



# Time management:

## Making more time for the things that count

### Why is time management important?

The modern concept of time management is 'the act of planning the amount of time you spend on which activities'. Sounds simple, but poor time management can affect every part of your life, including your health and well-being. In today's time-poor society and with education professionals' ever-increasing workloads, it has never been more important to assess your time-management skills.

### Where do I start?

A good place to start is to consider keeping a **time diary**. You will be able to see how your time is spent over a given period, and this will allow you to self-audit the tasks and duties that you carry out before, during and after your working day. A good place to start is to use ATL's work-life tracker ([www.atl.org.uk/abouttime](http://www.atl.org.uk/abouttime)), which allows you to consider and record a brief snapshot of your current work-life balance, the hours you are working and what tasks are taking up most of your time. Filled out regularly, it plots out how this changes over time.

You may also want to consider a more detailed time diary. For example, ask yourself questions like: how many of your tasks would be considered outside/extra to your agreed duties? Which activities are the most time-consuming and are there any opportunities to do these differently to free up more time? Are you taking regular, good-quality breaks? Consider identifying five things you could do differently and trial these to see if they help (see top tips below).

**Planning** your day and week ahead can help enormously: you may wish to block out time to complete specific tasks or adjust your schedule to accommodate one-off activities. Keep reassessing and revisiting your plan throughout the day.

Creating a **to-do list** can help consolidate all your tasks. Once created, you can prioritise tasks from very important to unimportant – you may need to consider deadlines and the impact of tasks being completed or not. Schedule the more complex tasks for periods of high energy and try to put the tasks you least want to complete in this period. Breaking down tasks makes them feel more manageable and ticking completed tasks off your list can help you to feel you are moving forward and making progress.

Consider if any of your tasks could be completed by others and don't be afraid to say no or ask for help. If you are attending numerous meetings that are unproductive, consider challenging their value, content and frequency with those involved (see ATL's website for more about meetings at: [www.atl.org.uk/meetings](http://www.atl.org.uk/meetings)).

### More time management top tips

- **Seek clarity early.** If you are assigned a task, don't procrastinate or avoid it; make sure you clearly understand what is being asked of you and when the task should be completed. Consider if this is a new/unknown task their may take you longer to complete the first time.
- **Don't be a perfectionist.** Ask yourself 'have I done the best that I could with the time and resources I have available?' If the answer is yes, accept this and move on.

- **Decide upon, and stick to, one time-management system.** Having multiple diaries on paper or electronically can result in poor planning and duplicate scheduling of tasks.
- **Manage incoming information through email or paper.** Schedule this into your plan and don't be tempted to complete this task outside of its allocated slot.
- **Learn from others.** Whether they are colleagues or friends, they may be able to provide useful tips on how to complete a task or may have already completed it themselves. Consider their time-management practices and if these would benefit you.
- **Have a Plan B.** Sometimes technology, your schedule or a school event will interrupt your day and result in you not completing some, or all, of your important tasks for the day. Impact assess those tasks, take appropriate action and re-plan.
- **Make yourself unreachable.** This can be very difficult for education staff but, if possible, limit contact both physically and electronically. Place yourself in an environment that is most productive for you: this could be a quiet room with a do-not-disturb sign on the door. Tell others where you are and that you are un-contactable during this time.
- **Consider if you need additional training to help you complete tasks or manage your time.** Discuss these requirements with your line manager or ATL union learning rep. ATL also has a CPD section on its website, see: [www.atl.org.uk/learningzone](http://www.atl.org.uk/learningzone).
- **Use 'dead' time effectively; for example, on your journey to and from work.** This doesn't mean completing more work, but perhaps using the time to reflect on the day's activities, plan for tomorrow, carry out some relaxation techniques or jot down some ideas.
- **Look after yourself.** During busy times, never underestimate the influence that good-quality sleep, exercise, relaxation and diet can have on your well-being and mental health.

## Where to find help when your workload gets too much

- Speak to a colleague/friend in or outside your workplace. Just sharing your feelings can help.
- Speak to your line manager or headteacher/principal.
- Speak to your ATL workplace rep. They can provide information about employer work-life balance policies and help identify if colleagues are experiencing the same so that local collective action can be taken. If you don't have an ATL rep, consider electing one – for more information on this email [organise@atl.org.uk](mailto:organise@atl.org.uk). And for more on taking collective action around workload with your colleagues, see: [www.atl.org.uk/workloadcampaign](http://www.atl.org.uk/workloadcampaign).
- Call the ATL helpline on 020 7930 6441 or 020 7782 1612 for out-of-hours help from 5pm to 7.30pm during term time.

## Further reading/resources\*

See: [www.businessballs.com/timemanagement.htm](http://www.businessballs.com/timemanagement.htm) for more time-management skills, techniques and models; free templates; tools, tips (including prioritisation) and training.

<https://alison.com/courses/introduction-to-time-management> (free).

[www.learndirect.com/store/business-workplace/personal-effectiveness](http://www.learndirect.com/store/business-workplace/personal-effectiveness).

[www.lynda.com/time-management-training-tutorials/1369-0.html](http://www.lynda.com/time-management-training-tutorials/1369-0.html).

\*Not endorsed by ATL

For more advice on tackling your workload check out [www.atl.org.uk/abouttime](http://www.atl.org.uk/abouttime).

Your first point of contact is the ATL rep in your workplace. Your local ATL district or branch are also available to help, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on 020 7930 6441, email [info@atl.org.uk](mailto:info@atl.org.uk).