

KAREN FOLEY: OK. So, our next session is going to look at time management. And I'm joined by Stefanie Sinclair. Stefanie, thank you for coming to talk to us about this today.

Now, you're the chair of AA100, aren't you, which is a level-1 arts module. And we've run some boot camps before where we looked at time management, which was one thing that students both had abundant ideas about and were very, very organised in how they managed their time. But it's also an area that people struggle with.

And in particular, as I was saying earlier, over the Christmas break there can seem like there's an expanse of time where you could potentially catch up on things. But also time can move very quickly when you've got guests dropping in and out. So it's a time where time is quite fluid and maybe isn't quite as easy to manage as it might be at other times of year, when the weeks are more categorical.

So, you'll see some widgets coming up on your screens at home. We'd like to know how confident you are in planning your time. How likely is it, then, that you will stick to that plan? What are some of the barriers to managing your time?

Now, that's a Wordle. And, as I said earlier for those of you who have been watching, there are three options, there. If you can't think of three, if you can just think of one or two, just put a full stop in the other boxes, and then you can submit those.

And which skill could help you most with effective time management? And there are a range, there, such as setting expectations, breaking down and prioritising tasks, setting boundaries with people around you, finding extra hours in the day, and avoiding distractions-- procrastination obviously being a key theme at Student Hub Live.

So, Stefanie, thank you for coming and talking to us about this today. It's a key issue. Why would you say that it's so relevant, right now, for students?

STEFANIE SINCLAIR: For the very reasons you just mentioned before, that Christmas is a very busy time. The festive season is a very busy time. And for AA100, we've got an assignment straight afterwards. So I think people are struggling to manage different commitments.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes. Now, students will have noticed this. And it's not going to be uncommon. We've also got there some widgets, as well, asking which level you're studying right now and which subject,

also.

Because a lot of students will notice that the OU's calendar, for a variety of reasons, will have these dates. And a lot of them will have TMAs due in the new year, won't they? Irrespective of what level.

STEFANIE

Yes.

SINCLAIR:

KAREN FOLEY: And this is something that's done not just to annoy everybody over the Christmas break but is just to fit in with the curriculum. It's one of those difficult things, and it just must be done. But TMA-- it's often TMA 3, at this point, for some of the 60-point modules.

So, TMA 3 can get a bit tricky. And I'm going to talk to Matt Staples about how things get difficult. But Stefanie and I are just going to focus on that time management.

So, people are going to be now starting to think about TMA 3 and working around that. We wanted to break this down into sort of five areas. And you've kindly given us some resources, which are on the website, which are all about weekly planners and fitting things in. And we're going to be working on one of those on the social-media board, as well.

So there's two weeks, really, that we've got for this period. And fitting things in and identifying the tasks and allocating the time is one of the key things that we wanted to look at. So, what advice would you give-- because we want to hear what the students say about fitting in time. What advice would you give? And what things can we think about about how people could cope with trying to identify what they need to do and then think about how they can then fit that in?

STEFANIE

I think it's quite important to plan ahead-- --but also to acknowledge that everyone's different, that you have different tricks, and different things work for you.

SINCLAIR:

You also have different commitments. And-- --I also think it's important to take time off. If you're planning to actually take a break, Christmas is there-- --to take a break, as well. And to have some time for yourself-- do things that you enjoy.

So I think it's-- yeah, planning, breaking down-- I think, what's really, really important is to cut-- big tasks, to break them down into smaller tasks. So they'll seem more manageable. And I think it's also a nice time to think, and that can really help with staying motivated, to actually

think about why-- uh-- yeah, to think about-- to do things that you enjoy. And that can involve studying, as well.

KAREN FOLEY: HJ, I do appreciate you've got a lot of presents to wrap, but, um, this is not the time or place to do that. Eating the mulled wine and mince pies, however, is fine.

HJ: OK.

KAREN FOLEY: Sorry, Stephanie.

STEFANIE [LAUGH]

SINCLAIR:

KAREN FOLEY: Always trying to multitask, that boy! But I'm sure it's for me, so it's fine. Stefanie, people are saying that motivation is one of the key areas they struggle with, around this time. And you've mentioned some really, really interesting points about fitting it in, taking time off. What would you say to students--

I mean, they have to do a lot of these TMAs. It's just something that has to be done. And they may not want to do it. How important is it to feel motivated and to feel like, right, I'm now in the zone, and I'm going to do TMA 03, and that's that?

