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unit 1

organisation and planning

When you organise, you put things into an order that makes sense to you. While some students can get by without explicitly organising their work, most will benefit from effective organisation and planning strategies. This unit presents three strategies for organising and planning academic work. The strategies are simple, easy to implement and personalise and don't take long to complete. The strategies can be used together as a 3 step process:

- step 1:** make an assessed work overview to identify and provide focus for all your academic work
- step 2:** produce an academic year overview that puts your coursework deadlines into a clear timeframe
- step 3:** use a weekly planner to plan and monitor your work

The unit ends with a simple strategy aimed at effective working in timed sessions. Ideally, you should think about organisation as early as possible, but you can implement these strategies at any time during the academic year, especially if you become overwhelmed with the demands of your study. Because these strategies are simple, they can easily be overlooked or dismissed but they will help you identify, focus, prioritise and monitor your work.

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1.1 making an assessed work overview

the aim

Establishing a clear focus at the start of the academic year is important. This strategy provides an easy to use document that displays all the assessed work (coursework and exams) that you will be required to complete for a particular course. It aims to replace the idea of 'reading around the subject' with a clear task-focused approach to academic work.

why this can help you

The work you do for any course should be focused on the assessed work, not simply on the course title or subject or on reading all the books on a reading list. However, when starting a course, many students are uncertain about the amount, type or value of the assessed work they will need to do. This uncertainty can cause unnecessary anxiety.

Making an assessed work overview displays and, importantly, limits the work to be done. This can help you achieve a sense of control. It also identifies the most important work (that which carries the most marks) so that you can allocate and prioritise your time more efficiently. It gives a clear and specific focus, which will be the basis for reading and for other work involved in completing coursework and preparing for exams. The assessed work overview is the first step to effectively organising and planning your work.

the strategy

From the various sources available (module handbooks, e-learning sites, websites, introductory lectures, tutors etc.) identify, collect and list all the assessed work for each module of your course.

The overview should include:

- the type of assessment (essay, presentation, poster, exam etc.)
- the length of the assessment (word limit, time for a presentation or exam etc.)
- the date of submission or date of exam
- the value of each assessment (as a % of the module)

For this document, you only need this essential detail. Put this information into a table on a single sheet of A4 paper. There is an example of an assessed work overview below and a template for you to adapt is available to download from www.macmillanihe.com/lia-sys.

Once you have made your overview, you can use it to monitor the progress and completion (with grades) of your assessed work.

Making an assessed work overview is the first step in creating focus for your reading (see subunit 2.2). If you want to work effectively, tell yourself that everything you do (read, make notes, write etc.) should help you with a task listed here. If it does not, then it is not essential work.

assessed work overview: term 1					
Name: Jane Smith			Course: War Studies		
module: Contemporary Security Issues					
	essay	words: 3,000	hand in: Oct 24	40%	
	briefing paper	words: 1,000	hand in: Nov 5	20%	
	essay	words: 3,000	date: Dec 12	40%	
module: Conduct of War					
	essay	words: 2,000	hand in: Oct 30	25%	
	exam	time: 2hrs	date: Jan 6	75%	
module: Islam: Later Developments					
	essay	words: 2,000	hand in: Oct 30	40%	
	exam	time: 3hrs	date:	60%	
module: Religious Truths and Philosophies					
	text analysis	words: 500	hand in: Oct 5	–	
	essay	words: 3,000	hand in: Feb 25	40%	
	exam	time: 3hrs	date:	60%	

It is best to make the overview at the start of the academic year or term, or, if possible, even before you start your course. In this way, you will know, at an early stage, what is expected of you.

The information you need (to make the overview) should be available, but you may have to access several sources in order to pull it together. Module handbooks usually contain detailed information for each module of a course, but the onus is on you to find any information that is missing. If some information is not available, creating the overview will help you identify any gaps that can be filled in later.

The assessment types (essay, report, presentation etc.) will identify the kind of tasks you will need to do. For example, if you are expected to write a lot of essays, you will need a good essay production strategy (see subunit 6.2) and, in this case, it would be useful to find and understand a good strategy before you start working on the essays.

If your assessment for a module is wholly by examination, any notes you take in lectures or from reading should be useful for revision and for use in the exams. On the other hand, if a module or course is assessed entirely by coursework, any notes you take should be focused on the specific requirements of the assessed work. There is no point producing endless notes if they are not going to be examined or they are not useful for your work.

