

The Un-Schedule technique explained

The un-schedule is a weekly calendar of all your committed activities. It helps you accomplish your goal(s) in two ways. First, in looking ahead to how much of your time is already committed, you will see the maximum time left over to work toward your goal(s). Second, by looking back on the un-schedule at the end of the week, you can see where your time actually went (very useful for the procrastinator with a vague concept of time!).

Think about the coming week and fill in all the activities you can predict you will do, no matter how trivial or important. Try to be specific with the amount of time needed and the time of day for these activities. If you are unsure, estimate. Remember to include all activities such as classes, work, sports, household chores, commuting times, meals, leisure time, time for sleep, and social events.

The blank spaces on the un-schedule reflect all of your uncommitted hours – hours that could be used for working toward your goal(s). You may find that you do not have much blank space on your un-schedule. This could indicate that you are overly busy with very little time to work towards your goal(s). Perhaps you are spreading yourself too thin and need to cut back on some activities. Or maybe the reverse is true and you have oodles of blank space on your un-schedule. Is it possible that you have too much free time on your hands? Perhaps you want to consider taking on other activities.

Now go back over your un-schedule and fill in some of the blank spaces with work towards your goal(s). It is important to prioritize when you do this (How imminent is the deadline? How much is this assignment worth? Do I really need to attend this optional lecture?). It is important not to fill up all the blank spaces as you need to leave room for unexpected events and for simple down-time.

You can track your progress on your goal(s) by blocking off the appropriate boxes of time on your un-schedule. Blocking off the boxes in this way can be very helpful as it helps you focus on what you *are* doing instead of on what you're *not* doing, and therefore reinforces the behavior. Blocking off the boxes can also serve as a small reward for your efforts, the way gold star stickers encouraged you in grade-school (we are all susceptible to the principles of conditioning, just like Pavlov's dogs!). At the end of the week you will see how much time was actually spent working toward your goal(s). This process is called "self-monitoring" and research has shown that this serves as incentive to work further on our goals.

The un-schedule technique and the self-monitoring strategy can help people (especially procrastinators) be more realistic about their time. Planning your time and counting up the hours spent working towards a goal is a very concrete activity. It is therefore difficult to fool yourself into believing that you spent a lot of time on something when you really haven't!

The weekly “un-schedule”

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00am							
7:00am							
8:00am							
9:00am							
10:00am							
11:00am							
12:00pm							
1:00pm							
2:00pm							
3:00pm							
4:00pm							
5:00pm							
6:00pm							
7:00pm							
8:00pm							
9:00pm							
10:00pm							
11:00pm							