



## 4 Planning for study and work

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Planning is valuable for lengthy and complex activities. You'll need to organise your time and effort appropriately, and complete the task on time and to the highest possible standard.

### Why is planning for study and work important to you?

**For BTEC study:** assessments will be in various forms and each of you will benefit from careful planning before you start the work. To plan well, you will need to:

- **balance** the time appropriately to different elements of the task
- **factor** in some space in your plan for the unexpected – delays, problems, illness
- **reduce** the chance of a last-minute rush or late submission
- **leave** sufficient time for reviewing and correcting your work.

**For work:** the planning skills and habits you learn while studying will be relevant in your eventual workplace. Your employer will want you to complete projects on time and to high standards. This will show you are well organised and self-motivated.

### What can you do to develop your planning skills?

Good planning includes two essential stages:

- breaking a task down into manageable elements. For example, cookbooks generally take this approach when giving instructions for recipes
- creating a timetable by dividing the available time between these elements.

Vital though they are, do **not** allow these steps to take up too much time. Make this a quick exercise so that you can spend most of your time on doing the work.

#### 1 Breaking a task down

This involves identifying the various activities you will need to carry out to complete the final product. Look at the table below for the general principles that apply to almost any kind of academic assessment (Column A) and at how this works for producing a case study (Column B). Other activity sheets will show you similar breakdowns for essays, reports and presentations.

General principles	Example: producing a case study
1 Analyse what you have been asked to do	Reflect on wording of the brief
2 Identify separate stages, targets or sections (as appropriate)	Decide on how to tackle brief by identifying different stages – e.g. conduct survey, review literature, reflect on own experience
3 List resources to be obtained and studied	Identify the nature of information-gathering – e.g. survey, analysis of results, personal diary, supporting literature
4 Consult source material and make notes	Note key ideas/data to include
5 Plan the layout of your assignment taking account of feedback from other work	Plan the layout of the case study, following any instructions you've been given
6 Draft your first version of the task (revisit source material as necessary)	Draft first version of each of sections, not necessarily in the order they appear in text
7 Review and edit first version	Assemble text in the order required and review for flow, structure and accuracy
8 Finalise your submission	Finalise your submission in accordance with guidelines for structure and presentation

For certain tasks that do not follow a familiar format, an essential step is to mind map the elements or stages involved, drawing on your experience from other similar work.

Some of these stages may be repeated (for example you may go through a cycle of several drafts) and some may take longer than others (printing out a final copy of an assignment may not take long, but the research for it may take much longer). Some elements may need to be further sub-divided – for example, the writing phase might involve three sub-phases for writing the introduction, the main part and the conclusions.



## 2 Creating a timetable

General principles	Points to consider
<b>Identify submission date</b> according to BTEC course information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check your timetables and the place in a week, e.g. Monday (gives you a weekend prior to submission) or Friday (has to fit in around classes and other calls on your time)</li> </ul>
<b>Identify due dates</b> of any other work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check sequence of due dates and nature of assignments so that you can allocate time appropriately to the complexity of task</li> </ul>
<b>Calculate the time</b> you have available for the task(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take into account unavoidable commitments on certain days in the week that you will need to work around, e.g. part-time employment</li> </ul>
<b>Sub-divide the total time</b> you have available to cover each element of the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may realise that time for some parts is very limited – in which case you may need to revisit your other commitments and prioritise</li> </ul>
<b>Create a timetable</b> on paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The activities part of this sheet includes a model timetable that you could use. This allows you to see at a glance what you should be doing and when</li> <li>Don't forget to allow some time for slippage in your plans or for dealing with unforeseen problems. This 'contingency' time can be programmed in with blank slots</li> </ul>
<b>Stick to your timetable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having a timetable that you can work to is empowering. It helps you monitor progress and shows what you have achieved</li> </ul>

### Checklist for developing your planning skills

- Take time to assess the task
- Resist any temptation to adopt a haphazard approach to the work
- Develop a plan based on the time available but do not over-extend this planning phase
- Get down to the real work as soon as possible
- Keep track of your progress and record completion of each element
- Recognise that, although you may have to adopt a flexible approach in response to changing circumstances, you should try to stick as closely to your original plan as possible.

