



2 Organisation

A good system shortens the road to the goal.

Orison Swett Marden

For every minute spent organising, an hour is earned.

Anonymous

Point to note

This chapter on Organisation and the following on Time Management are effectively one large chapter on the idea of self-organisation. Taken together, the ideas in these two chapters will form the backbone of your successful study plan.

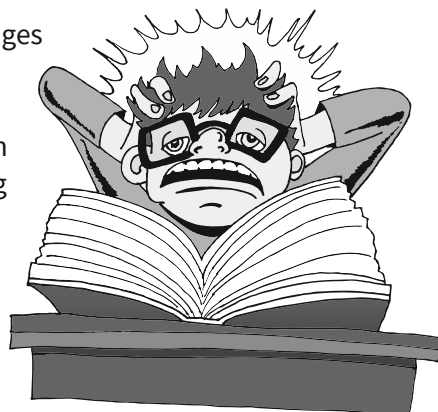
Self-Organisation

You've been a student for over 10 years now – do any of the following problems seem familiar to you?

- ✓ Not knowing where to start with study or an assignment.
- ✓ Remembering at the last minute that you have to do work for a class the next day.
- ✓ Working for hours but not getting much done.
- ✓ Having great ideas, but finding it hard to get them down on paper.
- ✓ Leaving things in school that you need at home to do homework.

These are all issues that stem from a lack of organisation.

Luckily for you, there are some very simple changes that can be made to reduce these problems and improve your results from study. Even better, an organised approach to your studies will mean that **you will have to work less** over the coming year. With better organisation you will be on top of things from day one and won't have to cram at exam time. It sounds too easy, but it really is the secret to success!



Point to note

Everyone will have a different method of organisation which will work best for them. It is important that you experiment with a number of systems until you find the perfect fit for you.

Organisation Fundamentals

There are some organisation fundamentals – which we will cover within this chapter – that will help students to begin to improve and streamline their productivity when studying.

Planning Tasks

The best approach to planning is one that breaks your tasks up into three different types: Short-Term, Medium-Term and Long-Term.

A great way for you to describe these would be as Daily, Weekly and Term Tasks. You can record these in your study planner, with Daily Tasks being quite detailed and Term Tasks being more general. This should help to give you an overall understanding of your studies.



1

Daily Tasks

Your daily plan can hold a day-by-day account of your assignments and areas of study. The best time to prepare your study plan is in the evening time, when you have finished studying. This is when you know what needs to be done the following day and it's when you should make a to-do list or a list of short-term goals for the day. (See page 12.)

2

Weekly Tasks

Your weekly plan can be used to give you an overall plan for the week, with a list of approaching tests and tasks to be achieved over the seven days. (See page 12.)

3

Term Tasks

Your term calendar gives you a broad view of your semester and helps you to plan ahead. Use this to mark all school assignments, tests, and activities, along with due dates so that you don't miss them by mistake! (See page 12.)

A DAILY PLAN

Tuesday To-Do List

- * Careers advisor meeting
 - Get copy of aptitude test
 - Ask for more info on Science-related careers
- * French test
 - 10.30am
 - N.B. Testing both regular and irregular verbs
- * Homework from today
 - 2 hours
 - Try to finish as much as possible
 - Prioritise based on date due
- * Thurs Physics homework
 - Qs 6-9 still to do, needs 30 mins
- * Study 1 Biology topic
 - Genetics
- * 1 hour revision
 - English poetry – Revise Robert Frost notes
- * Prepare Wednesday's task list

Point to note

It's important to note **the difference between a goal and a task**. A **goal** is an outcome that you would like to make happen e.g. Get an A in the French mid-term essay. A **task** is an action that you carry out or complete, e.g. Hand in the French mid-term essay before the deadline on Wednesday afternoon. Remember it by reminding yourself that:

Tasks are what we complete in order to achieve our goals!

