

# MANAGING UNIVERSITY TASKS IN A STRUCTURED WAY

DESPITE COVID-19

tips & techniques

The start of the semester is delayed for Leipzig's many students. This causes yet more uncertainty. Especially now it is important to keep a clear head and ask yourself what kind of preparations and tasks you can carry out for university.

The following are some **techniques and tips on how you can approach and master university-related tasks.**



## CREATING AN EVERYDAY STRUCTURE FOR STUDYING

Maybe there is a bachelor or master thesis, a term paper or an internship summary that still has to be written? Perhaps there is vocabulary to learn or other content that interests you and on which you could start researching literature?

Due to the current situation, many people are complaining about difficulties focusing on a task. It is therefore important to not get your expectations up too high and be considerate of yourself.

If there is currently nothing that can be done for university, it is still worth introducing and maintaining a daily structure in order to **keep up your spirits and give you a feeling of satisfaction.**

More information on the topic of everyday structure can be found here:



Tips & suggestions for the daily life at times of corona



# BACKWARD PLANNING

Backward planning is a **technique in work scheduling in which planning is carried out backwards from a fixed deadline**. This makes it predictable how much is still to be done and which milestones must be achieved in the near future to meet the deadline.

In this way, backward planning not only provides **concrete work plans**, but gives them a sense of urgency that is often missing, especially at the beginning of a task.

The **fixed deadline is noted in the calendar**, regardless of whether it was given or set by yourself. To get an overall picture, the weeks and days up to the deadline can be counted. In



addition, you can also enter milestones you want to reach.

# BACKWARD PLANNING

In order to explain this, we will use an example: Anne has to write a term paper with a fixed deadline.

The deadline for Anne’s term paper is May 15th, 2020. She has entered the deadline and the start of her planning activity. She has marked weekends and holidays, because she does not intend to work on these days. This results in 26 potential working days that span six weeks.

To be safe, she wants to be finished two days before submission and has therefore planned a two-day buffer before the deadline.

As her milestone, she would like to finish the literature research on day

März		April		Mai		Juni	
1 So		1 Mi Planung		1 Fr Tag der Arbeit		1 Mo Pfingstmontag	23
2 Mo	10	2 Do 1		2 Sa		2 Di	
3 Di		3 Fr 2		3 So		3 Mi	
4 Mi		4 Sa		4 Mo 20	18	4 Do	
5 Do		5 So		5 Di 21		5 Fr	
6 Fr		6 Mo 3	10	6 Mi 22		6 Sa	
7 Sa		7 Di 4		7 Do 23		7 So	
8 So		8 Mi 5		8 Fr 24		8 Mo	24
9 Mo	11	9 Do 6		9 Sa		9 Di	
10 Di		10 Fr Karfreitag		10 So Muttertag		10 Mi	
11 Mi		11 Sa		11 Mo 25	20	11 Do Fronleichnam	
12 Do		12 So Ostern		12 Di 26		12 Fr	
13 Fr		13 Mo Ostermontag	16	13 Mi Tupper		13 Sa	
14 Sa		14 Di 7		14 Do Tupper		14 So	
15 So		15 Mi 8		15 Fr Ausgabe		15 Mo	25
16 Mo	12	16 Do 9		16 Sa		16 Di	
17 Di		17 Fr 10		17 So		17 Mi	
18 Mi		18 Sa		18 Mo	21	18 Do	
19 Do		19 So		19 Di		19 Fr	
20 Fr		20 Mo 11	17	20 Mi		20 Sa	
21 Sa		21 Di 12		21 Do Christi Himmelfahrt		21 So	
22 So		22 Mi 13		22 Fr		22 Mo	26
23 Mo	13	23 Do 14		23 Sa		23 Di	
24 Di		24 Fr 15		24 So		24 Mi	
25 Mi		25 Sa		25 Mo	22	25 Do	
26 Do		26 So		26 Di		26 Fr	
27 Fr		27 Mo 16	18	27 Mi		27 Sa	
28 Sa		28 Di 17		28 Do		28 So	
29 So Beginn der Sommerzeit		29 Mi 18		29 Fr		29 Mo	27
30 Mo	14	30 Do 19		30 Sa		30 Di	
31 Di				31 So Pfingsten			

ten. She could also set dates for when she wants to finish the chapters of her paper.

## 2 PLANNING YOUR WEEK

It is best to roughly plan all remaining weeks until the deadline. The following weekly schedule can be used for this:



[Weekly schedule \(PDF\)](#)

In addition, you can make a more detailed plan for the upcoming week every weekend and add missing information or details.

Into the weekly schedule you:

- › first of all, enter all fixed dates for the week (wage work, doctor's appointments, etc.)
- › add tasks for every week of the entire learning/working period:

- Subdivide your project into smaller parts and these may in turn be subdivided into even smaller work units in order to plan the predicted length and number of work units.
- These should be realistic, i.e. achievable on the day in question.



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## PLANNING YOUR WEEK

If it is currently difficult for you to find tasks at all, you can start with small work units of 2x20 minutes per day. These can then slowly increase (see [YouTube links on the subject of Pomodoro method](#)). If you are already involved in the working process, make sure to start on time. Create a habit or a small ritual (e.g. make yourself a cup of tea and then immediately get started), which you repeat every morning before the start of your work.

- › **Planning breaks:** Plan a mini break after 45 minutes tops (at least five minutes), after two hours half an hour of break and after a four-hour work block a big break of at least one hour! When planning, pay attention to the



times when you can concentrate best.

