

PGR Tips: Time management for PGRs

As a PGR you will probably be offered a variety of project management and time management courses via your institution. It is very easy to feel that you are much too busy to attend a time-management course but this approach can be self-defeating. Success does not come to those who put in the most hours but to those who make the most of the hours that they do put in. By spending some time thinking about how you manage your time and attending a time management course can be a really good way to achieve this. In the meantime why not try out some of the following tips to help you make the most of your time:

- **Identify and minimise distractions** – avoid spending hours chatting face to face and on social networking sites, and checking your emails as they come in. If you struggle with this find somewhere else to work, buy some ear plugs or turn off your email altogether. Try and give yourself uninterrupted periods of time to focus on your research
- **Control your paperwork** - use the 'Velcro fingers strategy' once you have picked up a piece of paper do not put it down until you have used the 4 D's :
 - Do it: immediately
 - Delay it: find time in your diary and file it
 - Delegate it: can someone else do it?
 - Ditch it: throw it away
- **Devote time to planning** - spend time thinking about how you are going to divide up your time and what your priorities and goals are, it is well worth the investment in time. Remember to reward yourself when you achieve your goals. When you fail to achieve goals try to analyse why rather than punishing yourself, is there something you can change? Try the following planning activities to see if they work for you.
 - Spend 10 minutes at the start of each day jotting down what you want to achieve from that day. This will focus your activity and help you to make the transition from one task to another much easier.
 - Spend an hour every Friday summarising what you have achieved this week and considering where you need to start next week.
 - Spend half a day every month preparing a one page report for your supervisor outlining what you have achieved this month and how it fits into your overall plan for completion.
- **Record the hours you actually work** – for one week note the time you spend on each activity in your day: lunch, writing, experiments, recreational internet use, making coffee or chatting with colleagues and friends. Many people are surprised how little time they are actually spending on their research. By prioritising research related activities during the day you will limit the need to spend evenings and weekends on it.
- **Work regular hours** – working nine to five and taking a lunch hour will mean that you have a reasonable work/life balance and will make steady progress. 35-40 hours a week should be enough for you to complete your research if you are structured and disciplined about how you use that time. Binge working will generally be followed by periods of inaction or health problems and high levels of stress. Research is a marathon, not a sprint and you need to avoid burnout.

For more information have a look at the Just for Postgrads section of the UK GRAD website; www.grad.ac.uk/jfp, in particular the section on time management; www.grad.ac.uk/timemanagement