The assessments for each module should total 100%. This information is useful because it will show you the most important tasks and allow you to prioritise your planning by allocating more time to them. For this reason, the overview is primarily for summative assignments, but you can include formative work. A summative assignment is an assignment that is marked and contributes to your overall grade. A formative assignment can also be assessed but the mark does not count towards your final grade. However, the feedback you receive for formative work can be valuable especially in practising a skill for subsequent assessed work.

The overview can cover the work for one term or, if you prefer, you can prepare an overview for the whole academic year. If you are feeling anxious, overwhelmed or uncertain about what is expected of you, making an assessed work overview is a useful thing to do at any stage of your course.

making a more detailed overview

Although the simple assessed work overview is sufficient for most courses, some students like to make a more detailed document. This might be especially useful for courses with more than 4 modules per term, where the assessment is primarily or totally by examination or where there are a lot of small tasks that need to be completed (like problem sheets or lab reports). A detailed overview will take longer to produce than a simple assessed work overview, so you should only make one if you can see the benefits of it. For example, it might be mandatory to attend lectures, so adding a list of lecture topics to an assessed work overview will allow you to monitor attendance.

If you want to make a detailed overview, A3 templates for 4, 5 and 6 modules are available at www.macmillanihe.com/lia-sys. These can be adapted to suit individual needs or preferences.

You can change the headings in the template and, by placing a mouse cursor and right clicking in any cell or cells, you can divide or merge cells to list or represent different tasks.

In a detailed overview (as well as your assessed work) you can include things like a list of all the lecture topics, the number of problem sheets or the available past exam papers. Here are two example columns taken from a detailed assessed work overview:

Law of Tort	
module topics	
Duty of Care	
Psychiatric Injury	
Pure Economic Loss	
Omissions	
Public Authorities	
Breach of Duties	
Causation	
Remoteness of Damage	
Product Liability	
Occupier's Liability	
Nuisance	
Trespass to Person	
coursework (10%)	
Essay (formative) 15 Oct	
Essay (formative) 24 Nov	
Essay (summative) 17 Jan	
exams (90%)	
date: 22 May (2pm)	
time: 3 hours	
structure: Part A (2 from 5) Part B (1 from 2)	
question types: problem questions x 2 discussion question	

MS1 Calculus			
coursework (10%)			
test 1			
test 2			
test 3			
test 4			
test 5			
exams (90%)			
date: 17 Jan (10am)			
time: 3 hours			
structure: A: Differential calculus B: Integral calculus C: Multivariable			
problem sheets			
problem sheet 1			
problem sheet 2			
problem sheet 3			
problem sheet 4			
problem sheet 5			
problem sheet 6			
problem sheet 7			
problem sheet 8			
problem sheet 9			
problem sheet 10			
lectures			
1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20
past papers			
2013	2014	2015	
2016	2017	2018	

1.2

making a semester or academic year planner

★ the aim

This strategy aims to set all your coursework deadlines (for each module studied on a course) into a clear, visual timeframe.

i why this can help you

The perception of time is subjective. Some students find it difficult to estimate how long they have for a task or how close a coursework deadline is. The academic year planner will help you prioritise and plan your work. After creating an assessed work overview, you can set out your coursework deadlines and display them in relation to time (dates) and to each other. This will show you how long you have to complete each task and it will allow you to select the order in which you will do the work.

⚙️ the strategy

Download and modify the A3 academic year planner template. Go to: www.macmillanihe.com/lia-sys.

Check your term dates and enter the (teaching) week number and week beginning dates in the left-hand columns.

Then shade out any holidays (e.g. Christmas) and reading weeks or half-term breaks.

List the modules of your course in the column headings. Then enter the individual coursework task deadlines next to the appropriate weeks.

Some modules will be completed in one term, others will continue into the second term.