How important is motivation, being genuinely happy with feeling motivated about things? Or, do you need to be motivated to do a task and break it down? Do you see what I'm saying, about that different sort of way in which we see motivation? Often, we think that motivation means we need to want to do it, as opposed to, we actually need a plan of how to do it.

STEFANIE Yeah, I think-- and sometimes it's really quite nice to remember why you're in it or why you're
SINCLAIR: actually studying this. And I'm sure people have-- lots of people who have signed up for it because they feel really passionate about studying, passionate about the arts. And, yeah.

And when you prepare-- perhaps writing assignment isn't the time when you feel most passionate. I don't know. But that can be a bit scary, as well. So maybe set time aside for writing the assignment. But if you can also do smaller, little tasks, like reading, preparing for the assignments, and thinking around the assignment task.

Perhaps even, if you find someone who's willing to do that, discuss some things with them that you found out when you were reading, then. And, yeah-- might be some interesting pub talk

[LAUGH] around-- [LAUGH]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

KAREN FOLEY: Often, these assignments, irrespective of what you're doing, can be very interesting. And often they're asking you to maybe compare and contrast something or think about different views. So it can be a different-- a good idea to explain things to people or talk about things.

I wanted to sort of touch on this point with you about, you know, you're talking here about breaking things down, thinking about doing the reading, the writing, and not maybe seeing it as a whole thing. But what I did want to ask is, you're coming from an arts background, very creative, and also, obviously, a religious-studies background. How important is it to feel motivated in tune with everything before you actually do things? Do you think you need that drive, there? Or can you view motivation as a part of a process?

STEFANIE
SINCLAIR: I see it as part of a process, in some ways. For me-- I don't know-- everyone works in different ways. But for me it helps to have sort of a mix of that, to also be quite disciplined, to stick to a particular plan, to actually really-- to set yourself goals and stick to a plan.

And, quite often, what I do when I do things, and I break them down to little tasks, I tick them off to make myself feel better! [LAUGH] To see I've done this. And really feel-- I think there might be some subjects--

Because AA100 is an interdisciplinary module or multidisciplinary module, where you study lots of different subjects, there might be some that you feel more passionate about than others. But I think I get the sense that a lot of students really enjoy the different subjects. And it's quite important to kind of remind yourself why you're doing this. And I personally--

I mean, maybe-- I don't know how representative I am, but I feel very energetic and motivated by it and very passionate about what I do. And that really helps me, as well. So I don't see it just as a chore. I see it actually as something I really enjoy doing.

KAREN FOLEY: So, keeping hold of why you're studying, what you're doing, and viewing completing an assignment as maybe a means to an end.

STEFANIE
SINCLAIR: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Because some people, especially at levels 2 and 3, where they're doing more specific things, can be really, really helpful for people. But for other people, you know, it might be the case that they're doing something that-- like at level 1, where you are having this interdisciplinary mix of things-- they can maybe be doing something that they don't want to be doing as much.

Now, you've given us these planners, which are on the Resources pages. And Sophie and HJ have done a wonderful job starting to plan some of this up. Because this can be a nice way of breaking things down, as well, and thinking about how things could happen, in terms of the days of the week-- how much time there is.

Because, of course, with time management you're planning something that is finite. People have been saying, you know, that finding extra hours in the day can be an issue. But motivation and work and family seem to be some of the key things that are coming up, in terms of barriers to studying time.

Although I must say that, in terms of some of the feedback we've had, there's quite a split in terms of how confident people feel, in terms of planning their time. Some are very confident. So, if that's you, please share your advice and tips about how you do that.

STEFANIE Yes, please do, yes!

SINCLAIR:

KAREN FOLEY: And a few of you are not very confident at all about that. And I wonder whether that's maybe related to the likelihood of sticking to plans. Because I can do these plans!

STEFANIE Yeah, I know.

SINCLAIR:

KAREN FOLEY: Very easy! I love doing the plans. But sticking with them [LAUGH] is another matter, isn't it?

STEFANIE But I think also, especially if you're very, very busy-- I mean, for me, the older I got-- and I've got three kids, myself, as well-- is kind of, the more I've got to do, the more I actually stuck to the plan. It's really strange. Because I actually--

Because you have to. There isn't the luxury of kind of moving things around, sometimes. So it's really important to-- as I said, everyone's different-- but I think to sometimes just say, this is my time, and actually set this aside, and I need this.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, absolutely. I mean, "procrastination" is a word that's coming up a lot in the chat. I assume, HJ, you're leading that whole discussion and possibly telling people how not to procrastinate.

