# Managing your time for your dissertation: video tutorial

http://www.screencast.com/t/dDlLcYpHzv

## Transcript

**Introduction:** Welcome to this tutorial on managing time for your dissertation, from the University of Reading's Study Advice team. This tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace, and you can pause it at any time.

**Fitting it all in:** Managing your time for your dissertation should be easy. You just have to:

- Fit the things you have to do into the time you have to do them
- And leave a little wiggle room for the unexpected
- However things are rarely straightforward

So this tutorial aims to help you think ahead about what might work well and how to plan for the things that don't.

**Make a plan:** As with practically anything to do with study, the worst thing is to not have a plan. Going straight from A to Z with no idea about what comes between or how you are going to pace yourself to get it all done is never going to work well. Research is a journey, so for the best results, think about your destination and how you are going to get there. And don't put off starting – it may feel like you have all the time in the world, but you'll be surprised how quickly that submission date comes up, and just when you also need to work on your final assignments and revise for exams.

**Keep it simple:** Try to keep things simple. Detailed colour-coded timetables look lovely and are great fun to make, but tend to fail because they don't leave room for the unexpected: when you have to wait to borrow the book you need, or have a vital query the week your supervisor is at that conference in Oslo.

**Start with a framework:** Start with a simple grid – you could mark it up in weeks or months, depending on how much time you have. Count back from your final submission date to see where you want to put your target deadlines. For this overall schedule, the targets need to be quite general. This framework helps to make sure your work stays under control over the whole period of your project.

**Use to-do lists:** When you start working, you can zoom in on a section at a time, and plan it in more detail. This is where to-do lists come in. Your to-do lists are the tools you use to get the job done. List all the tasks you have to do to achieve your target, then set yourself short deadlines to get them done. Don't be too inflexible about deadlines for these individual tasks – if you don't have time to finish something when you'd hoped to, you might need to borrow a little time from somewhere else. Just try to keep to your bigger target deadlines.

**Use your time effectively:** You will need to make sure that you use your time as effectively as possible. So:
- think about what time of day you are best at focusing and use that time for your most complex tasks – like difficult reading or writing up critical sections
- use the other times for easier, more mechanical tasks – like sourcing bibliography, checking references and writing up methods or data
- have some extra time built in for unforeseen disasters and things that take longer than you think – catching Freshers Flu, spilling coffee over your laptop, checking your bibliography and proof-reading.

**Sticking to the plan:** All sounds straightforward – what's the catch? The catch is that you have to motivate yourself to stick to your plan. So set yourself up with some rewards for hitting your targets: a cookie when you get to the end of this page, or a night out when you finish the chapter. And watch out for the procrastination thieves, who steal your time away. Think ahead about the things that tend to distract you and what you might do to avoid them: put your phone on mute, stow your videogames away on a high shelf and fill a flask with coffee to stop all those little trips to the kitchen.

**What if I get stuck?:** If you get stuck, step back from what you're doing and do something different. You could:
- Review where you've got to
- Set your current task on one side for now and do a different one (remember to revise your to-do list)
- Do something small to get yourself going
- Try writing questions rather than answers. These will often help you to see what answers you need

**To sum up:**
- Start with a simple plan with your overarching targets for the whole dissertation
- Break down one section at a time into to-do lists and get them done
- Use your time efficiently by identifying your best and worst times of day to focus
- Have some extra time for emergencies and prepare for the procrastination thieves

If you do all of these things, your dissertation will be productively planned for project perfection!