### Activity 4.1. Planning for an assignment

Attached to this activity sheet, you will find a blank timetable covering a week. Note that each day has been divided into six sessions: two each in the morning, afternoon and evening, with space for meals. These represent chunks of time that you could allocate to work on an essay or to revision.

Use this timetable to plan for your next assignment.

- 1 Copy** the timetable for the required number of weeks between the date you intend to start and the due date for your assignment or other assessment.
- 2 Add** real dates and note down any unavoidable commitments that you have. This could be such things as attendance at class, work commitments or sports activities. If you're serious about your studies, you might consider temporarily reducing some of the non-academic stuff.
- 3 Decide** on the number of sessions you wish to work on each of the days. Allow some gaps for relaxation, and take account of whether you prefer to work in the morning, afternoon or evening. You can then arrive at a total number of hours/sessions available for the work.
- 4 Distribute** this time to the different parts of your tasks. This could mean allocating them to different stages in the production of a report for example, or to different topics for revision. Balance the time appropriately between the various parts or subjects, and to allow some time for slippage in your plans. One way to do this is to incorporate relaxation time which you will do without if things do not go according to the plan, but which will seem like 'mini rewards' if things are going well.
- 5 Display** the completed timetable sheet(s) near to where you work, and mark your progress using a highlighter or coloured pen.
- 6 Review** your progress at intermediate stages. If necessary, adjust your plan as necessary.

<b>TIP</b>	Don't get too hung up on the timetable – if you really don't feel like working at a certain time or on a certain topic, just swap things around – but be aware of avoiding difficult stages or topics. Sometimes if you tackle these near the start, it is all easy from there.
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### Activity 4.2. Examine how your planning worked in practice

After using a timetable as for work on an assignment or for revision, review how successfully you kept to the plan and the rate of progress you made towards the final goal. Ask yourself the following questions, with the aim of improving your approach next time around:

- Did I stick to the timetable as well as I could?
- Was my division of time appropriate for the task?
- Did the plan mean that my performance was better than normal or better than it might otherwise have been?
- Should I have reduced more of my other commitments temporarily?
- Did I get the work-relaxation balance right?
- Should I start my planning earlier next time?
- Did my planning help to reduce my stress levels?

### Reflective activities

#### A case study on planning effectively for study

Maisie is quite a sociable person who'll almost always put her social life over her studies. She's also got a part-time job on fixed weekly hours (eight hours), but she needs to travel by public transport to her workplace so this eats further into her time. Her BTEC work so far has been described as 'slapdash and incomplete' with low grades. At present, she'd struggle to achieve a pass. She's been advised to learn how to become more organised than at present.

### Activity 4.3. Factors affecting planning

It's often easier to identify how other people might do things better, rather than ourselves. This can lead to useful tips that we might adopt for ourselves. Don't just think about Maisie, but also about your own strengths and weaknesses when completing the exercise below.

- 1 List 5 social life distractions that people like Sally might pursue thus damaging their ability to meet coursework targets.

<b>Maisie</b>	1	2	3	4	5
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- 2 List anything that distracts your own planning.

<b>Me</b>	1	2	3	4	5
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- 3 Using the information in this worksheet, choose two points that you would recommend to Maisie to help her become more organised in planning for her studies and so help her to submit better quality work. Similarly, add any two points you would adopt for yourself.

<b>Maisie</b>	1	2
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<b>Me</b>	1	2
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### Action points

Consider whether some of the recommendations made for Maisie would apply to your personal action points. If appropriate, set yourself target dates to meet your challenges.

#### How you can develop effective planning skills further

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| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |

#### Link

To help you develop your Skills for Learning and Work, look also at:

- Activity Sheet 5 on Time management.

