

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub live induction event for the Open University Law School and the Open University Business School. This session is all about time management, a key issue. And I know that there are lots of students out there right now who are studying full-time, a lot of people out there who are carers, a lot of people who are out there who are on their own. So there's a lot of variables that could come into play with your very well-organized study plans.

Now, I have some people here who, hopefully, can answer your questions. I have Frank Farley from the student support team; Dasha Ivkina-Macdonald, who has studied 120 credits a year for the last two years with a baby, so she knows a thing or two; and Sam Thorne, who is currently doing a Master's in Creative Writing, so lots and lots of different issues here.

Now, we've got some widgets that we'd like you to fill out at home. So we'd like to know about whether or not you anticipate that time management is going to be an issue for you. So for those of you who've just joined us, you'll see these interactive widgets or tools. Just click on the one- click on the option that applies to you, yes or no, and then return it. And your results will submit.

We've also got a scale. So we'd like to know about the extent to which internal factors could impact on your time and also external factors. Because as we know, there are these two things going on in tandem, which is the whole balancing act of time management.

And the best place or time for me to study is- now this is a word cloud. There are three things, so we're limited by this three thingedness. So if you could only think of one or two things or you might want to say where you like to study or when, just chuck those on and put a full stop in the other box. And then, your results will submission into a wonderful colourful graph.

OK, so we wanted to focus on planning and prioritising. Now, there's loads of advice, which we've taken from the OU systems into how we recommend you do this. But what would you guys say about planning and prioritising? Dasha, I'm going to start with you, just because I think that with 120 credits a year and a baby, you must have had a very- a lot of experience planning. How did you go about doing it?

**DASHA IVKINA-
MACDONALD:** I think for me it was about opening my books. So at the time when I was studying with the received materials through the door, looking at the study guide, looking at where the key dates are, when my TMAs are due, seeing if there are any overlaps, and then, just making sure that I allow lots of time to study.

My study place was at work. So I'd go in for a few hours before work, and I'd study. And then, I'd go back to work, drop my child off at the nursery, go to work, go home, pick up my child, have dinner, and then go back to work and study again.

So I'd say just don't underestimate how much time you need. And to start with, be a little bit generous with the time. And then once you've got into a routine, that should help as well. So I think for me, review the dates, be generous with the time, and find out where you're going to be studying and make sure that it's all set up.

KAREN FOLEY: You must have been shattered. I mean, all of that going on, how did you separate the time? Because we all know that an hour in the morning- well, for me anyway, an hour in the morning is twice as valuable as an hour at 11 o'clock at night when I can do less good things. How did you focus on that side of things in terms of the quality of the time that you could dedicate?

**DASHA IVKINA-
MACDONALD:** I think for me it was all about the task in hand. So in the morning, it was good for planning. So I'd really look at the TMA, and I see that I have to write, and I basically had to isolate myself. So I'd switch my internet off, and I'd really start writing. And sometimes, it's not about writing something amazing straight away. It's just doing a bit of a brain dump and just going with the flow and then actually looking back and then fine-tuning your work.

And yes, you're absolutely right, Karen, that at nighttime, it might be that the energy levels are a bit lower. So maybe one should allow more time in the morning to do creative work or most of the writing. But I think as long as you schedule the study slots in, that will be a huge help to the students.

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely. And I think it's one of these things as well, where there's always something to do, even if it's writing a reference list or if it's highlighting your process and content of this TMA. There's always something you can do if you've got a little bit of time to keep the ball rolling.

But Sam, I wanted to ask you about this, because for creative writing in particular, you can't always schedule your time when you're feeling particularly good. And I know that there are

issues with writer's block and all sorts of things going on with that. And even students studying law and business with things that might be a little bit more concrete will have different values on their time. How do you find planning and prioritising, bearing in mind those complexities?

SAM THORNE: Well I try to focus on the tasks that are hardest. So put aside quality time for your TMA writing. So if you know your TMA needs to be handed in on a Thursday, for example, try and block out the weekend before so that you can spend a few hours during the weekend having some quality study time.

The less high-intensity study I do tend to try and fit in the evening. So it's after the kids have gone to bed, just a couple of hours, just keeping things ticking over.

KAREN FOLEY: Exactly it's keeping moving, isn't it? Frank, you must have a lot of students phoning in with difficulty, sometimes, prioritising. And I know from talking to some of your colleagues that one of the things that you guys on the student support team are so helpful with is just saying, let's just break this down, and let's focus on one problem at a time and try to think about what is the most important thing. What are things that you find students most commonly worry about with prioritising and planning?