# 2

## PLANNING YOUR WEEK

- › **One or two days of rest per week** should be included: What makes you feel good? How can you reward yourself for the productive working week and recharge your batteries?
- › **Collect all other activities and build them around the already existing appointments.** This can include everyday activities such as shopping and housework. Don't forget to include the necessary time to reach your appointments. At least as important as planning work is to include pleasant activities that serve as rewards, such as sports, walks, telephone calls, watching a film, taking a bath, etc.

Here are even more ideas and suggestions:



List of pleasant activities (PDF)



# 2

## PLANNING YOUR WEEK

### First weekly schedule

Anne first enters her fixed working hours and then determined the times for housework. As she is aware of the few days she has left, she wants to do as much as possible, especially on her days off.

For her work units, she starts at her regular starting time of work on Mondays in order to create a constant rhythm.

Anne also has an appointment with her roommate to watch a film and make a phone call, that she enters into her schedule. She can schedule all other activities freely and tries to maintain her balance through exer-

Wochentag	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Samstag	Sonntag
8:00						Freizeit	Freizeit
9:00							
10:00	Arbeit	HA	HA	HA	HA		
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00			Spazieren	Einkaufen	Haushalt		
15:00	Einkaufen	HA	HA		HA		
16:00	Kochen			Arbeit			
17:00							
18:00	Haushalt		Kochen		Kochen		
19:00							
20:00		Yoga			Yoga		
21:00	Film schauen		Videotelefonat				
22:00							
23:00							
24:00							

cise. In addition, she has to do some shopping and housework, which she does not want to postpone to the weekend.

# 2 PLANNING YOUR WEEK

## First weekly schedule

### Review after the first week:

Anne reflects on how things went and is a little frustrated because she did not manage to stick to the plan exactly. In the mornings she almost always had problems to start on time and was easily distracted. In the afternoon she was often exhausted and unfocused. She also noticed that she would like to sleep a little longer on Fridays and that she needs more exercise and breaks overall.

## Second weekly schedule

On the weekend Anne prepares a new weekly schedule for the following week, in which she includes her observations. First, she plans 15 minutes every morning for a ritual: She tidies up her desk and makes herself a cup of her favourite tea to get started.

In order to work more concentrated, she sets an alarm clock for all work units, which rings after 45 minutes. It reminds her to take a short break and get up from her desk regularly.

After 90 minutes of work she plans a 15-minute break. She has decided to

# 2

## PLANNING YOUR WEEK

look at her mobile phone only during breaks and to put it aside otherwise. She has reduced the afternoon work units from three to two hours, as this seems more realistic to her.

Anne now includes exercise for every day. In order to still be able to achieve the required learning time, she plans an additional work unit on Saturdays. This reduces the pressure to do all the housework during the week and increases the number of potential working days.

### Review after the second week:

Anne now notices that the adapted plan helps her to structure herself without overburdening herself. She feels more satisfied and thinks about what else she can add to the plan.

Wochentag	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Samstag	Sonntag
8:00							Freizeit
9:00		Schul	Schul	Schul			
10:00	Arbeit	HA	HA	HA	Schul	Schul	
11:00		Kurse Pause	Kurse Pause	Kurse Pause	HA	HA	
12:00					Kurse Pause	Kurse Pause	
13:00		Spazieren	Spazieren	Spazieren			
14:00			Einkaufen			Freizeit	
15:00	Einkaufen				Haushalt		
16:00	Kochen	HA	HA	Arbeit	HA		
17:00							
18:00	Haushalt		Kochen		Kochen		
19:00							
20:00		Yoga			Yoga		
21:00	Film		Telefonieren				
22:00							
23:00							
24:00							

She thinks it might also be helpful to plan more precisely what pleasant activities she has planned for the weekend.

# 3

## DAY PLANNING

Once the weekly plan is in place, you can start to improve the plan from day to day by checking what was accomplished that day and assess how you did in the evening.

**Review of your daily schedule:** At the end of the day, the activities can be checked off your list (as a reward). You can, for example, use different colors to mark how well a planned activity went or how you felt when completing it, which is often a very similar result. You may work with a traffic light system with three colors, as this can make the influence of planning and completion the activities on your mood even clearer.

Anne uses a traffic light system and takes green, yellow and red hooks to reflect at the end of the day how well she has managed to complete the set tasks.

Mittwoch	Donnerstag
Ritual ✓	Ritual ✓
HA ✓	HA ✓
kurze Pause	kurze Pause ✓
Spazieren ✓	Spazieren ✓
Einlaufen ✓	
HA ✓	Arbeit ✓
kochen ✓	
Telefonieren ✓	



# 3

## DAY PLANNING

### Preview

Also check if the plan for the next day is realistically planned and includes pleasant activities or if it should be adjusted. It is normal that the performance curve fluctuates and it can happen that you don't manage to do anything one day despite your plan. This should never lead to an attempt to achieve twice as much the next day, i.e. to catch up. It is advisable to continue normally according to plan.

Over the course of time, you will develop a better feeling for how much time is needed for a task and what kind of task is currently good for you.

As a little help, you can visualize the next day in the evening, you can imagine getting up in the morning, performing your rituals, sitting at your desk, taking breaks and doing the things you have planned for the day one after the other.



# MORE TIPS & SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CORONA EVERYDAY LIFE



Tips for staying at home with children (PDF)



Initial help on dealing with (negative) feelings (PDF)



Tips for organising your daily routine (PDF)



Weekly schedule (PDF)



List of pleasant activities to do at home (PDF)



Video about the Pomodoro technique (YouTube)



Mindfulness (PDF)



Annual Calendar



# PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING

free of charge

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Website of the Psychosocial Counselling

anonymous if desired

consultation in  
English possible