

Six Steps to Create a Personalized and Effective Study Plan

What is a study plan?

A study plan is an organized schedule that incorporates your academic, professional, social, and personal commitments. Study plans help you prioritize your tasks and budget your time to achieve them.

Having a study plan does NOT mean that you will be studying all the time! Personalized study plans are flexible to accommodate for your changing needs and new events. A study plan will help you efficiently make decisions and use your time to do things that matter to you.

Five reasons to make a study plan

1. Reduce stress
2. Achieve your academic goals
3. Organize your time to balance your needs and commitments
4. Increase your productivity
5. Make sure that your priority tasks are completed

In this handout, we'll go over the six steps you need to create a study plan. Follow the steps and you will be able to budget your time, reflect upon your study habits, and tackle your academic priorities using monthly and weekly calendars.

Step 1: Determine your priorities and academic goals

The first step to create a study plan is to set your priorities and your goals. Based on your courses this semester, answer each of these questions:

1. What grades do you want to earn in your courses?
2. What sessional GPA or cumulative GPA do you want to earn by the end of the semester/academic year?

You can use the [UTM CGPA calculator](#) to estimate your GPA based on your anticipated performance. You will need to log-in with your UTORid.

UTM CGPA Calculator: <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/registrar/cgpa-calculator>

3. What skills do you want to develop through your courses?
4. How will your course performance help you in your program and career pathways?

Commit to being honest and realistic as you create your study plan. Keep in mind that it is completely normal to change your goals as the semester progresses!

Step 2: Reflect upon how you study best

Now that you have determined your academic goals, take the time to reflect upon how you study best. Think about how you will achieve those academic goals in terms of your study preferences and how you will be studying.

Answer these questions:

1. Where do you study best (e.g., home, library, campus food court, etc.)?
2. How often do you need to take a study break and for how long (e.g., 15-minute break every hour)?
3. What time are you ready to start studying in the morning?
4. How late are you able to study effectively at night?

Note: When answering questions 3 and 4, keep in mind that the [National Sleep Foundation](#) recommends that young adults should sleep 7-9 hours/night. While everyone has a unique amount of sleep that is best for them, it is not recommended to have less than 6 hours of sleep per night.

National Sleep Foundation:

https://sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/STREPchanges_1.png

Step 3: Create a one-month calendar of your academic deadlines

As a student, you are responsible for your academic commitments and you need to be aware of your academic deadlines. This means that you need to know when your tests are, when your assignments are due, and what your university's important dates are and what they mean.

Create an overview of what your semester will look like:

1. Use a blank **one-month calendar** for each month of the term.
2. Find copies of all your course outlines.
3. Read each outline closely and highlight all your assessment due dates (e.g., tests, assignments, lab reports, presentations, etc.). Also pay attention to the weighted value of each assessment.
4. Find the important academic dates (e.g., last day to drop a course, final exam dates, end of classes, study breaks, etc.). UTM's Office of the Registrar lists out the [important academic dates](#) for each academic term:
<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/registrar/important-dates>
5. Mark every due date and other important academic dates on your monthly calendars.

Study Tip: Break your larger assignments into smaller manageable steps

Create your own due dates for larger assignments. Even if your Professor does not explicitly tell you, your assignments may require you to complete multiple smaller tasks before you can earn a good grade. For example, a research paper requires you to complete your research, make an outline, write a draft, and complete revisions. You need to create your own due dates for each of these components.

Make sure that you create reasonable and realistic due dates for yourself.

Try using the online Assignment Calculator Tool

The University of Toronto Scarborough's [Assignment Calculator Tool](#) can break down your large assignments into smaller tasks based on your start and end dates.

The Assignment Calculator: <https://ctl.utsc.utoronto.ca/assignmentcal/>

Step 4: Make a list of your priority tasks

What do you need to accomplish right now? Depending on your courses, there may be many tasks that you need to complete. Identify these tasks and determine how you will approach them.

1. Look at your calendar for the current month and **identify what is due in the next two weeks.**
2. List the tasks you need to complete for each of your courses in the next two weeks. Make sure you include:
 - Weekly requirements (e.g., readings, assignments)
 - Preparation requirements (e.g., study time, attending office hours)
3. Remember that due dates can represent steps to complete a larger assignment. Identify your larger assignments (e.g., term papers, lab reports), break them down into their parts, and create your own realistic due dates for each of them.

Study tip: Get help at the Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

If you are unsure of the tasks that need to be accomplished to complete an assignment or to study for a test, make an appointment with an Instructor at the [RGASC](#).

Student appointments at the RGASC: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>.

Step 5: Create weekly calendars to budget your daily commitments and study time

Now that you have identified all of your key dates, put in all of your academic, professional, social, and personal commitments into your two-week calendar. A two-week study plan will help you to complete tasks due this week, while knowing next week's tasks, and while keeping the entire semester in mind. Remember: You may

need time this week to prepare for assignments/tests that are due in the weeks to come. Prioritize how you budget your study time based on the key dates.

1. Use a blank **two-week calendar**
2. Block in all your activities that repeat on a weekly or daily basis. Your activities can be categorized as class, volunteer and employment, and social and personal activities. This time is unavailable as study time.
 - **Class activities:** lectures, tutorials, labs
 - **Volunteer and employment activities:** work, meetings
 - **Social and personal activities:** meals, commute, exercise, family events
3. Block in any activities you may have for the specific week. These activities are variable, meaning that they do not always repeat. This time is unavailable as study time.
 - **Class activities:** extra help office hours
 - **Volunteer and employment activities:** work, meetings
 - **Social and personal activities:** events with friends and/or family, appointments
4. Highlight the available time on your calendar.
 - How much of this time will you use for studying?
 - Where will you be studying?
 - Based on the location and the time, what type of work (e.g., weekly assignment, problem set, reading, etc.) should you work on?
 - When will you schedule breaks for yourself?

Remember: Taking small breaks from studying is important to reduce your stress. It is healthy to schedule in time to exercise, see your friends, or to take part in other fun activities. Balance is key!

Step 6: Revise your plan

A study plan is flexible. It can change. Do the best you can to meet your goals within the two-week plan and continue to revise as needed. Seek help and guidance for time management and study planning if you consistently fall behind and are not meeting due dates.

If you need to readjust the tasks you need to complete each day, then revise your study plan. Use these self-assessment questions to revise your two-week study plan:

- Were you realistic about the amount of time you budgeted for your tasks?
- Did you have enough time to complete your academic tasks?
- If you need more time for studying, are there any activities that can be modified?
- Did you have enough time to take breaks and eat?
- Did you take time to relax?
- Do you have any new events or priorities to add to your study plan?
- Are there any tasks that you can re-prioritize or re-schedule?

More resources for time management

Check out these resources to get more help and information on time management:

UTM TimeTracker:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/transition/all-students/utm-timetracker>

5 Ways to Wellbeing:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/health-promotion/mental-health/5-ways-wellbeing>

University of Toronto Scarborough time management and stress:

<http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/ccds/time-management-and-stress>

University of Toronto Academic Success Centre time management and procrastination:

<https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc/procrastination>

University of Guelph time management guide:

http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/guides/time_management/

California Polytechnic State University Academic Skills Center Time Management:

<http://sas.calpoly.edu/docs/asc/ssl/TimeMgmtStrategies.pdf>

Looking for more learning strategies? Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.