This planner is for coursework. For any exams you have, you can use the revision planner (see subunit 9.3).

week	term 1	Contemporary Issues	Conduct of war	Islam: Foundations	Relig
1	30 Sep				
2	7 Oct				
3	14 Oct	Tue 15 Oct: proposal			
4	21 Oct				Wed 2
5	28 Oct			Wed 30 Oct: essay	
6	4 Oct				
7	11 Nov				
8	18 Nov		Tue 19 Nov: essay		
9	25 Nov				
10	2 Dec			Mon 2 Dec: briefing	
11	9 Dec	Fri 13 Dec: essay			
	16 Dec				
	23 Dec				
	30 Dec				
	term 2			Islam: Later Issues	Easter
12	6 Jan	Fri 10 Jan: essay			
13	13 Jan				
14	20 Jan		Tue 21 Jan: essay		
15	27 Jan				
16	3 Feb			Wed 5 Feb: essay	
17	10 Feb				
18	17 Feb				
19	24 Feb		Mon 24 Feb: report		
20	2 Mar				Wed 4

1.3 making and using a weekly planner

the aim

Knowing your weekly timetable is a good way to start planning your work. This strategy creates a visual display of regular activities over a period of a week in order to show you the time available for academic work. It aims to make explicit the link between available time and workload.

why this can help you

Some students plan in too much detail; others need to plan more. A weekly planner is a simple to use and flexible tool that can help you plan your work:

- it provides a clear, visual timetable of your regular appointments
- it gives a clear, visual idea of the time available for you to do your work
- it keeps a list of the major work that needs attention
- it allows you to plan work in terms of working sessions (see subunit 1.4)
- it helps you to stay organised and focused

the strategy

Use a template that shows the days of the week broken down into hourly slots. You can adapt the times on the template to suit your personal routine.

Start making the planner by entering your regular appointments such as lectures, tutorials and seminars. Then add any activities you do every week such as non-academic work or going to the gym. Use colour to indicate the same subjects or the same activities. There are two main ways you can use the planner:

1. You can make the planner on an A4 template and print it out to take with you. Although many students now use a variety of digital planners, an A4 paper copy can give a clearer display of activities and time. It is also faster to access and easier to personalise. In the 'things to do' box, note the assessed work you have to do for that week. During the week, add items to the list and cross off completed tasks. At the end of the week, open the weekly planner file on your computer and, if necessary, adapt it for the week ahead. Print out the planner and transfer any incomplete activities into the new planner's 'things to do' column. Discard the old planner.
2. You can make the planner on an A3 template and print it out to display on your wall. This can act simply as a visual timetable that shows your weekly routine or you can add information to the 'things to do box' in pencil or with sticky notes. Erase the information or replace the notes as required.

You can download an A4 or A3 weekly planner template from www.macmillanihe.com/lia-sys.

If you wake up earlier or want to divide the evening into hours, simply add new rows to the template before entering your activities.

Visualising time broken down into hourly slots can help you see how much work you can realistically do in any one day and week. Although the templates show cells divided into periods of one hour, each slot is made up of two 30 minute cells. This allows you to enter activities that start or end on the half hour. If you want to mark these 30 minute cells, click and drag the mouse cursor over the two parts of an hourly slot and right click. Then, select **Insert Horizontal Border** under the Borders symbol. If you want to divide any cell further (e.g. the 'evening' slot), select a cell with a mouse, right click and select **Split Cells...**

Once you have drawn up your timetable, you may even be encouraged to change your routine, especially if you see that you do not have enough available time for your academic work.

Here is an example of a weekly planner using the template:

date		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	things to do:
9					Work, Org and Society Lecture (B 50)	Work, Org and Society Seminar (B 50)			
10									
11	Accounting and Finance Lecture (G1.17)	Communications Lecture (B5)					W O		
12				Business Mgt Lecture (B5)			R K		
1			Communications Seminar (B5)	Business Mgt Seminar (B5)				social	
2	Accounting and Finance Seminar (G1.17)								
3									
4			Sport						
5	Gym								
6									
7				Gym					
evening									

You can plan the tasks for each week by deciding when you will do them and enter them into your planner. Alternatively, you can use a more flexible planning approach and decide how many (one-hour) working or study sessions you can do each day and select one task from the things to do for each session. Creating effective study sessions as a strategy is explained next.

If you are likely to procrastinate (put off doing your academic work for many different reasons), it might be better to timetable coursework alongside the regular weekly activities and keep the 'things to do' box for short or easy tasks.

1.4 creating effective study sessions

the aim

Starting work and maintaining focus and concentration can be hard. This strategy can help you plan, complete and monitor a realistic number of focused work sessions in a single day. It is aimed at addressing lack of focus, distraction, low motivation and procrastination.

why this can help you

Many individuals lose focus on a task after about 45–50 minutes and work after this time is less efficient and sometimes totally ineffective. Some people simply cannot concentrate for long periods or find it difficult to get going at all.