A WEEKLY PLAN

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Start Physics homework for Thurs	Meeting with school careers advisor	Geography field trip money due	Maths problems set due	Bring PE gear	Geography field trip: 3 hours	Rewrite all notes from week
Study for Tuesday's French test	French subjunctive test	Finish Physics homework for Thurs	Oral exam practice in Irish class	Renew books from library	Write up notes from field trip	Do 2 French past paper aural
Start today's Homework	Start today's Homework	Start today's Homework	Start today's Homework	Start today's Homework	Study 1 History topic	1 hour revision
Study Irish poetry	Physics homework for Thurs	Complete Maths homework from last week	Prepare for Friday study group	English Paper 2 - practise one past paper	Write 1 French Essay	1 hour revision
Study 1 History topic	Study 1 Biology topic	1 hour revision	Study 1 Biology topic	Study group meeting	1 hour revision	1 hour revision
1 hour revision	1 hour revision	1 hour revision	1 hour revision	1 hour revision	1 hour revision	Do self-assessment/recap on week's work
Prepare Tuesday's task list	Prepare Wednesday's task list	Prepare Thursday's task list	Prepare Friday's task list	Prepare Saturday's task list	Prepare Sunday's task list	Prepare Monday's task list

Study Materials

It is important to put some thought into your study materials – getting a good study planner, the right stationery, as well as the various textbooks and learning aids required for each class.

It is often an undervalued point but it is vital that you sort out all these individual bits and pieces at the start of the year and keep them in your study area. That way they'll be there when needed throughout the semester. Nothing breaks study momentum more than having to spend half the evening shopping for log tables for maths study or tracing paper for art practise.



Create Your System

It is impossible for one system to suit all students, but it is guaranteed that **there is one best study system for every student**. If you invest a little time and effort in identifying what works best for you, not only will your results improve greatly but you'll spend less time getting there too!

Below are three tried and tested study skill principles which will help any student to raise their game:

① Make Sure to Write Everything Down

The time when you remember something most clearly is often immediately after it happens. If you are given homework or study advice and think: 'I'll definitely remember that at home later; I won't bother writing it down now.' Does that work for you?

The problem of course is that we rarely remember individual facts and pieces of information by the end of the day. Our strongest memories are those associated with powerful emotions and homework just doesn't have that kind of impact on our thoughts. Does that sound familiar?

Of course there is a simple solution. Once you have been given a new piece of information which you will need to remember at a later point, **write it down**. It is crucial that you write the information down in as detailed a way as possible. Otherwise, you will remind yourself that you need to remember a piece of information but you won't know specifically what it is!



A great place to automatically write down all of these little bits of information is on your **draft to-do list**. You can then sort through it and prioritise to help create your **ordered to-do list**. (See pages 16–19.)

② Everything in its Right Place

A student who doesn't use a filing system is like a computer user who saves everything to the desktop. It's the easiest place to save your file at the time, but it quickly comes back to haunt you as the desktop becomes cluttered and it becomes almost impossible to find what you're looking for.

Remember the phrase, *Out of sight, out of mind*. If you place all typed class materials, handwritten notes and past papers in one big pile in your bag you will soon find that you lose notes and often forget to complete homework.

A sure-fire method to avoid this problem is to use a **multi-compartment A4 folder** instead:

- ① Make sure the compartmented folder has at least one section for each of your subjects.
- ② Use the small paper labels that come with the folder to write the names of your subjects and clearly mark which compartment is for which subject.
- ③ Place all typed notes, handwritten notes and other relevant materials into the correct section for each subject before you leave the classroom.
- ④ Choose a spot (for example, the top left corner) of each sheet and write in the date you received it.
- ⑤ Some students like to add an extra level of organisation to each compartment by placing new notes to the left when inserting. This way the notes will always be chronologically ordered for the quickest access later on!

Of course this one folder will not be big enough to store all of your notes throughout the year. You need to have a larger method to store notes at home, for example a set of drawers or a filing cabinet, and keep it near your study area.

Pick a time towards the end of each week to look through your weekly notes folder. Sunday evening is a good option as it gives you the best overview of the week just gone by. As you go through your folder, decide which notes are ready to be filed away at home.

Keep the following two questions in mind:

- ✓ Do I need these notes for any short-term (in the next week or fortnight) homework or in-class exams?
- ✓ Do I still need to clearly mark the date and purpose of these notes on them, to remind myself what I need them for at a later time?

If you answer 'Yes' to either question, keep the notes in your short-term folder until you can say 'No' to both.

③ One Notebook per Subject

Imagine how straightforward it would be to sit down the night before each of your Leaving Cert exams and pull out *one single notebook* to revise everything for one subject! Well, this is a very achievable goal and one used by some of the best students.

