

Time management

This chapter deals with the most efficient time management strategies and techniques and discusses their application in in-person and online educational settings. After reading and exploring the resources in this chapter, you should be able to:

- ✓ List at least two roles of the educator in relation to time management in an online setting,
- ✓ Name apps that can help educators and their learners in managing their time,
- ✓ Explain how the flow can help manage distractions,
- ✓ Compare face-to-face, online synchronous, and online asynchronous learning time management practices.

The chapter includes the following sections:

1. *Time as a resource and a burden – the importance of time management*
2. *The various roles of the educator in an online setting*
3. *How to deal with time – online*
4. *Time management in face-to-face, synchronous, and asynchronous education*
5. *Challenges: Managing distractions with flow*
6. *Questions for reflection*
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1. Time as a resource and a burden – the importance of time management



Time is one of the most precarious resources, so it is important to organize it well and plan how to divide it between specific tasks and activities. The process that enables you to work smarter is called time management. Research has shown that effective time management reduces job stress, which can be an important obstacle to job performance.

Online teaching redefines the schedule of educators not used to it and can lead to frustration, burn-out, and career change.

Managing one's time as an online educator is a challenge, but not an insurmountable one! In fact, the research is mixed on the question which takes longer: online or offline teaching.

The basics of time management for online education

Some of the most important habits and behaviours related to efficient time management are planning, setting priorities, organizing activities, scheduling assignments and tasks, delegating time and work, taking care of procrastination, managing external time wasters, focusing on one task at a time to avoid multitasking, and taking time for self-care activities to reduce stress and stay healthy. Apps like [RescueTime](#) and [Focus Booster](#) aim to make days more efficient by tracking some of the mentioned behaviours.



2. The various roles of the educator in an online setting

Educators have a big job ahead of them: they have to manage time themselves, think about time in a different manner while designing online programs, and manage the time of their learners.

Thankfully, time management is a skill that can be learned. Start small and build up!

Prepare yourself for efficient time management in an online setting

Creating a time management plan or schedule

The most important thing is to create and manage a time management plan consistently. The plan should take into consideration the learning course: make sure you allocate enough time for preparation, lectures, feedback, communicating with learners, sending out reminders and feedback, and setting up online office hours. Plans can be done for the whole course, or semester, and broken down into weekly portions for easier monitoring. Useful tools can be found at [Toggl](#), [Base Camp](#), [Asana](#), and many other project management tools and apps.

1. Establishing rules and expectations



It is important to communicate clear and consistent rules and expectations for learners as soon as possible – even before the actual learning begins. It is even better to offer them a way to participate in the process with their own suggestions. It is especially important to set expectations for feedback and so learners don't get frustrated with long waiting times. Once the rules are introduced, they can be referred to throughout the course with minimal waste of time and effort. For example, you can make a visual representation of learning rules with [Canva](#) and send it to your learners by e-mail.

2. Taking advantage of tools and technology

Online tools can be useful for managing tasks that can be automated, like learner tracking, testing automation, self-grading, or rubrics added to assignments. Feedback can be more effective in audio or video form, which can be edited easily with tools like [Audacity](#) and [DaVinci Resolve](#). In addition, online spreadsheets or calendars can help with time management itself. Online platforms like [Google Classroom](#), [Moodle](#), or [Microsoft Teams](#) have a lot of tools that can make course design and management less daunting.

3. Taking advantage of existing resources

You can free up your schedule by using pre-existing resources. There are plenty of quality learning materials out there, and it is not always needed to do them from scratch. They can also be improved or adapted. For example, you can add subtitles to existing videos or think up unique questions for discussions about the materials. Sites like [Khan Academy](#) and [Ted ED](#) offer a variety of content and topics.