Planning to work in a realistic number of short sessions can:

- help establish and maintain focus on a single task
- improve concentration on an explicit task
- overcome procrastination by setting a realistic, achievable target
- establish a working routine
- measure progress
- create a sense of completion and achievement

the strategy

For this strategy, a work session is normally considered to be between 30 and 60 minutes long. However, if you are finding it difficult to motivate yourself or to concentrate, consider a working session to be shorter (e.g. between 10 and 20 minutes). If you start by doing 10 or 15 minute sessions, try to slowly build up the sessions to reach 30 minutes.

Decide how many sessions you can realistically do in one day (usually between 1 and 6). Then plan a realistic start time for the first session. This strategy is flexible and it doesn't state the times when you have to work. However, a scheduled start time for the first session of the day is important. It may be useful to also provisionally plan a time for the second and third session.

Before starting the first session, identify a specific task (e.g. reading a certain chapter, making revision notes on a lecture or writing a part of an essay). This is important as it will establish a clear focus for the session.

If you are finding it difficult to work (e.g., you may be lacking motivation or you may be procrastinating because something is difficult), make your target explicit. In this strategy, your target is not to complete a task, but to work, with focus, for a stated number of minutes. In other words, your aim is to complete the session. Sometimes, getting started is the hardest thing to do. Setting an achievable goal can help you overcome this barrier.

Start the first session. Work until you become aware of losing focus or concentration. If your concentration levels remain high, continue to work. When you lose focus, stop. Set a start time for the second session and take a break. The break can be any length. It is usually at least 30 minutes but can be longer. Taking breaks is an important part of this strategy because breaks give you time to process the information or ideas from the session.

At the start of the next session, quickly review what you did in the previous session. This will help re-establish focus. Continue to work in this way until you complete your target number of sessions for the day. The strategy is summarised visually on the next page.

monitoring your work sessions

It is important that you monitor your progress by marking the completed sessions. This is particularly useful if you are experiencing a lack of motivation, because even small achievements can help you feel better. You can use the weekly planner to plan and monitor the sessions.

Plan to do more sessions at the time of day you find it easier to concentrate. Your energy levels can fluctuate throughout the day, so you should take this into account when you plan and when you take breaks from working. Cross out the sessions as you complete them. If you have a good day, try to do a bonus session. On a bad day, you can carry one or more of the sessions over to the next day. If you think that setting a daily target is not practical or is too rigid, think about setting a weekly target instead.

This strategy can be useful to keep you working at a minimum number of hours a day or week during the term. It will help you set a good routine. It is also useful when you have to revise for exams at a time when you may not have scheduled lectures or seminars that help structure your day. During revision periods, you can monitor the sessions you complete on your revision planner. In the example below, the target was set at 4 to 6 sessions a day, with most of the sessions in the morning and the first session at 10am.

			morning	afternoon	evening
Mon	3	Jan	10am ● ● ●	●	● ●
Tue	4	Jan	10am ● ●	●	●
Wed	5	Jan	10am ● ● ●		●

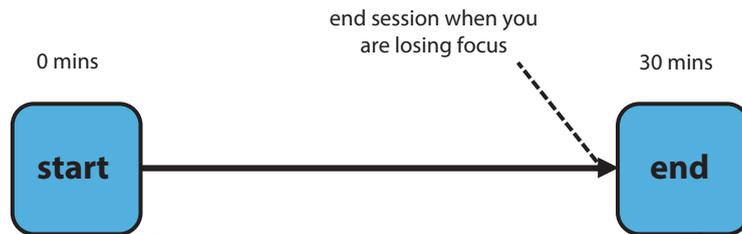
Planning can become a form of procrastination, so it is important to make plans that can be implemented. This means being simple, realistic and flexible. Working effectively is the basis of the strategies and ideas contained in this book, and preparation is part of that process. The simple strategies in this unit do not take long to complete. Before you start to make complex, detailed plans, think about whether they will help you work better.

creating effective study sessions (working in sessions):

- working session: 30–60 minutes
- decide on a realistic number of sessions per day
- plan a realistic start time for the first session

session 1

establish a clear focus on one task before starting the session



when you become aware of losing focus, take a break, a break can be any length, set a start time for the next session

session 2

make a quick review of previous session or establish a new focus before starting the session



take a break

session 3

review and re-establish focus



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