FRANK FARLEY: I guess it's probably just initially finding the eight to 16 hours a week, and it's being realistic and realising you do need those eight to 16 hours to keep on top of the reading list. But sometimes, personal circumstance can come into play as well for students, and you can't really plan or forecast when personal circumstance can come in, so that can sometimes affect your planning. But I think as long as you initially plan to really dedicate eight to 16 hours a week from the start, then you can afford to be flexible, hopefully, if personal circumstance arise. But I think you need to be very realistic and do allocate eight to 16 hours per week.

KAREN FOLEY: Well it's a weird thing, this eight to 16 hour thing, because often, you think, that's fine. I can do that on a Sunday. I have a Sunday, which is 24 hours, so not a problem at all. I'll give a third of that to my- and we all know that it's not quite like that.

But you've got this really helpful grid. I'll show you guys at home, actually. And there are all these things that you can find on the Help Centre, but this is one of them.

And one of the activities that we encourage students to do is to think, when am I going to actually philtre my time? How am I going to actually plan throughout the week when I've got? And then also, how can I review it?

Because sometimes, you think, right, OK, so I've got all of that in here. But actually, then I realise that Mondays is never a good sort of time. So it's about learning from things that are going on. What advice do you give students about working with these sorts of grids and things, where we've got things like travelling time, shopping, exercise, health? Because those are all things that keep us ticking over, so we need to plan them in as well as study.

FRANK FARLEY: Yeah, I mean, it sounds quite elementary, accounting for things like shopping. But I think the challenge with OU studies, especially if you've got a full-time job or family commitments, it's finding those eight to 16 hours a week. So this really does help you sort of realistically look at your activities throughout week and even the day, and how much time you can fit in.

But sometimes it's even- if you've got an assignment, say, due in at the weekend and you're a bit behind on your reading list, it's where are you going to find that time to- I mean, if you carry your books around with you, perhaps, and find it, or 10 minutes here and there. And sometimes, you can use that as a Plan B.

But this is a really useful tool. There's a lot of useful tools on the Help Center. But this one, particularly, allows you to really look at your study on a practical level and your life on a practical level and try and balance the two.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Absolutely. I think it's one of those things, as well, that once you start thinking- in an earlier session, we talk about online shopping. And that has revolutionised my life, because I don't, now, have to drag children around dealing with blackmail and various complexities of whether or not we need eight different types of cereal. I can just order it online, and that frees up some time. So there are various techniques and things that you can use to claw back time.

But also, you mentioned picking up things on the go. And I wonder if you guys have any experience of- a lot of these materials are available on PDFs. We can use the formats in different ways.

I often will take a task out when I take my daughter swimming. And I'll say, right, I've got half an hour here. And I'm going to read this paper, or I'm going to do this, and this, and this. Do you ever break down things so that you can use that dead time for something? Sam, you are nodding.

SAM THORNE: Yeah, well I remember.

KAREN FOLEY: It sounds like you've got lots of experience.

SAM THORNE: Yeah, well I remember holiday in France a couple of years ago and just like long motorway drives. And my wife did the driving for a few hours. And I just sat in the passenger seat reading, because I had an EMA to hand in about a week or so later. So that was kind of dead time for me, and I just used it to do a bit of work.

So it's finding those funny little pockets of time where you can fit something in, yeah. But then that, I was saying earlier, that doesn't really work when you've got to write your TMA or your EMA. Then, you need the more quality time with a desk and a computer in front of you.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. We asked you at home what you thought in terms of the best time and place to study is. And let's see what you had to say about that.

So a lot of people say in the evening, I guess because people are working maybe. Or maybe they've got time. But the beach, I think, is a particularly nice place to study if you can take all your things there.

And what sorts of things you are doing is often listening to music, so lots of various different times and some places, in terms of dining room tables, desk in bedroom, coffee shop, et cetera. When under pressure- I mean, that's always a good time for me [LAUGHS] I tend to find to meet a deadline. But lots of spaces and things.

So let's think about how we conceptualise this time and space for study. A lot of people will literally have their books, and that is their OU space. Some people have a hoodie or a jumper, and they sort of carve out that space in their minds instead of on a nice desk with a board and with a nice station all around them.

