

The Art of Time Management - A Must Know for Effective Student Pharmacists

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To gain a competitive edge in successfully obtaining post-graduate programs or to land their dream jobs at desirable locations, pharmacy students must juggle multiple responsibilities with their pharmacy organizations/leadership positions, internships, research, and community outreach programs. Cultivating effective time management skills is critical to fulfill the aforementioned responsibilities while concurrently managing a rigorous pharmacy school curriculum. This editorial article presents effective time management strategies to assist students in navigating through their busy schedules.

1. Understand your performance throughout the day, and allocate tasks accordingly. Try writing a time journal, including the time of day and what you are doing, as detailed as possible. After about a week of documenting your time journal, you will be able to figure out when you are most or least productive. Afterward, identify the most challenging activities and tasks that require the most brain power and creativity, and exclusively allocate these activities to times when you are most productive. Designate all the other activities that do not demand much of your concentration or attention, such as replying to emails, doing simple assignments, or making flyers for school events, to times when you are least productive. This intentional time and task allocation will help you become extremely productive and aid you in accomplishing the most difficult tasks in a timely manner.

2. Turn off social media and email notifications. It is extremely important to turn off all electronic device notifications when you are trying to focus, especially during the most productive time of the day, to get the most out of your productive time cycle. Distractors like social media and email notifications will decrease your performance and focus. Rather than getting all notifications and trying to resist the urge to check your phone whenever it rings, simply turn them off by activating a “do not disturb” button on all your devices to maximize your productivity.

3. Effectively utilize mindless times that would otherwise be wasted. Are you in a long line to get lunch? Do you have a 10-minute walk from the parking lot to the classroom? Utilize those mindless times for pure-memorization tasks, such as generic-brand name matching, therapeutic classes of medications, etc. Whenever you encounter downtime, pull out the summarized sheet that you prepared, and start memorizing the list for that short period of time but for multiple times a day repeatedly. You just need repetition and reinforcement for those pure-memorization tasks, and you do not necessarily need to sit down or look for an isolated and quiet place.

4. Do not multitask. Students are often taught that having good multitasking skills are valued, which effective pharmacists absolutely need to have in order for them to survive in an extremely busy environment. However, contrary to common belief, multiple studies demonstrate that multitasking has major negative consequences, such as reduced performance and efficacy, decreased IQ, and potential brain damage.⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾ Students, you may think you are effectively multitasking when you are taking care of other matters, such as responding to emails, texting your friend, or navigating through social media while attending a lecture. But in fact, it will decrease your ability

to recall and process the lecture materials and will cause you to make more errors on other tasks you are trying to perform. Give 100 percent of your attention to one task at a time, complete it efficiently in a timely manner, and then move on to the next one.

4. Set SMART goals for each day. Study goals are not very helpful unless they are specific to the time frame and number of tasks to be accomplished. Before you start feeling overwhelmed, set a specific goal each day with a detailed time frame and how much you would like to accomplish. This goal is called “SMART” (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound), and setting a SMART goal can lead to better execution of educational actions and consistently enhanced performance.⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾ For example, it could be as easy as setting a goal such as “from 2 to 4 p.m., finish cardiovascular lecture, 100 slides with 50 slides in an hour.” Making this your daily habit will help you understand how much you can realistically study at a time and plan accordingly before a test. This goal should be utilized for not only studying purposes, but also for overall career goals throughout your pharmacy schooling.

5. Calendar immediately with all details. Put in your calendar right away all events, deadlines, and exams so that you can see all that you must accomplish at one glance. This will help you determine how to prioritize your time. Moreover, copy and paste the details into the “Note” section of your calendar to avoid having to waste your time digging through your email inbox.

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