Time Management

You are in apprenticeship mode – you are learning technical concepts, but also learning how to define research problems, design and carry out research plans, handle problems, and to succinctly interpret, communicate/disseminate results. The goal is to become comfortable with the ups and downs of research and enthusiastic about finding new solutions. This experience is VERY different from your classroom-based courses.

> *If you do not manage your time, someone else will manage it for you. We are all uniquely different from one another…customize your time management plan and rate of progress for you.*

Your mentor may set major milestones, but you are responsible for setting deadlines and goals to meet those milestones.

What do you want to achieve in 1 year, 5 years, 10 years? Start with a long term goal and define objectives to reach that goal. ***ALWAYS THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE – HOW WILL MY ACTIONS TODAY AFFECT MY PERFORMANCE TOMORROW?*** Set up experiments in advance, think through all steps, and commit to paper. Plans do not crystallize until they are on paper. Do not lock plans in stone, allow plans to evolve with new inputs. Do not measure your personal success based on absurdly specific goals (must have degree by certain age, must have job within certain radius of Clemson, etc.)

Plan in order to avoid constantly playing catch up.

Are you managing your time wisely? ***TIME IS A NONRENEWABLE RESOURCE!*** If you spend it on one thing, you cannot spend it on anything else.

ACTIVITY (see below): Make a list of where your time is spent on the typical week day and the typical weekend day… friends, family, lab, class, sleep, travel, homework, other. Does the distribution surprise you? Now make a time diary, i.e., when you complete certain functions in a day. What is your mood at various times in the day? Are these the optimal times; are you maximizing your productivity? When are your quality work times? Rearrange your schedule accordingly.

Control your day/life rather than letting it control you!! Prioritize and make time for important activities.

Define daily time to plan (short and long term) and audit your performance. Plans must be flexible to accommodate for unexpected events – avoid over planning and perfection in plans as research (and life) is filled with imperfections and surprises. Embrace the surprises as challenges.
Put plans in writing – a calendar, a Gantt chart, etc. The Gantt chart is a planning and scheduling tool.
Gantt charts:

- Allow you to assess how long a project should take
- Lay out the order in which tasks need to be conducted

- Help manage the dependencies between tasks
- Determine the resources, people needed
- Monitor progress and allow you to audit project and take corrective action

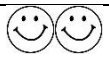
Gantt Charts plot time on horizontal axis and tasks/duration on the vertical axis
Procrastination indicates lack of time management. Perfectionism is a form of procrastination – perfection is not the same as excellence. Avoid procrastination by setting deadlines for your work and breaking down your work into small, manageable parts.
Set deadlines on projects that you dread – let someone (mentor) know about the deadlines so that they make you accountable. Put your plans in writing.
Keep a tidy work area (lab and office) – tidiness is a continual task, should be maintained on a daily basis. Each day, decide to retain or get rid of paper – do not have any "maybe" piles. Digital era – paperless work environment (many companies require this).
Use "waiting" time to complete other tasks, learn to plan ahead and multi-task.
Plan mind intensive activities for optimal time for you.
Formulate a plan for handling distractions (phone calls, visitors, talkative lab mates, roommates, etc.). Try to prevent distractions ahead of time (let lab mates or roommates know you will not be fielding phone calls, etc.).
Learn to say "no" where appropriate and know your limits.
Focus on the positive - it only burns up time dwelling on past negative incidents. Learn from the past and move on!!
DON'T COUNT TIME, MAKE TIME COUNT!!

Activity: Time Management

How do you create the most productive schedule for yourself? Knowing how your body and mind operate on a daily basis can help you to be a more efficient worker.

Time of Day	Avg. Time Range	Typical Activity	Mood
Morning			
Mid-Day			
Afternoon			
Night			

Example day:

Time of Day	Avg. Time Range	Typical Activity	Mood
Morning	6:30am	Wake up	
		Eat breakfast	
		Drink coffee	
		Drive to campus	
		Set up experiments	
Mid-Day	11:30am	Read articles	
		Eat lunch	
		Experimental work	
Afternoon	3:30pm	Work out	
		Experimental work	
		Read	
Night	7:30pm – 10:30pm	Dinner	
		Watch TV	
		Sleep