is to be handed to your teacher or tutor. Students will usually have two or three, maybe as many as five, assignments running in any week. First, for an assignment, write into the programme the completion date of the task at least 24 hours before the deadline. Thereby you build in a cushion for unforeseen circumstances. The trick is to take control, to do work in short segments so that you can see your progress and you are not overawed by a huge task, and to make progress early in the time allowed. Straight away, start the acquisition of books and

undertake preliminary reading. It is best to find information early before the last minute panic-driven struggle to find books and sources (see Chapter 2 'Hunting for information') and your early reading, that is your overview reading, will allow you time to absorb the key features of the topic without the pressure of last-minute scrambled study. If the work assignment is an essay answer, after you have finished your overview reading, prime your mind early by thinking about what could go into the answer. With the question in your mind it will work away on its own so that when you come to prepare the answer (see Chapter 7) you will have more ideas. These preliminaries finished, plan later stages of work and pace them over the available time.

Reasons for student underachievement

A programme for work for any study assignment will help to protect you from three reasons for underachievement:

1. Students who work for too long, because they are compulsive bookworms and mistake quantity of study for quality of study.
2. Students who are lazy and study for an insufficient minimum.
3. Students who study ineffectively, however long they study, because they pay little attention to skills and the staging of work.

A programme for a work assignment will help you to move from one level of reading (see Chapter 2) to the next and it will help you to build in the most important and neglected stage of work, working on information (see Chapter 3).

Self management - freeing yourself for the good life

With, say, four study assignments in progress during any particular week, there may be two or three tasks for you on any working day. They become your (only) two to three tasks for the day - other than obligatory classwork, sports or planned social activity. Your tasks should be limited and realistic. When the two or three tasks, which you set at the start of the day, are completed the remaining day (and night) is free. With set tasks, you can have a list in writing or a list in your head, you realistically predefine your day's work and, because they are predefined and limited, they are more manageable.

The span of time in which students work well varies. It is best to set yourself a limit and not be too ambitious to begin with. It is better to work quickly for a short time than to plod on slowly for hours. Even if the span of working time for you is short, with practice it will become longer. However long you work, do not forget to have a break before



your next task. Then, by the satisfaction of completed study tasks, you free yourself from the burden of deadlines and free yourself for participation in a full life. In contrast, the sad student follows undefined, open-ended, study objectives: these are death to substantial progress and a good life.