The concept is simple. Purchase one notebook for each of your subjects and **only write notes for that subject in the designated notebook.**

- Clearly label the different topics within each notebook and use different colour pens, highlighters and other tools to make the content visually stimulating and appealing.
- It can be difficult to write clear, useful notes during a busy class, so some students like to use an A4 pad or spiral-bound notebook to quickly jot effective notes on the spot. Each evening, they take the time (never as long as you might think!) to transfer these notes to their subject notebooks. This way, their subject notebooks are clean, tidy and effective when it comes to revision time.
- Don't worry about the size of the notebooks when you start to use this system. Choose one uniform style for all of the notebooks (unless a certain type is needed for mathematics, science subjects and so on) and you can always purchase a second if you fill the first.

The best students are in tune with their own study habits and are always experimenting to see how they can get more from their time and efforts. Be curious! Think about your study process and about ways in which it can be tweaked.



To-Do Lists & Prioritising

To-Do Lists

To-do lists, also called task lists or checklists, **can be your best friend and most effective study tool** if used properly. Students, however,

often make to-do lists with the best of intentions and then despair as they find it difficult to even make a small dent in their ever-growing list! The problem is usually that you haven't done the proper preparation in putting your to-do list together. It becomes one long list of items with no way to differentiate between small, quick tasks and longer, more effort-intensive tasks.

As always, each student will have his/her own unique way of approaching this but there are a few simple principles that can really help you start making the most of your To-Do list!

- ✓ Figure out **when is your best time to make your to-do list**. Some students like to write it last thing at night when they have completed a long day's work and know what needs to be done the following day. Other students like to do one first thing in the morning when they are most rested after a good night's sleep.

Rename your 'To-Do' list to your 'Opportunities' list. Each day is filled with limitless opportunities; take joy in checking many off your list.

Dr Steve Maraboli



- ✓ **Don't leave anything off the list**, no matter how small. To-do lists work best when you can rely on them to be a comprehensive overview of your short-term (and occasionally medium-term) tasks.
- ✓ **The Golden Rule:** If a task can be completed in **5 minutes or less** then try to do it first thing before tackling any of the other items on your list. Taking half an hour to knock 5-6 items off your list at the start gives you a great boost and prevents your list from becoming too cluttered.

Prioritising

Prioritising well is an important step when creating your to-do list. It's not always easy to do it but here are some simple steps to help:

- ① Make sure **you have all the information** you need to decide how important or urgent the task is. Important does not necessarily mean urgent. For example, having your history research project ready for April is very important but it is not actually an urgent task in September.
- ② Urgent tasks require your immediate attention, so make sure you have a **due date** for each task before you begin to prioritise.
- ③ The more important a task, the greater the impact it will have on your studies/exams. **Label your tasks** in one of three different ways:



- ④ Create a **priority list** based on the labels above; urgent and important tasks first, followed by urgent tasks, and then lastly important tasks. Within each label section you'll have to decide which item has the highest priority. When you are deciding the order in which to tackle your to-do list, use this priority list to help you.
- ⑤ Remember 99.9% of Facebook® messages and other distractions on your phone or laptop are usually **very low priority**. So, try to stick to the list you create and you'll be amazed at how much time it frees up for you later in the evening!



Three Steps to the Perfect To-Do List

1

Step 1

Start with an unordered list of everything you know you need to do. Don't worry about details or perfect grammar in this step; instead just try to make sure you don't leave anything out.

2

Step 2

Examine each item by itself and try to clarify all of the details involved (date due, steps involved and so on). Make notes and scribble on your list from Step 1. Try to expand on all of the items on your list.

3

Step 3

Using your notes from Step 2, create a new list on a fresh piece of paper.

Any items requiring 5 minutes or less, place at the top of your list in the **5 minutes section**.

Any items due later that same day or the following day should be placed in the **Immediate section**. These are your high-priority items for now.

Anything less urgent or needing more information, place at the bottom of your list in the **General section**. These items are still important, but they are not urgent.

Point to note

If you create the list properly and manage your time well, the only items that are pushed forward to your next to-do list should be those in the **General section**. This may take some practice to get right but the extra productivity is worth it!

Top Tip!

Keep homework mentally stimulating. Don't spend hours and hours on one task; press pause and come back to it after trying something different. You will be more engaged with your work and less likely to become frustrated with slow progress.