HJ: [LAUGH] Yeah. I'm sort of probably the worst person in the world for procrastination. And I would appreciate--

KAREN FOLEY: You're not! You're not. You're not. Because I talked to you about these plans, and you always break-- you have a wonderful way, actually, of breaking things down into tasks.

Because I'll look at something and go, I need to do this. Whereas you'll look at it, and you'll have broken it all down into these times. How do you do one of these time-planner things, then?

HJ: Um-- I think-- well, it depe-- I'm good at the planning stage. I'm very good at that. So, I do like to break things down and plan my time, and plan extra time while I'm doing things. Because I think-- uh--

Sylvia says, in the morning she likes to go for walks to actually think about what she's going to do. And I think that's really good. And I think planning in thinking time is a really good tip. I like that.

But sometimes, when it comes to actually doing it, that's where I struggle-- the implementation. And I have just asked, in the chat, if anyone would be able to help me with some advice on that. Because I do really struggle. [LAUGH]

SOPHIE: Well, Dawn had a good point, actually. Because going up to a TMA, you can really break it down, and you can go, OK, I've got my deadline, and you get it in. And then she struggles after that, waiting for a TMA to come back. And I suppose that's also a point of sort of reflection.

But whilst you're waiting for your feedback, I think that's when it's most difficult to focus anything else, because you're so eagerly awaiting your mark. So. Which I didn't really think of, until she pointed it out. So that's a really good point, Dawn, yeah.

STEFANIE
SINCLAIR: I think also sometimes, even if it feels like procrastination-- I don't want to advocate it-- but I think it is actually part of the process, as well. Because, quite often, you're thinking about things. You are mulling it over. So it's not coming up, because it's somewhere.

Quite often, when I'm really stuck, one of the best things to do is to go for a walk or have a bath or do something that has nothing to do with study or work. And then, all of a sudden, I have got-- I can see it. I was really stuck, before. And then, all of a sudden, I can see what I need to do, or I have an idea of how I can get round an issue or problem.

So that's why I always carry-- and I was going to take it with me! I've forgotten it, now. I always have a notebook with me, in my handbag or in my backpack. A little notebook. So whenever-- sometimes, ideas come at the strangest moments, when I think about something or I'm digesting things I've read. And I write them down.

And I think it's very handy, just as a way of processing thoughts. And that works for me. So, yeah. I think taking time off is really important, to give your brain some breathing space.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, it is, isn't it? And, I think, once you start looking at your week-- I mean, I'm very-- I like thinking very visually, in terms of carving time off. And I think if you can appreciate, I am going to relax now, or I'm going to spend time with my family, or I'm going to do x, y, or z now, you can see then where you're going to put study and when you're going to be working and how you balance your time out, so that you can allow yourself that space.

Because sometimes that can be quite hard for people, to think, I'm stuck, I'm going for a walk, or whatever. But what then? How can I then come back? And how can I then carve out-- or reallocate, even, if that's part of your work time that you feel stuck during and you think, I need time out? How can you then reallocate your time?

So I wonder what sort of advice you've got, in terms of how you might then carve out your time? Do you think about it on a planner like this? I mean, we've had some ideas about writing notes underneath. Do you carve things out, in terms of colour-coding things that are related to work or play? What are some of the ideas that people are having, Sophie?

SOPHIE: Well, Tony's just put up a really good question, actually, asking if people can give one word that would help you to study and become motivated. And that sort of made me think. When I was back in first year, I did almost like a Wordle, but with some pictures and some words, of things that I wanted to achieve. And that really helped motivate me and break things down, because then, once you've got that, a little idea of how you want to be, you've got the motivation to actually say, OK, well, maybe I'll do a little bit here and a little bit there.

So, people that have come back to Tony are, Dawn has said the word "future," and Katherine

has said "graduation." So that's really nice. And Ruth has actually said "failure," as a motivational word.

So, I think motivation's really important, this time of year, because you do sort lag behind and things. And it does feel cold and quite down. But motivation is the key.

KAREN FOLEY: That's a brilliant idea. Thank you, Tony, for doing that. Stefanie, what are your thoughts?