How important is that for time management? Do you need to be in that sort of mindset where you can say, I just need this book and this highlighter and a pen right now. And is that the best way of doing a task with short amount of time? Or do you need to say, I need to actually be in my space at home with everything around me, or I can't do it? It's a personal thing, because I think there might be different opinions on this.

FRANK FARLEY: I think that you tapped on this, Sam. I'm thinking for certain tasks, you probably will need to plan and have your resources available. But I think there certainly are some tasks where you don't need those resources. And as long as you've got your PDFs, yeah, you can do a bit of study anywhere. But certainly, definitely do plan for those tasks and activities where you do

need your resources.

DASHA IVKINA-MACDONALD: I would say that you also need a very strong support network around you. Because actually, I'm one of those people who needs space. So for me, I went back to work, and that was quiet space for me, where I could study and really focus on a task in hand. And during that time, my husband would take my child out. And so I didn't need to worry about anything.

I think whatever we- however we like to study, we just need to do a bit of planning. So whether it's a coffee shop, we just need to make sure that there is Wi-Fi available. Or whether it's at home, I'd say just get everything ready- the post-it notes, highlighters, schedules, and have a good plan in place.

KAREN FOLEY: We asked our students whether they thought that time management will be an issue, and 73% think that it will be an issue for them, unsurprisingly. We also asked about the extent to which internal factors could impact. And again, those were sort of towards the higher end of the scale, which leads me to my next thing that I wanted to ask you, Sam, about.

Because you sort of mentioned this earlier before, and I want you to ask about study goals and how important it was to have an endpoint in mind in terms of what you are trying to achieve. Because sometimes, we can sit down with a book or a TMA and think, I'm going to do my absolute best. But perhaps when there is time and there are certain things, we need to be mindful of our expectations. What's your advice for students about thinking about what they're actually trying to do in terms of what they're trying to submit and what they're expecting to get for that in terms of grades, maybe?

SAM THORNE: I think I would echo what Dasha said earlier about that first draft. Just get it down. Don't worry too much about the quality of it.

Hopefully, you'll have been taking good notes all the way through in the lead up to the TMA. I think when you- five weeks before your TMA, have a look at the actual question and have that question in front of you as you're going through the books and making notes. And then, your notes will be tailored to be able to answer the TMA more easily.

But when it actually comes time to write the TMA, yeah, just don't worry about the quality. Just get that first draft down. Hopefully, do it a few days before you need to hand it in. And then you've got maybe four or five evenings after that where you can start editing and polishing it up, filling in your references, all that kind of stuff.

KAREN FOLEY: And this is in an ideal world, where we've got time planned in. But then when these external factors can happen- someone goes to a hospital, a child is sick- and all of a sudden, that nice time that we carved out in that week is gone. We might need to be mindful of our expectations. And sometimes, I'll say to my students, well, what did you expect to get? You've had three hours to do this. You've had a sick mother. You haven't been able to sleep.

Why did you think you could get a distinction? Because it's not a reflection on your ability. You've had all this stuff going on. And so people can be very hard on themselves sometimes.

And also, we know that the TMAs are weighted. So at level one, it doesn't really matter in terms of your overall degree. It's a nice way to get set up and often, they're different.

But Frank, tell me. Do students know about the way that they're being assessed? And is it important if things are getting a bit too much to take a step back and think, actually, how important is this TMA in terms of my overall degree and in terms of the weighting, maybe, for this module?

FRANK FARLEY: Absolutely. Sometimes, with some modules, the way the assessment strategy is designed, if you contact the student support team, we can hopefully try and find a strategy. And in a way, if you are very far behind with some modules- there may be six TMAs, for example. But you don't necessarily need to complete all six TMAs, depending on how you performed with your other TMAs.

So sometimes- it's not always possible. But certainly, if you fall behind, sometimes contacting the student support team, we can help devise a strategy to get you back on track, whether it be extra tutor support or just replanning and refocusing certain parts of the module. But yeah, certainly, we always like to try and find a strategy if can to support students when they're having difficulties.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So this leads us to our next point about being flexible and realistic, which is something that we encourage students to do. So tell us about the realistic side, I think, which is possibly more difficult than the flexible side. [LAUGHS] Who'd like to comment on that?

Sam, has it been important to be realistic in terms- I mean, when you're studying at the moment, do you submit something and think, yeah, that's a 70 per cent. Or do you think, I'll be lucky if I pass that? How realistic are you with the quality of work that you're able to put in?

Because obviously, there are times when you can do better or not-so-good work.

