This is the second of a series of online tutorials designed to help you make the adjustment to uni life. This tutorial focuses on managing your time and workload and looks at strategies to do this on a semester and weekly basis. Also we’ll look at some ways to help you plan your assignments and strategies to help you manage your external study.

Uni workload overview
The diagram gives you an overview of your workload on a semester or study period basis. In the yellow section of the diagram, which looks at weeks 1 to 5, you can see that the workload increases at a moderate rate. You’ll probably have one assignment or piece of assessment per course and there may be some sharing of due dates for assignments during this time.

When we look at the orange section which goes from weeks 6 to 7, and includes the two week teaching break, there is a moderate increase in the workload during this time. The assignments you’ll be doing will usually not only be worth more, but will also be larger than the first lot of assignments you completed. Again there will be a sharing of due dates.

The third section of the workload, in red, covers weeks 8 to 13. The workload at this time is high and it increases at a maximum rate. Again you’ll usually have one assignment per course and the assignments or pieces of assessments are worth significantly more than before and are also larger or have a greater work count. Again, you may have more than one assignment or exam falling on the same day.

Planning for the Study period (SP)
Because of this increase in uni workload, it’s important to keep on track of assessment tasks and due dates.

How to do this, you may ask? One strategy is to use a Study Period Planner. The good thing about this document, unlike a diary, is that it gives a realistic overview of the study period and helps plan ahead in the long term.

Here’s how we recommend you use it.

1. First of all, download a Planner. Choose one that best suits your study period. You can use the pdf or, if you prefer, the Word document version.
2. Next map all the commitments you have over the study period onto the planner. This includes the due dates for all assessment tasks, including the value of each of these and the word limit. This information is found in your Course Outline or Course Information Booklet. Colour coding your courses is also helpful.
3. Next add up the values of each course’s assessment tasks and make sure they add up to 100% for each course. Check that you haven’t forgotten any.
4. Finally, put your Planner in a visible place to remind you of what’s coming up.
Study Period Planner example
This slide is a Study Period Planner example and shows what the first few weeks of a Study Period might look like with some of the details filled in. You can see that assignment details have been added, and courses colour coded, so you can see the size of the assignment and the percentage for each course. The larger assignments, which are worth more, should be started several weeks before they’re due. Also social events and work commitments have been included to give a more realistic view of available time.

Time for uni
At uni, each course is allocated a particular number of units, usually 4.5 or 9 and the workload, which includes things such as time in class, amount of reading and size of assessment tasks, is designed around this. Based on this, a 4.5 unit course, would involve approximately 10 to 11 hours per week, and this includes contact and non-contact time.

So, for a course with 3 contact hours, you may be expected to study up to an extra 8 hours per week. From this you can see that being a full time student is similar to being in full time work.

When you are thinking about your own workload, it’s important to think about how much time you’ll need to spend on each course.

Weekly planning using a Planner
By filling in a weekly planner, you have a realistic view of your weekly commitments. Do this by blocking out regular, weekly activities such as:

- university commitments (lectures, tutorials, practicals, studio, etc.)
- work commitments
- sporting activities (training, games, gym)
- social and family commitments
- meals
- household chores
- travel
- and any other regular activities (such as TV shows, religious commitments)

Also allow some unscheduled time so that you can swap and for any unplanned events which come up.

Weekly planning – what’s missing?
When you look at the example here, you can see that it’s only at the early stages and doesn’t give a realistic view of weekly commitments. A lot more needs to be filled in.
Weekly Planning
After you’ve filed in all your weekly commitments, you need to think about where you can fit in the non-contact study time for each course? When doing this, think about things such as:

- how you work best—is it in short bursts or over a long stretch of time?
- do you study better in the morning or late at night?
- do you need a quiet place to study?
- can you study at home or do you need to travel to the library?

Aim for, and work towards, a balance between study and other commitments. Keep in mind that your planning needs to be realistic and practical for it to work.

Assignment Planner
Another way to manage your workload is to plan your assessment tasks so that, rather than rushing everything at the last minute, you break up the assignment task into chunks and you work on small tasks aimed at finishing the final end product.

So in the example Course A, has an essay plan due in week 4. This student has broken the task up and has begun working on the assignment in week 1 by finding out about how to use databases and finding out more about Harvard referencing. You can see that other activities have been scheduled in in other weeks to help work towards completing the assignment for this course. From this example you can see that this student has allocated different tasks, all aimed at completing the different assignment for each of the other courses, many of which are due at around the same time.

Assignment Planner
Massey University had developed as assignment planning calculator from the following website and this breaks down an assignment into small chunk and gives timelines.

If you do use this, keep in mind that you use this as a guide only and that:

- Individuals work at different paces
- Also when you first start uni or are completing an assignment which is unfamiliar, you may find some parts/tasks take more time than expected (such as searching databases, referencing, writing an essay)

Also you all have different demands placed on, so each of you may have other factors which might impact on how long you take to complete tasks.

Studying externally
Many of you might do external study as part of your degree. This slide is just to remind you that there are a number of online resources to help you with your study as an external student. Each of the one below has lots of useful advice about being an external student, how to go about studying externally and how to stay on track. The links are:

- 10 steps to get started
- Studying externally
- Stay on track - Weekly tasks
Summary of time and workload management
So just to sum up some of the strategies to help you manage your time and workload now that you’ve started uni:

- Use planners – a Weekly Planner, a Study Period Planner and Assignment Planner
- Start early
- Break down tasks into manageable parts
- Prioritise assignments according to deadlines
- Regularly review your schedule
- Seek clarification or support in advance
- Work towards having a balance in your life.

We wish you luck in your studies and with the semester ahead.