4. Establishing a routine



With the help of a plan or schedule, it is beneficial to get into the habit of working at consistent times. Research has shown that it is better to do one task at a time because multitasking dampens the focus, and constant context shifting makes people more fatigued. It is also important to take time for self-care and downtime. Some of the more efficient ways to promote health are regular exercise, mindfulness exercises, practicing thankfulness, and taking time to include hobbies and pleasurable activities preferred by every individual.

3. How to deal with time – online

You might have the time management of your face-to-face sessions down to a fine art. Still, the online setting brings about its own set of constraints and quirks. Everyone is different so you will have to find your own way, but we hope you'll keep these simple guidelines in mind.

1) Focus on the learner's weekly load. How much time per week should your learners set aside for your course? Keep in mind that lectures or video materials shouldn't take up all that time – plan for assignments, individual research, and connect with other learners online.

2) Less is more. Cognitive overload is no joke, and Zoom fatigue is a real phenomenon. Our bodies are not optimized for online work, and you should accommodate that in yourself, and your learners. Shorten your lectures, learners online tend to keep their work up for less than an hour. Breaking up your lectures with short breaks every half an hour could do wonders for your learners' focus. You can always check in with them to figure out the ideal length of interrupted work. If filming videos, keep them on the short end so they don't overload the learner's Internet connection.

3) Set your priorities and keep an eye on the clock. When designing your activities, choose those that will lead to the most important learning outcome, and make them the centre of your lecture. That way, you will always have time for the most important outcomes and won't get lost in details.

4) Factor in technical difficulties. Plan for at least ten minutes to deal with technical issues. If possible, hire technical support to deal with that.

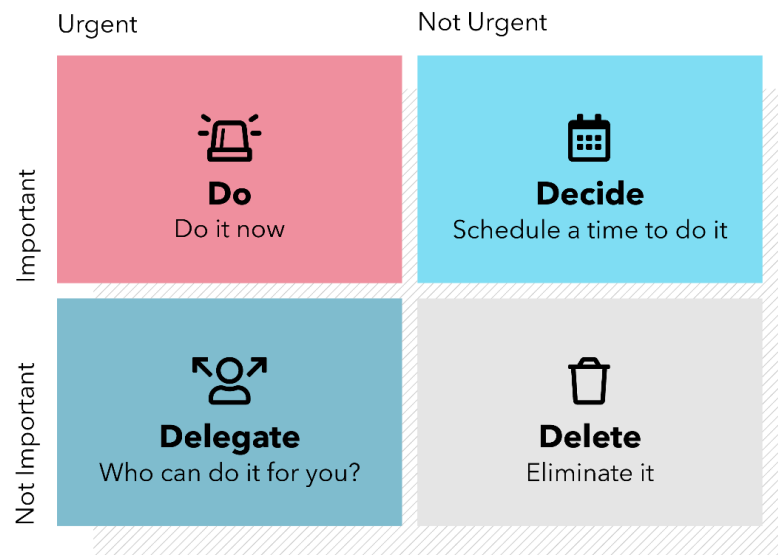
5) Plan for the worst-case scenario. We tend to underestimate the time things take, and online things tend to move slower. Always add at least 15% to your starting time frame, and have a couple of extra activities you can use if your learners surpass your expectations. Of course, you can also finish early as a reward!

6) Be honest about the online timeline. Acknowledge the weird flow of time that can happen in an online setting and communicate it to your students. Thank them for their patience when waiting for everyone to tune in or get sorted into break-out rooms.

Help yourself first: Try these tested time management techniques!