STEFANIE Yeah, I think "failure" is an interesting one, I think, in some ways. [LAUGH] I suppose they

SINCLAIR: were saying that as a fear of failure. But I think also "failure" is always really important, as well, as a learning point, that you can kind of--

I always see this as a-- even if things don't quite work out, even if a plan doesn't work out as you expect it to, don't spend time freaking out about it. [LAUGH] Try not to. But actually move on. And it's not so much about--

Even if you have a perfect idea or a plan or an assignment that hasn't gone quite to plan, don't get stuck in sort of looking back and feeling bad about what you haven't done. Really look forward and think what you can learn from it.

KAREN FOLEY: It's difficult, isn't it? It's something I'm going to be talking to Matt about, is working on feedback and using that. But so many students, I'm very conscious, you know, view grades as a trajectory. I got this percent, then I got this percent, now I've gone down, therefore that is a deterioration.

And also this idea that we were talking about, I haven't got my results back yet, so I can't work on the next assignment. And often they're completely unrelated. TMA 2 will be focusing on something completely different to TMA 3.

And it's about reframing, what is this assignment actually asking me to deliver? And, therefore, how can I say how well I've done it? Is this about essay-writing for the first time? Therefore, should I view it in terms of my referencing? Well, maybe a little bit.

But what is the task? And then how does that relate to what I'm actually being able to do? But that, as you say, is very difficult. For students to keep that in mind, and to not just say, well, I'm doing better or worse, and not just looking at the negatives, but to be mindful about what the task is and thinking about how well they're doing in the scheme of things.

STEFANIE

Yes. Yeah, and I think it's also about learning from the experience, always, and taking things

SINCLAIR:

forward and really looking ahead. I mean, in some ways you need to look backwards to kind of reflect on what you might change, perhaps. But, yeah.

And also, be proud of your achievements. I think every achievement-- I find-- that's why I'm saying the ticking-- even if you have managed to get anything done. [LAUGH]. Perhaps the trick is to break it down into really small tasks that you can tick off.

KAREN FOLEY:

Yes, well, this is an interesting one. And I'm glad you've mentioned it. Because, apart from avoiding distractions-- which is the key thing, which, I think-- let's be honest, that is difficult, especially at this time of year-- students are saying that the next most important skill that they could do is breaking down and prioritising tasks.

Now, we've mentioned that there are some things, like thinking, which are priorities. What advice would you give, in terms of how to prioritise tasks and how to break down a TMA? Which most students view as "writing" the TMA is the task. How could they actually start breaking down-- you mentioned reading, preparatory work, maybe essay planning-- those sorts of aspects that all combine to deliver the TMA.

What advice would you give, in your role as a chair, for students to break down those tasks for the TMA and identify what needs to be done and maybe even put a time or put something on this planner that may relate, then, to getting that done, so there's a plan for them to deliver on it?

STEFANIE

Well, actually, I think our study planner is pretty structured as it is. Although, if you look on the

SINCLAIR:

module website, we tell students what we expect them to do in each week and what the resources are for each week. So, to really go through these.

And I think, in some ways, yes, if you focus on assessment, that is an important thing. But that's not all to a module. I think it's also about reading around and reading the subjects that are not necessarily assessed.

But, when it comes to assessment, I mean, let's say we're finishing now before the Christmas break, and then there's the assignment afterwards. Really think about, have a look at what the assignment is. [LAUGH] Have a really good look at it. Have a look at that we've got two-part assignment. And really look at what the two different parts are and what you need to focus on.

Possibly read those sections again. Have a think about what kind of skills are required there.

And really have a really good look at the guidance notes in the assignment book, as well, to tell you what's expected.

And also be aware that, obviously, over Christmas, tutors take Christmas time off. So, if you have perhaps-- it's really set-- if you have questions, ask them early enough.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, I'm going to ask Matt all about that, who's coming up next. And just before I finish, are there any burning questions? Because I want to ask Stefanie something, as well. So, are there any burning questions that you want to raise?

HJ: I think we've gotten loads of good stuff from the session. People say they've got loads of stuff to do. And some of the things that we want to know-- we got a few questions, so maybe we could quickly tackle them.

Richard would like tips for finding suitable study buddies. Sarah finds it difficult to plan, with other commitments-- work, family, night life, and chronic illness, which can be a barrier to returning to study. And a question about being nervous, about getting TMA feedback. How to deal with that, as well. So, what do we think about those points?

KAREN FOLEY: Well, we'll leave the TMA feedback for Matt, because I'm going to talk to him a lot about all of that. But what are some of your thoughts about those other areas, Stefanie?

STEFANIE
SINCLAIR: There were a number of different things. In terms of finding a study buddy, I think that's a really good idea, if you can do this. The easiest way is to come to a face-to-face tutorial and meet up with students. And, in my experience, I have tutored, as well, for many years. And you have groups of people who've followed each other, throughout several modules. And that always seems to work very nicely.

If you're lucky enough to find someone like-minded. Obviously, you're not allowed to copy from each other. But it's really helpful to have someone else to chat--

KAREN FOLEY: But would you be able to, say, put on your tutor group forum, for example, "Does anyone want to talk through things?"

STEFANIE
SINCLAIR: Yes. And I think, actually--

KAREN FOLEY: Could people put that out?

STEFANIE

SINCLAIR:

--the tutor group forum, if you can come to a face-to-face event, or if you want to reach people who can't go there, because there's many others out there, go perhaps do a tutor group forum. It might also be worth approaching your tutor who can help you get in touch with other people. Because the problem is that, obviously, sharing out addresses is perhaps a bit of an issue.

But the tutor group forum is a really good starting point, I would say. To say hey, I'm looking for someone. Would anyone else be interested? And they're likely to be near you, as well, if they're in the same tutor group.

KAREN FOLEY:

Absolutely. So, there's loads of ways you can do things. Get in touch with your tutor. Post a note on the tutor group forum about ways of doing things.

But ultimately it doesn't have to be a formal thing, does it? You can just hook up with someone-- be on the phone. You can be on the phone once, or every week. It doesn't need to be something set up. You can just meet other students and maybe even at the Student Hub Live, as well. Although we can't give emails on the chat.

But we do have a forum, and we do have an email address, so you can always drop us an email. If you'd like to study with somebody, let us know which module you're with. And we can see if there are any other students who would also like to study with you, too.

STEFANIE

SINCLAIR:

And it's really quite useful, as well, to-- I mean, there might be the odd person who's kind of-- there might be some people who are, like, three chapters ahead of you. [LAUGH] But I think what's much more common is, you find someone else who's going, like, oh, I have so much to do! How am I going to cope?

And you'll see that others are in very similar situations and deal with very similar issues. You're not alone. I think that's really, really useful to know. I mean, I find it helpful, because-- to realise that you're not on your own, dealing with these issues.

KAREN FOLEY:

Absolutely. No. Stefanie, thank you so much. That's all we've got time for in this short session. As usual with every time-management session, we run out of time. But thank you for bringing all your advice and for giving us a space to talk about this.

And if you'd like to see some of the resources that Stefanie's put on the website, we've got the AA100 planner on there, a section of it which gives you some really good ideas about breaking

things down, in terms of weekly tasks, et cetera. And I'm sure we'll keep this conversation going throughout the chat.

So, Stefanie, thank you very much for joining me today. Before we get Matt on, to talk about all of these issues around feedback and when TMAs are getting more difficult, I'd like to see, Sophie and HJ, whether there were any other tips and things that people have come up with, in terms of how to manage their time over the Christmas break.

SOPHIE:

Yes, there's been some really good ones, actually. I really liked Ben's. And he goes on to say he's heard about a general rule. And you commit to the first three minutes. And after three minutes, if you still aren't ready for it, then you can go away. But generally the first three minutes gets you into it, and then you keep on going.

And he's applied that to his studies. And he's actually upped it to five minutes. So he'll do five minutes-- when he's really not feeling like studying, really just wants to lie in bed, does five minutes. And then, after that, if he's still not up for it, he goes to bed.

But then it hopefully gets him into the swing of things, which is a really good idea, actually. I really like that one. So, thank you very much, Ben.

HJ:

And we got some nice chat leading into this session about-- a lot of people are refreshing their computers, over and over again, waiting for TMA results. And we're talking about some of the harder TMAs that come up. And how talking to tutors, and how we can break them down. So this session will definitely be-- everyone's looking forward to this one. And hopefully we'll get loads of questions answered for this one.

KAREN FOLEY:

Brilliant. That's lovely. Well, we've been, um-- [SIP] enjoying our festive supplies, here. What are you eating, at home? Are you eating--

It's around lunchtime, now, so I expect everyone's having a few bits to eat. These mince pies are going down very well, I can tell you, and so is the mulled wine, which is nice. But we're only allowed very small glasses, for those of us who are teaching later.