When trying to organise your time there are two issues: finding the time in the first place and then using it properly. If you don't do the second, there is little point in doing the first. Luckily, your life and work experiences often mean that you are usually already good at 'juggling' - you are used to having too many things to do in too little time.

What can you do to manage your time?

Make schedules for each week of the university semester and for the semester as a whole. The weekly plan is where you set short term goals: what needs to be done this week and so on. The semester planner is where you plan your work over the entire Semester.

Calculate how much actual time you have, or could find, for your studies. Although there are 24 hours in a day, not all of those hours can be used to study. After removing time for sleeping, eating, shopping and so on, you'll arrive at a number that represents the 'real time' that can be devoted to study.

Make the most of the time you do have. The idea that it's only effective to study if you have large chunks of time is a misconception. In fact, studying uninterrupted for hours on end can be counter-productive in terms of concentration.

Use small blocks of time for completing minor study tasks.

Break large tasks down into segments, which are easily achievable.

When you arrange a few hours to study, always be ready to make the most of it. Save this time for thinking and writing or focused reading.

Work out your optimum study method. When, and under what circumstances, do you work most efficiently and how will that fit in with your life? For example, is it best to work at night after the kids are in bed, or while they're doing their own homework? Clarifying your preferences will make you a more efficient and effective student. Be honest with yourself about your preferences. Don't plan to get up and study at 5 am if you're not a morning person, and don't plan to study after dinner if you always fall asleep by 8.30 pm.

Be realistic about how much time is required to complete particular tasks. Generally, academic work takes longer than you think, especially if you want to do well.

Avoid perfectionism—you don't have time to make every single assignment perfect. Also, spending all your time making one assignment perfect uses up the time that you need to complete all your other work.

Allow yourself adequate 'thinking time' when doing assignments. Students are often aware of the time it takes to find research material, to make notes, and to actually write the assignment; what they don't always consider is the time it takes to do the necessary thinking.

Start work on assignments well before they are due. Sometimes you may have two or more assignments due on the same day, so leaving things until the last moment is not recommended. Not only will this make university a real chore, but you will not do as well as you are able.

Set a regular time for ongoing tasks. If you have a Semester-long assignment that requires a short weekly activity or entry (such as a reflective journal), set a fixed time each week to devote to it. Completing each activity weekly will prevent a 'log jam' of work at the end of Semester when you will have other assignments due.

Don't rely on extensions. An extension isn't a 'get out of jail free' card. It will get you through a single emergency, but the extra day or two will eat into time that needs to be spent on your other assignments.
Creating time

Time is always a limited commodity for mature-age students, so make the most of it, and try creating some!

- If you can’t get to the uni library, try your local municipal library. They might have resources there that you can use and their catalogue is likely to be searchable online too.
- If you are doing a library search on campus why not get materials for two assignments at the same time?
- Make the most of time spent on public transport—can you read on the train or bus? Can you read while you are waiting? If so, do so (reading while you are driving is, however, discouraged). If your reading material is heavy or bulky, then photocopy some of the relevant sections and carry them will you in a pocket or bag.
- Think about the timing of ‘moveable’ assignments. While most assignments have a fixed submission date, others, like tutorial presentations and tute papers, are more flexible. When choosing a particular presentation slot, take into account the timing of other assignments. Generally speaking, it is good to do your presentations in the first half of the course if you can (weeks 2-7) as it clears the way for the major assignments that are normally submitted towards the end of the Semester.
- Make sure you attend lectures, or at least listen to them online. Although missing a lecture may seem like a way to save an hour, time saved in one week might lead to many hours of extra work later in the Semester: skipping lectures is a false economy.
- If you’re on campus for the day, are there any errands you could run during breaks between classes? UNSW has banks, medical clinics, pharmacists, a post office and other shops. Make the most of proximity to these services to use your time efficiently.
- Reprioritise your life outside study. Once you begin uni, there may be some tasks or commitments you will have less time for, or will need to do less frequently. Certain things will just have to move down on your priority list. However, remember that leisure and exercise are important.

Combining life and study

Studying around the demands of work, life and family will challenge your time management, but won’t make it impossible. Planning ahead is the key. Here are some strategies:

- Try to arrange your study timetable so it reduces disruption to your existing commitments. It’s a good idea to look out for any flexible options on offer, such as programs that may include evening classes, weekend courses or online subjects.
- If you intend to work while studying, you will also need to get the support of your manager and colleagues, particularly if you will be adjusting your work hours or taking periods of study leave.
- If studying has meant quitting an existing job or reducing working hours to part-time, plan a new weekly budget if there’s been a drop in household income.
- If you have children, study at a regular time so that they become familiar with your routine: your routine will become part of theirs. Explain to them the importance of what you are doing and tell them how the family will benefit.
- Plan ahead for your peak study periods. Plan activities to help keep the children occupied, because if they aren’t occupied then you will be.
- Consider getting a babysitter for those occasions when you just have to get things done. For example, when you are studying for exams or when you are trying to meet a deadline for a group project, you might ‘outsource’ your childcare.
- Establish a semester-long timetable so that, by taking on primary child care responsibilities, your spouse, partner, friends and family may help you create time for your academic work. The more notice you give them, the more they are able to help you.
- If you are juggling family demands with study, realise that things will take you longer and plan accordingly—having children to look after always increases the possibility of unexpected occurrences and, therefore, interruptions to your well-planned schedule.
- Leaving things until the last minute is never advisable, even more so when your time is never totally your own. If you can’t get it all done, get something done. It is better to have achieved something rather than nothing. Give yourself credit for what you have done, rather than what you should’ve done.
Keeping everyone happy

Undertaking tertiary study can sometimes be a source of tension between you and your loved ones. Partners and children may not always be entirely happy with the time you spend on study, especially if you have put family first in the past. Your friends might find it difficult when you are suddenly less available.

- Make sure your family knows why study is important to you. Remind them of the possible benefits—these may include your happiness and wellbeing, your future employment prospects or the possibility of increased household income.
- Ask your family or housemates to respect your at-home study times and avoid interrupting you. Hang a “do not disturb” or “study in progress” sign on your door to remind them. Show them your timetable. Keep a copy on the fridge so everyone knows what you are doing on any given day.
- Schedule study time at your local or university library so some of your study is separated from the home environment.
- Make your family and friends feel included. Let them know how much work is involved for you. Discuss their concerns openly and encourage communication.
- Let your loved ones know how best they can support you – for example, you might need quiet time alone, a meal prepared for you, or you may want to go out and relax.
- If you have performed the majority of household tasks, let your family or housemates know you won’t be able to do as much now you are studying. Renegotiate some household tasks and decide who can do which job.

It’s easy to get caught up with your studies and lose sight of family and friends, especially when deadlines are looming. But if you don’t spend much time with your loved ones, they might feel like they don’t matter to you:

- Don’t rely on spontaneity. Schedule regular time with your family. Plan something special for when exams are over. Arrange a proper ‘catch up’ with friends during semester breaks.
- Plan for leisure/ family time. Schedule ‘appointments’ into your weekly timetable to help you enjoy yourself without guilt.
- Consider setting your own deadlines for assignments a few days earlier than the actual deadlines. A week or so of breathing space allows for the interruption of unexpected events, such as family illness.

Your studies are important. Try not to feel guilty about the time you spend on them—your family will survive. Be assertive with family and friends until they get used to your student role.