Sustainable productivity

Starting Graduate School Right

Reflection question: What’s the link between how you start your day and your tendency to procrastinate the rest of the day?

Can you think of a strategy that might help?

Strategies

PRINCIPLE 1: START THE DAY RIGHT

Start Checklist
Write a step-by-step routine from wake to completion of the first work session to reward. Example: 7:00 Wake and wash up; 7:15 Breakfast and read book (not email, social media, or news); 7:45 walk dog; 8:00 Start 25-minute timer and immediate next step.

Self-Appointment
A Self-Appointment is an activity you start punctually, just as you do your Other-Appointments (classes, meeting with advisor, etc.). Put a 25-minute Self-Appointment on your calendar to do your hardest work Monday through Friday at the start of your day.

Text Success
Ask a friend if they’d be willing to get a little text report on how you did following your Start Checklist and starting your Self-Appointment punctually. Text “I did it!” and they can text back “Great!” You can also text, “I did ABC but didn’t do XYZ”; they can reply “Try again!”

PRINCIPLE 2: MANAGE YOUR FOCUS

Resist Checklist
List all the things to mainly resist doing during work hours if you want to stay focused on your work. Favorite items include specific social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter); YouTube; Netflix series; responding to texts between certain hours; doing chores.

Distraction Elimination
Maximize privacy, use ear plugs or headphones with instrumental music, clear your desk of clutter, put your phone in your bathroom on silent, turn off computer
notifications, close unnecessary browser tabs (get a tab organizer app), write down mental distractions.

Pomodoro Technique
Find a timer you can use other than your phone. After clearing distractions and setting a goal, set the timer for 25 minutes and work uninterruptedly. At the end, reset the timer for a 5-minute Brain & Body Break. Stand up and do something easy, asking, “Was I productive?”

PRINCIPLE 3: MAINTAIN THE P/PC BALANCE
Stop Checklist
List your approximate stop time and what you’ll do next to address production and production capability: 8 p.m. stop work. Write next action. Review tomorrow’s calendar. Text Susana the time I stopped work. Make healthy dinner. Prep breakfast and lunch for tomorrow. Go for cardio walk. Stretch. Relax. 11 p.m. get ready for bed. 12 p.m. lights out.

Quarter Calendar
Exams can come in Weeks 3, 4, or 5. Download and print the Fall Quarter At-A-Glance to continuously plan ahead and thereby manage your stress. Write in all homework, test, and project deadlines from all syllabi. Write in expected major personal events. https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/tips-and-tools/time-management

Weekly Schedule
Fill out and print the Weekly Schedule or use it as a model. Put in recurrent events and approximate times for work, laundry, groceries, exercise, relaxation, and socializing. Put it on your wall alongside your quarter calendar to make it easier to think through your week. https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/tips-and-tools/time-management

And remember, we’d love to work together with you in tailoring strategies and making them a habit! Book a coaching appointment at https://studentlearning.stanford.edu/academic-skills/gradcoaching

References


Strategy planner

*Take some time to fill this out on your own, then share your plan with a partner*

What strategy (or strategies) are you most interested in experimenting with?

It can be easier to do things if we break them down. What are 2 to 3 steps to implementing your plan?

What’s the immediate next step?

When might you do it? (Feel free to look at your calendar)

Help us make the workshop better for new graduate students next year! Please fill out the anonymous workshop evaluation: