

# TIME MANAGEMENT

for Teachers

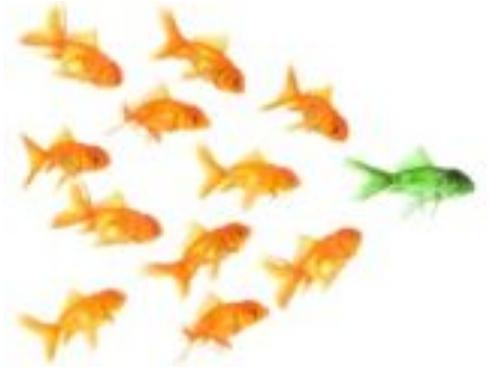


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# Time Management for Teachers

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## Too much to do?

*Do you often feel that you have too much to do and not enough time?*

*Do you feel like you are often playing 'catch up' and missing deadlines?*

*Do you feel overwhelmed with what is expected of you as a teacher?*

*Do you feel stressed by what you don't get done?*

*Do you often work late or at weekends yet still feel there is more to be done?*

At times, teaching can be overwhelming. You have units and lessons to plan, student work to mark, meetings to attend, reports to write, budgets to submit, emails to respond to, and, if there is any time left—lessons to teach. There is so much to do, and only a limited amount of time in which to accomplish it.



**Time management for teachers is far more complicated than for office workers or in other industries.** Teachers face unique challenges:

- Much of the day is already scheduled. There is very limited leeway in altering a class schedule, so teachers must work very efficiently with the very limited time that is flexible.
- An important component of a teacher's role is to be available for students and parents beyond the actual classroom teaching time.
- There are many other competing demands on teacher's time including demands from administrators, requests from the wider community, contributing to the school's on-going development and the need to continually professionally develop and update.
- Good teaching requires students to be engaged and suitably challenged. This requires high levels of both energy and skill.

*Research shows that the average classroom teacher will make more than 1 500 educational decisions every school day. In an average 6-hour school day, that's more than four decisions every minute. It is no wonder we feel over-whelmed by the demands of our profession.*



## Two keys to time management

Time doesn't change. No matter how organised we are, there are still always only 24 hours in a day.

All we can actually manage is ourselves and what we do with the time that we have available.

It is VITAL that we learn to work both **effectively** and **efficiently**. These two points are always the key to achieving as much as we can with the time we have available.

Time management is about control. When you allow time to control you, you never have enough of it. On the other hand, when you control your available time, you can allocate your time available to complete tasks and duties.

Time management is about using the time that you have available as productively as possible.

It IS about **working smarter – not harder**.

There are still the same number of hours in a day, days in a week and weeks in a year.

It is about how we use that time!

## Where does your time REALLY go?

It is important to identify the key issues that are contributing to inefficiency. Before starting out on a time management plan you need to spend a few days observing and reflecting. Watch for times when you are not using your time efficiently. The key question is always, "Is this the best use of my time?"

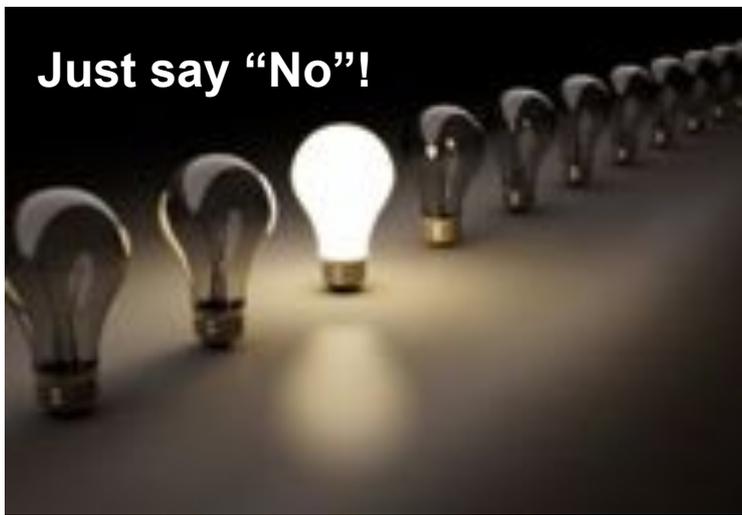
Watch for problem areas where improvements in systems or processes could make a positive impact. For example, do you spend a considerable amount of time explaining to students what they need to do in order to make up missed assignments? Is your time taken up by filing, emailing, phone calls, disruptions, copying material, marking the roll, repeating directions? Identify what your "time leaks" are and then find a way to plug them. You may be surprised at the activities that are soaking up your valuable time.

It is also useful to monitor your own energy levels and ability to concentrate. Try to identify the times of the day when you are most effective. Do not try to accomplish difficult tasks when you are tired. Save those for your peak periods.

*Are there 'windows' when you have a clear mind and uninterrupted time?*

*Are you using these 'windows' effectively to do your most important tasks?*





If you have too much on your plate, just say no.

Whilst this may seem obvious, it is one of the most difficult things to learn.

An important point to keep in mind - if you attempt to do too much, you risk, at best, not completing tasks to your standards, or at worst, burnout.

Teachers are special people. By our very nature, we are “people persons”. We like to go out of our way to help others and especially to help our students to succeed.

But as teachers, we have a tendency to say “Yes!” too many times. We volunteer for too many projects; we get on too many committees; we get involved in the lessons or units of our colleagues; or we willingly take on duties simply because somebody asked us to.

I believe that it is important to have a strong work ethic and to work hard. Responsibilities as a teacher are NOT limited to your own class and your own classroom.

It is important to achieve the satisfaction that comes from ‘making a difference’. Therefore you should get involved beyond your own classroom. However it is far more effective to have a significant impact in two or three areas than to have no impact in fifty areas because we are over committed.

Teachers tend to be workaholics - it's the nature of the job. As a result, you're likely to be confronted with lots of requests and lots of “invitations”. Use these ideas for saying “No” with style and grace:

*“I'd really like to, but I'm overcommitted right now and don't think I'd be able to do it justice.”*

*“Thanks for asking, but I really need to spend some more quality time with my children ... my spouse ... my friends ... myself.”*

*“I appreciate your confidence in me, but I have other tasks that demand a lot of my time at the moment.”*

*“I have a lot of commitments already on my calendar. Sorry I can't help this time!”*

*“No thank you. I'm not ready to take on that additional responsibility just yet.”*

## Getting organised



Whilst organisation is one of the keys to time management, many teachers find it very challenging. It seems to be part of our personality profile. I am not convinced it is an 'either or situation'. I believe it is a continuum. Some are at the buried in piles of "stuff" end and are way too disorganised. Some others are anal about organisation, can retrieve even the most trivial piece of paper in a nano second and spend way too much time sorting and filing. "A place for everything, and everything in its place," is their motto.

Great time managers are organised AND effective. They use their time well without getting carried away and becoming obsessive compulsive.



It is vital to use ONE daily planner or diary. Keep all your "to do" lists there. Write everything on it that you need to accomplish. Memories fail at times. Some teachers keep a planner on their desk at all times, some use large desk calendars. Whichever type you prefer, use it.

A big time waster, according to many teachers, is "hunting and gathering". Looking for that missing lesson plan, trawling the internet, library and resource rooms for resources, collecting and distributing classroom equipment to students, searching out that IEP that was due yesterday, procuring books for a unit and finding that missing form that was due to the office yesterday. (If you are one of the lucky ones who are already organised, skip ahead to the list of time-saving tips.)



If you are one of the chronically disorganised, the task may seem daunting. It is important to start with one area at a time and work your way around your classroom. An important place to start with is your own desk. The second area for attention is your filing system. After you have organised one area, give yourself a reward for a job well done!

The following sections include tips for getting organised.

There are basically three types of files.

**Working files** are the files you need most days, eg class lists, anecdotal records, assessment results as well as folders on current projects. They should be kept within arm's reach. A hanging drawer in your desk is ideal. Working files should contain the following:

*Fingertip and routine information*

– these files contain important information that you refer to often and need at your fingertips eg phone lists and any forms you regularly use.



*'To be Discussed' files*

– create a file for regular meetings (eg Staff Meeting, Year Level Meeting, Curriculum meetings) and a file for each staff member you regularly interact with (eg Principal or Deputy, Curriculum Co-ordinator, Learning Support Teacher). Use the file to put information that needs to be discussed at that meeting or with that colleague. This saves time by raising relevant issues with the right people at one pre-arranged time rather than a number of incidental, unprepared meetings.

*Current projects files*

– projects that you are currently working on (eg trips, camps, committee projects etc) should each be contained in a file. Clean out these files at the beginning of each term to ensure they are current.

*Tickler files*

– establish files numbered from 1 to 31 (representing each day of the month) and a file for each month of the year. The files are best arranged with the first numbered file being the current date and then cycling back to 1 after 31.

The month files are then placed after the numbered files with the current month at the front. The current day and month are at the front and are moved to the back of that section at the end of the day.

Use this system to store paperwork that is date sensitive. The Tickler file is designed to assist in meeting deadlines. It works on the basis of considering when the task is due and making a decision about when it will be undertaken.

The document is filed in the relevant Tickler file (the numbered file if it is in the next 31 days or the relevant month if it is later). The document will then 'surface' on the designated date when you had planned to undertake the task. It is essential that the Tickler file is checked each day. After checking the Tickler file for the day you will have identified tasks that you have designated to complete that day.

Having a look in the Tickler file should be done as part of the decision of what your priorities are.

A Tickler file also makes it easy to retrieve those forms that are always requested of teachers. File it in the corresponding Tickler file.

## Email - problem or solution?

The original problem of clutter was paperwork. Email is the new millennium version and may be an even greater problem. Although it is a wonderful communication tool it needs to be very carefully managed or it can waste a huge amount of time and create a vast amount of clutter.



The overuse of 'Reply All' and the ease with which we can send (and be sent) a document means that we are being inundated with even more information. This needs to be managed or we will lose even more time and be swamped even more. Deleting emails is VITAL. Too many emails in your Inbox adds to your stress levels, creates frustration that you don't appear to be getting things done and is time consuming as you try to retrieve documents.

It is important to move emails out of the Inbox. It is important to implement the 'Do it now!' philosophy. Wherever possible handle each email once. It is recommended that you follow these tips:

1 Read the email only when you have time to action it. Turn OFF the sound alert that advises you of incoming messages and resist the temptation to look at your emails at multiple times during each day. Allocate two or three periods of time each day when you will just read and respond to emails.

2 Delete if it isn't necessary to save. Remember to ask yourself, "Could I get this information again if I needed it?"

3 Reply, if possible, to complete the correspondence.

4 Make a decision about WHEN you will be in a position to respond and move the email message to that date on your electronic calendar. (This is the same approach as using a 'Tickler' file - see filing). If you are not sure how to do this with your operating system (eg Windows Vista, Windows XP, MS Outlook, Mac etc) ask for help. Most programs also have a very useful 'Help' menu.

If you are not using an electronic calendar then create a Pending/Follow up folder in your email software. Drag and drop the emails that you need further time to respond to. Return to these emails once you have the required information.

5 If you want to store the email or an attachment save it into the relevant folder on your computer.

6 Watch out for mailing lists. Your IN box can quickly become filled with additional emails if you subscribe to free mailing lists. If you are receiving emails that aren't adding value, unsubscribe.

7 Before reading an email read the subject line and who sent it before opening it. Delete if necessary.

8 If your backlog of emails is too big to manage, set a cut off date, ie beginning of last term and create an Archive folder in your email account. Save all emails before that date into the archive folder. Most people won't ever refer to these again. Delete the Archive folder at the end of the year.

# Just do it! - overcoming procrastination

**“The beginning is the half of every action”** Greek proverb

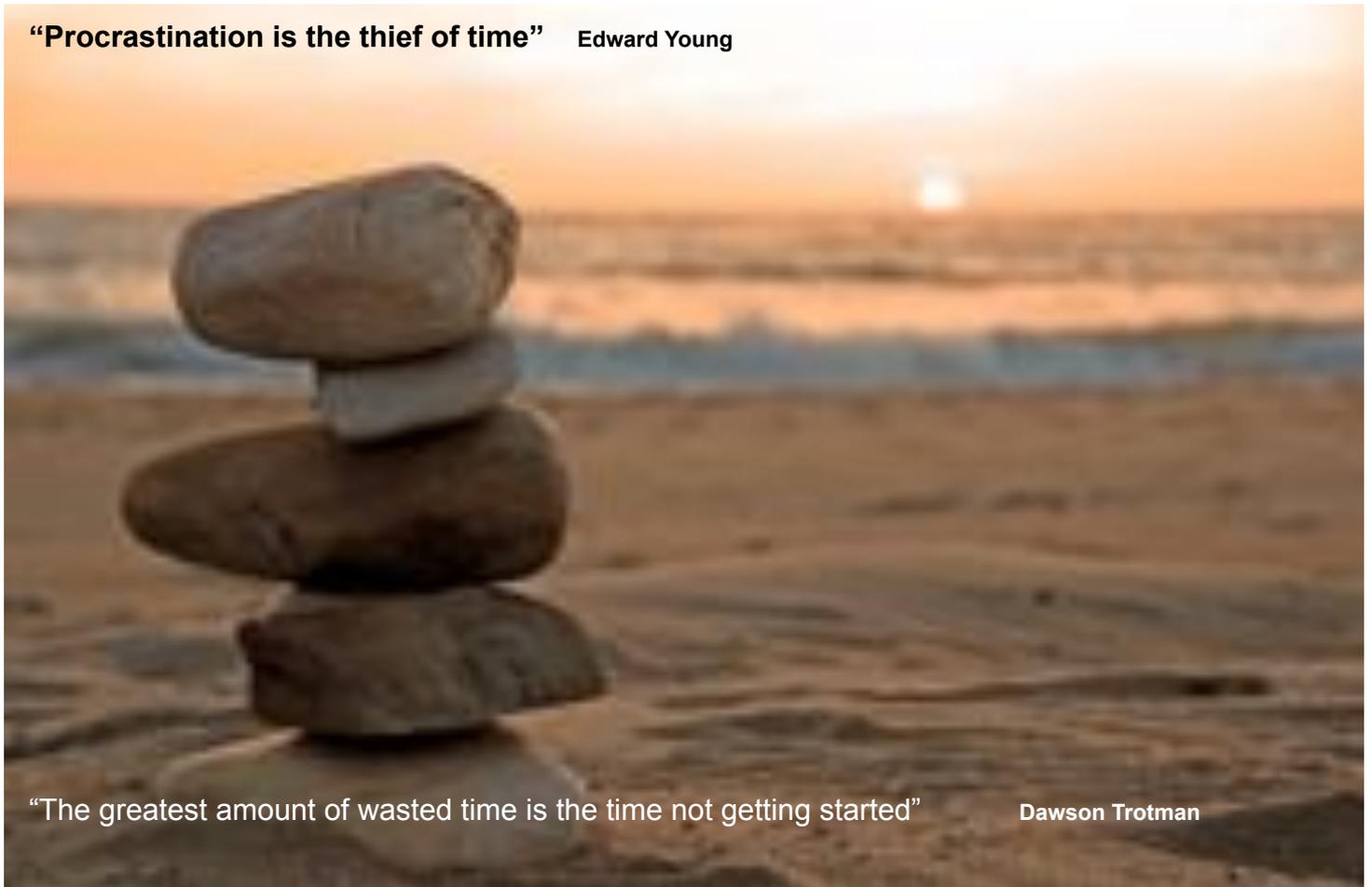
‘Do it now!’ is the best way to get more done. Procrastinating by continually putting off tasks is a HUGE time waster. The most significant change in behaviour that you can make is a commitment to take action and NOT waste time procrastinating or doing things you ‘like doing’ but are a lower priority than what you ‘should’ do ...

Most time efficiency experts advise that the first rule for improving personal efficiency is “Act on an item the first time you read or touch it.”

For example a lot of time is wasted reading emails, intending to reply but then going on to something else. Inevitably we re-read emails and other correspondence a number of times before finally taking action.

The efficient response is to ‘Do it now!’ If you are not going to act on your paperwork, don’t waste time looking at it. Needlessly re-reading your email or everything on your desk before acting achieves nothing. Do it once!

**“Procrastination is the thief of time”** Edward Young



**“The greatest amount of wasted time is the time not getting started”**

Dawson Trotman

# Maximise your instructional time

As a classroom teacher, you want to engage your students in productive learning time. This is time when your students are engaged in meaningful and appropriate work. The more productive learning time you have, the more your students will learn. The challenge, of course, is in creating a classroom that maximises that time.

You may have less time to teach than you think. Lunch, breaks, down-time between lessons, moving from one classroom to another, interruptions and other periods of non-instructional time account for at least 27 percent of an elementary school day. In many classrooms, that figure climbs beyond 40 percent.

## Guard solid blocks of teaching time

With the many disruptions in a day it can be worthwhile to look out for, and guard, any solid blocks of teaching time that are available. You might hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign outside your door during those times.

Timetabling is a complicated and complex task. However through working with the person who arranges the timetable in your school you can raise the awareness of the need to have appropriate blocks of time. The length of time that is 'appropriate' for your class will depend on their age and the learning intention. It may be worthwhile raising the issue to secure your principal's help in scheduling withdrawal programs around those blocks and ask parents not to schedule medical or dental appointments then.

To minimise lost time it is important to plan for smooth transitions between lessons. Transitions are those times during the day when you move from one activity to the next. Because students work at different paces and different levels, some may be able to make the transitions faster than others. Transition time often leaves openings for misbehavior and disruptions. To avoid this it is important to make your expectations for transitions clear and establish routines for transition times:

- Provide opportunities for students to practice those routines: "When you come in, be sure you complete your 'Ready! Checklist' before you sit down."
- Let students know when an activity will end: "In two minutes we'll have a whole-class review of this problem solving approach."
- Let students know what they can expect in any subsequent or follow-up activity: "After lunch, we're going to continue working in reading groups."
- Be sure your lessons have clear beginnings and endings. Review the lesson objectives before the lesson begins and again at the conclusion of the lesson.



## Time saving tips

### Making Resources

Whilst making resources is time consuming, it is better to take a little extra time to '*do it right*' and be able to re-use resources again. For example laminating a sheet (eg a number facts grid) and using whiteboard markers to practice allows you to re-use the sheet.

Using any available teacher aide time efficiently is vital.

Whether making resources yourself or asking an aide to prepare resources it is more efficient to group tasks together.

If you don't have any teacher aide time allocated to regularly support you, consider asking for some '*one off*' support to prepare some resources (eg on a pupil free day).

If that isn't possible consider paying an aide to do a couple of hours of work for you. It is important to consider how much your time is worth to you.

### Moving Between Lessons

Try to use transition time between specialist lessons effectively. Chanting number facts or playing mental games (eg Buzz) can engage children, help them to embed learning and use time efficiently.

### Homework trays

Obtain coloured baskets or trays from your local office supply store. Designate these as homework bins for your students by colour:

 Red

Place completed homework here.

 Green

Get your homework assignment from here.

 Blue

Obtain homework assignments that were given out when you were absent from this bin.

 Yellow

Place incomplete homework here. (This can alert you to students who did not understand the assignment, had difficulty completing it, or simply chose not to do it.)

### Classroom greeter

Assign and rotate the job of "classroom greeter" to students on a weekly basis. This person's responsibility is to greet any and all persons who come into your classroom. This frees you to continue with a lesson rather than taking time out to attend to the visitor. Most visitors are there to deliver information (the buses are late) or obtain information (student absences). Students can easily handle these tasks.

### Lining Up to See You

Many students waste a lot of time if they have to line up to wait to see you to have their work corrected.

In most instances it is more efficient for you to go to them.

If they need to come to see you set up a routine such as a list on the board when they are ready.

Once they are the next in line they rub their name off the list and stand in the queue.

That way you only have a maximum of two students waiting. The one you are working with and the next student.

Other students return to their seat when their name is on the list and continue their work.





## References

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**Steve Francis** MScM, BEd, Dip T has over 20 years teaching experience as a classroom teacher, teaching principal and principal.

After working in a range of schools across Queensland he ventured with his wife and family to Hong Kong. For four years Steve was the Principal of a large international primary school.

After four great years of adventure the family returned to Brisbane to take on new challenges.

Since returning in 2008 Steve has worked on a range of projects to support teachers and school leaders to reach their potential.

The gr8 people resources are helping busy schools align their programs and simplify the complex task of teaching.

Through leadership programs, professional development and speaking at conferences Steve encourages all to make the most out of life.

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**This book includes great practical tips for getting organised, prioritising, looking after yourself and making the most of the time that you have available.**

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