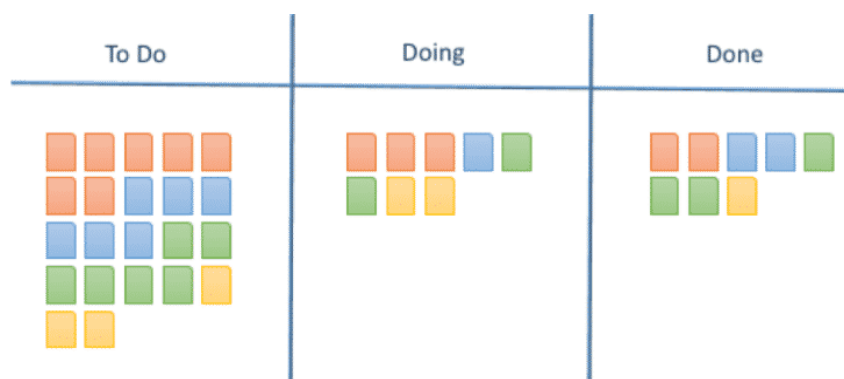
Eisenhower Matrix

Prioritisation over productivity! Divide your tasks into four categories, based on their importance and urgency. Once you do that, filter them accordingly. It is important to do this with a bigger number of tasks because constantly categorizing tasks also wastes time and energy. Once properly set, it can provide a much-needed dopamine boost!



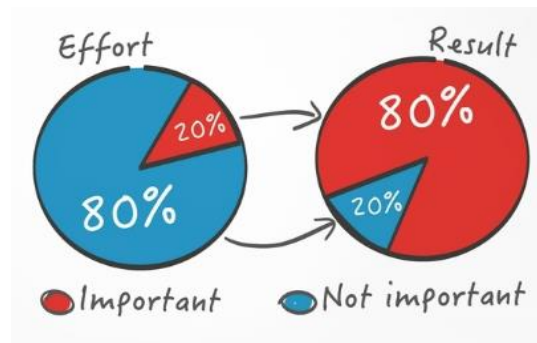
Kanban method

Kanban method is one of the most famous ones, incorporated into management tools like [Trello](#), [Asana](#), [Todoist](#), or [Microsoft Teams](#). It is a visual productivity workflow that allows you to track the progress of your tasks from those that should be done, those that are in progress, and those that are done. Don't forget you can tailor it to your needs, and prioritize within the tasks to get the most out of it!



Pareto principle

Named after its founder, Vilfredo Pareto, the Pareto principle states that 20% of your tasks will account for 80% of your results. So, by identifying that 20% and marking them as more important, you can manage your time more easily and efficiently, ensuring that you spend it on things that actually matter!



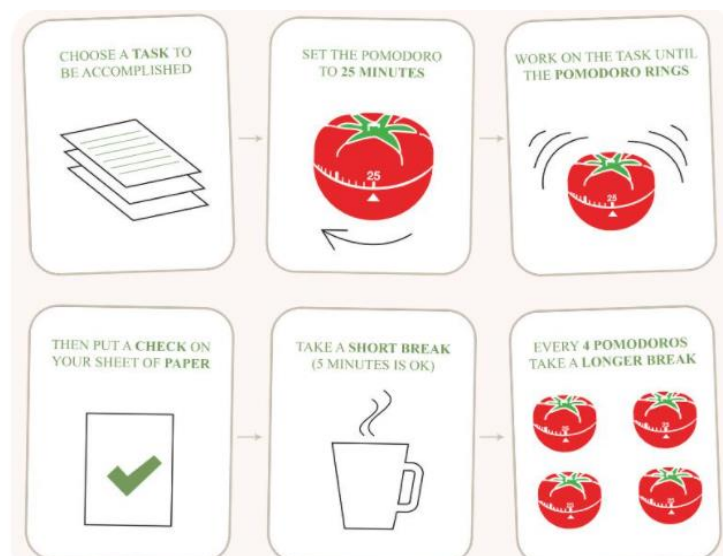
Pomodoro Technique

Pomodoro was developed by Francesco Cirillo for those who struggle with staying focused.

It consists of the following four steps:

1. Get a to-do list and a timer or an app
2. Set the time for 25 minutes and work on a task! Remember to focus on one bigger or combine several smaller tasks together. Don't multitask!
3. When the session is over, mark what you've done, and write down any other leftover thoughts and feelings.
4. Enjoy your break. After one "Pomodoro", take a five-minute break, and after four "Pomodoros" take a longer break to refresh!