SAM THORNE: Well, I think my attitude with assignments is just to do your very best in the time that you have available. And if, for whatever reason, you've only got five hours or three hours to do that TMA, just do your best and get it in. I mean, I do try and plan ahead around those TMAs to make sure that I do have lots of time. But whereas with the rest of the study, I'm probably a bit naughty in that I'm trying to do the bare minimum of- get through the reading and activities as quickly as I can and really focus my quality time on the assignments.

KAREN FOLEY: I don't think that that's naughty. I think that that's very clever, and that's exactly what I would do and what I do do. But it is important, because I think so often, students get this lovely study calendar with all these activities and things. And really, I mean, from my perspective, I see the challenge of time management is identifying what really matters and where you can most effectively spend your time, bearing in mind you don't have an infinite amount of time, and you're probably not going to do 100 per cent of that module in the detail that you think you should. And actually, we don't expect that as the Open University.

We expect you to do your assignments. We expect you to read what you can. Your degree is yours. You get out of it what you put in. It's your stuff, isn't it? And you can always come back and look at things afterwards.

There's a lovely chat going on about mind maps, about routines, and you're all being incredibly helpful. And also talking about what you wear when you're studying as well, so things to get comfy in. And I know clothes can be a really important thing. And it's very difficult to study if you're not feeling comfortable, so I really get that. And also comparing coffee drinking. What's that all about?

HJ: We're just talking about some of our study tips. And Mohan said, I study in 20 to 30-minute bursts and have a small break while I have some tea. And it seems that a lot of people agree with this. So Mohan's already on 15 cups of tea day, and-

[LAUGHTER]

-Melanie and Anne Marie are neck and neck on their fourth cup of coffee of today. So I think we've got some heat going on with this. But it's great seeing all these study tips. With what we're wearing, Libby's decided we should have a pyjama party. And I think we can have a fight outside. There's some cushions upstairs, I think

MYCHELLE: I'd like to see you in your pyjamas.

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: Yes, we'll have to do that. But yeah, lots of great study tips here. I like all of these. And printing off grades and successes and putting them on the wall. I think that's really good too, because everyone gets in a bit of a rut with studying. So just having some motivation.

MYCHELLE: I see a lot of questions about how to get motivated. And so I thought that was a great idea about printing off the certificates and putting them on. And sharing with each other- be proud. Share with your friends and family and get them excited too. But there are a lot of good tips on here. And there's a lot of stationery love going on as well.

HJ: Yes.

MYCHELLE: Lots of discussion about pretty stationery and highlighters and having things around you to help you that you feel comfortable.

HJ: Yes, I think someone suggested that we need a support group. Because sometimes, the stationery love can get a bit out of hand. If you've seen my cupboard, perhaps, yes, maybe I'll join that support group.

KAREN FOLEY: Tell me who's been banned by her family for buying stationery.

MYCHELLE: Oh, I believe- was that Danielle?

HJ: Yes. I think she said she had like over 400 pens and 20 notebooks. And we like having pristine notebooks, so we can't use them. But we do still need them, of course.

MYCHELLE: And we had some comments on about reading Adobe- reading Adobe text. And we talked about some software that you can download so that you can have those texts read to you. So if you're in the car and you don't have someone, like your wife, driving, you can have- you're driving yourself, you can still listen. So there are some tips and tricks for the software apps for both- for all kinds of phones. I don't want to say any names. But for all kinds of phones, you can get apps that you can download to convert your text into reader so that you can listen.

HJ: We were saying about studying on the bus and all sorts of places. So I think- if I just find that moment, because I think it sums up- so Anne Marie says she's starting a new job, which- working with the NHS from 9 till 5. So fitting everything around and having all these extra apps

and support and all these extra things that the OU provides really helps and fit and study around.

I liked downloading the podcast that I had with my modules. And it means I can just listen to them anywhere when I get a spare minute as well.

MYCHELLE: If you go to the main student home site under Links, there's a software download. And you can get the text-free text-to-speech software there.

KAREN FOLEY: I think that might revolutionise my life. I've never heard of that before. But I'm really excited by that. And the stationery and things, it's really, really important to feel ahead.

I wonder if we can just sort of finish by talking about motivation. Because we've pretty much covered a lot of things. But in terms of getting motivated, there's a deadline, an imminent doom, if you don't complete your assignment by that date. But what other things hold you throughout your studying that keep you motivated when maybe you think, I can't do this; it's too hard?