Pomodoro is flexible: you can make working sections longer according to the task you are working on.



4. Time management in face-to-face, synchronous, and asynchronous education

Face-to-face education	Synchronous education	Asynchronous education
<p>Live education usually follows its own set time frame and timeline.</p> <p>Non-formal education can be organized in many ways, timewise: it can last from a one-hour meeting to multiple days of workshops or experiential learning.</p> <p>Breaks are usually organized around mealtimes, and there is a time for “time-off”, for recuperation and free activities of the learners.</p>	<p>Synchronous education can closely follow a live education structure, with some key differences.</p> <p>It is even more important to value time in a synchronous setting, so before you start your education program, set up some ground rules that emphasize the importance of timekeeping for all learners. You can gamify it by keeping a score of learners’ adherence to the rule and award badges for keeping the time. Keep in mind that some learners might perpetually break the rules, so make sure you also establish reasons for exclusion in those situations.</p> <p>Online meetings can quickly drain a person’s energy, motivation, and attention. It is important to find a way to keep your learners refreshed and focused: organise more short breaks (one every 60-90 minutes), combine different types of activities so that the pace changes every 15-20 minutes, and provide energizers.</p> <p>Engagement can keep the attention longer, so find ways to engage your students with feedback, individual work, and group work.</p>	<p>Asynchronous education can be set in a way that leaves learners to do everything at their own pace or follows a previously set up timeline.</p> <p>When doing the self-paced program, it is important to set up a way to help participants to stay on track. Send e-mail reminders that inform them of the percentage of their progress and invite them to continue with the topic at hand!</p> <p>In a paced asynchronous education it is very important to have an automatized system that clearly shows learners their progress, what they learned, and what’s next on the schedule. You can also set up reminders for them via mail, or various messaging options. Set up a messaging board or forum with clearly stated tasks and deadlines, where people can socialise and motivate each other to finish the tasks on time.</p> <p>In both cases, it is important to incorporate the “option to socialize”: office hours for those who want to reach out, or a yearly event for those who want to meet other students. Also, gamification is a powerful way to keep learners engaged: show them where they stand on their “hero journey”!</p>

5. Challenges: Managing distractions with flow

One of the biggest challenges in online education are distractions. Email, phone, notifications, other people in the room, calls, and other work-related tasks can really be a challenge for staying organized and conducting online sessions.

How to avoid distractions?

First, try to have a clear goal in mind that will help you stay on track. You can use the browser extension [Mindful Browsing](#) to remind yourself of the importance of using your time in a more mindful way.

Then, arrange your working space in a way that you can easily find your tools, and keep important ones at hand. Put away any unnecessary devices, and switch off media notifications – you can use apps such as [Dewo](#) (blocks distracting apps), or [Freedom](#) (blocks the Internet)! For a less extreme approach, set aside a specific time to work on activities that eat up your time: responding to emails, for example.

Finally, reward yourself for achieving a task or a goal you've set! The rewards should be meaningful for you with regard to your well-being and connection to the outside world. Take a walk, talk with a loved one, and spend time with your pets. Disconnect for a while!

How to use flow to help?

Once you deal with distractions, you are more open to flow. Flow is a state of deep concentration in which one's attention is fully absorbed. It doesn't mean it's not difficult or stressful – it usually challenges you and builds up your skills.

Besides managing distractions, pay attention to the following things:

- Goal clarity: try using SMART goals!



- Immediate feedback: it is important to know if you're going in the right direction, so set up a way to get feedback on your work. Check out our chapter on *Giving and receiving feedback* for more tips!
- Challenge to skills ratio: your goal should challenge, but not overwhelm you.

6. Questions for reflection

1. Which time management technique sounds like the best fit for your learning style?
2. Think about the ways you could make the waiting time for technical difficulties seem shorter. Make a list and choose the top three options you can use!
3. Is using time efficiently important to you? Why, or why not?

7. References and resources

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