DASHA IVKINA-MACDONALD: I think for me it was attending tutorials and talking to my peers. That was an absolute must, and you get so many amazing tips from your tutors as well. And also, when I had difficulties or personal circumstances changed for me, to have a chat with a tutor, because you get to know your tutor. And you feel that you can speak to them openly, so that's very important. So I'd say, don't wait, attend tutorials, and speak to your tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: And Sam, what about you?

SAM THORNE: I think that's good advice. And also, use the other students in your group. A trouble shared is a trouble halved and all that.

And I quite often get involved in a forum chat or whatever before a TMA, where everyone is sharing their issues with trying to meet the deadline. There are Facebook groups that you can join as well. So I think definitely use your tutor as your student support team and the other students who are going through that learning journey with you.

KAREN FOLEY: And Frank, finally, we sort of mentioned falling behind and the support that the SST can give in terms of helping prioritise and make plans and things. But sometimes this does happen. And whilst everyone's really super excited and conscientious right now, it can happen that people can fall behind. What should they do if they do fall behind in their studies?

FRANK FARLEY: I mean, always contact your tutor first to see if there's anything that can be done, any flexibility with it, perhaps an extension. If not, always contact the student support team as well. There's lots of strategies that we, again, can try and support our students with, whether it be the assessment strategy of the module or just generally trying to claw back some time.

But we would always recommend, if you do fall really behind, contact your tutor. Contact us. We can maybe see if we can get an extension, and then you can regroup and replan and get to where you need to be again. But these things do happen.

KAREN FOLEY: I just want to show everybody one of your priority matrix, which I love, which actually helped me the other day when I was really, really busy. And I ended up doing things that I thought could be crossed off my to-do list. But actually, I realised that they were not important things.

So we've got this priority matrix, which is about what you need to do first, do next, do later, or not to do. And sometimes, when there is so much stuff going on, it can be really helpful to maybe start sectioning some of the tasks in these lists. Because again, there are certain things that you could do later, such as maybe additional reading that's not related to the assignment.

FRANK FARLEY: Yeah, I guess it all comes back to your original planning. There's some things you may not need to do. There's some things that you may need to do. There's some things you need to put more time into.

But I always find that your piece of work at the end is only as strong as the amount of time you're prepared to put in or put into your resources and your reading. But when you fall behind, there is often always a way to try and catch up. And it's just contacting your tutor and your student support team. And hopefully, we can find a strategy for you.

KAREN FOLEY: I don't know how it's possible, but we always manage to find time to do the things that don't really need doing, [LAUGHS] I think, which is why procrastination is, possibly, such a common OU problem.

FRANK FARLEY: Or turn to the internet that you sometimes, if you're at your computer, just by default.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, I just must do this right now.

DASHA IVKINA-MACDONALD: Disconnect it. That's what I used to do. I really would disconnect my internet when I needed to write.

FRANK FARLEY: Turn your phone off.

DASHA IVKINA- Yeah, turn it off.

MACDONALD:

KAREN FOLEY: And that's a very good idea because, you can't, then, be distracted when your email and things are off. So one of the ways, I think, that's really evident is this obsession with stationary right now. Because [INAUDIBLE] been banned from buying any stationery. And Anne's family are getting quite annoyed with her for buying more. But Danielle has ordered some new highlighters in the post waiting for her. And Zoe says that they should set up a stationary support group.

[LAUGHTER]

Which I think maybe would be in the lower echelons of that matrix. But nonetheless, it's an important thing. And stationery can really, really help.

In fact, I have a colleague who's coming along tomorrow. We're doing a session at our Student Hub Live boot camp on note-taking. And she's got these amazing post-it notes. So come along if you want to talk about reading, writing, and note-taking with us tomorrow.

So Sam, Dasha, and Frank, thank you so much for joining us in this session. You've given us really useful advice. But most importantly, you guys on the chat have been sharing so many useful ideas. Where we can, we'll put up those links that we've been talking about on the Resources page of the web site. So do check that out later.

And if you've got any other things to share as well, do let us know. You can either put those in the chat. You can email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk. Or you can put something up on Twitter, and our hashtag is [studenthublive17](#).

So do let us know what things, apps tools, techniques, and stationery help you stay on track with your studies, and we can get a nice list together that you can all share. And that'll go up on the website very soon.

Right. Our next video is Jamie, actually, doing our virtual reality app for the Law School. And then we're going to come back for our next session in a few minutes, where we're going to be finding out what a sight for sore eyes has to do with plagiarism. We'll see you in a few minutes.

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