

Pacing Yourself

Below is a list of some of the things you're invited to do during Week 2 of the module. Time needs to be found for a range of activities, including reading, going online, thinking and making notes.

Activity

In the space next to each item, note down the day of the week and/or time of day when you think you're most likely to tackle each of these tasks.

read approximately 30 pages of text (not all at once!) (2 hours 40 minutes)	
jot down brief thoughts in response to a question (10 minutes)	
watch a DVD clip and make some notes on its content (45 minutes)	
discuss film images of Cleopatra at a tutorial or in an online forum (2 hours)	
read some additional poems and short extracts (30 minutes)	
analyse and make notes on images of sculptures and coins (20 minutes)	
note down your own view about Cleopatra's African or European heritage (1 hour)	
take stock of the information in the first module chapter (45 minutes)	

This activity should have got you thinking about how you're going to allocate your time week by week. Revisit these notes at the end of Week 2 to see how long these tasks actually took you; judging how much time you will need for specific tasks will get easier with practice. Remember:

- studying *The Arts Past and Present* should take an average of twelve hours each week
- you may need to put in more time than this during the first three weeks or so, while you're finding your way around the module website and establishing a study routine
- once you've settled into a rhythm, you can plan ahead and build in the occasional light week
- don't let study take over and squeeze all the social, leisure or family time out of your life.

There are active steps you can take in order to pace yourself and manage your time. Read and act on the material that follows.

The activity below will help you to assess your time management skills and give you some guidance on becoming a more effective and organised learner.

Activity

Tick the boxes next to the statements that apply to you.

- I have trouble starting jobs
- I meet deadlines
- I usually arrive on time
- I get easily distracted
- I use my time efficiently
- I am a last-minute person
- I can juggle more than one task
- I know when to stop working

Thinking about these statements will reveal something of your own strengths and weaknesses as a time manager. To get around the problems of task avoidance and ‘last-minute’ syndrome, you should begin by pinpointing key deadlines and planning how to use the time leading up to them.

Use tools like the AA100 study planner, your diary or a personal organiser to map out your commitments over the first couple of weeks of the course.

Become an active learner by drawing up your own study schedule for Weeks 2 and 3. Accept that you may need to adjust that schedule when some tasks take longer than expected or when the demands of real life intervene. See the next section where we have created two sample schedules for these two weeks.

Activity

Doing the following tasks at the start of each study week will help you to keep organised.

1. Make a ‘to-do’ list for the current study week
2. Highlight the essential items
3. Identify the most urgent task on the list
4. Estimate how long each task will take you
5. Decide on an order in which to tackle the tasks
6. Work out what you can *realistically* postpone, if anything!
7. Slot the essential items into a study timetable for the rest of this week.

Time spent reflecting on the way you study will not be time wasted. Effective learners get to know what kind of learners they are. To become more aware of your study habits, and the pace of learning that suits you best, you might like to keep a study diary during one of Weeks 2–4 of the course. Include a record of what you did and when, and roughly how long you spent on each task.

At the end of each study session, write a paragraph in your diary about what you’ve achieved. Have you, for example, broken the ice by posting a message to an online course forum? Or have you got your head round a difficult argument in the current chapter?

Note down too, at the end of each study session, how you feel. Confident? Muddled? Surprised at how far you've got? Exhausted? You can use these feelings to help you identify your most productive study slots.

What do your responses to these questions tell you about your current abilities as a time manager? You might like to start a private study journal, or keep a running 'to-do' list. You will find this sort of evidence extremely useful when you do the two reflective assignments for the course. But whichever personal strategies you adopt, try to reassess your time management skills on a regular basis: use this course as a way of learning to exploit your available time, rather than letting shortage of time dictate what you do.

Sample schedules for Weeks 2 and 3 of AA100

Following the Preparatory Week in which you have time to get set up and organised, in Week 2 you will be expected to begin work on the first chapter of the course material. Here is what the timetable for Weeks 2 and 3 of the course might look like for an imaginary student with a part-time job; someone whose commitments, of course, may look very different from your own. This student's OU study sessions are in red, and the variable shifts in her job are marked as 'work'. Check the study planner on the module website to help you fill in your own timetable. When you draw up your schedule, you might choose, as this student has done, to include a space for notes on anything that is special about a particular week. You might also find it useful, as this student has, to allocate yourself some free time in advance to ensure you give yourself time off from your studies and work commitments.

Why take up time with activities like this?

Putting together an OU study schedule is time consuming in itself; and you might wonder whether it's really worth doing tasks like this when you're already busy, and they don't actually get you any marks. Being a student doesn't just come naturally, however. Expecting yourself to be able to manage your study, read efficiently and produce effective notes and written assignments without any *preparation* or *practice* is unrealistic.

The activities in this book and the module books are designed to give you some practice in what is sometimes called 'studentship'. Even if you've been a student before, it's likely that you'll need to test out the types of reading, online exchange, writing and use of feedback involved in a distance learning course. Because much of your OU study is undertaken on your own, you have to be ready to adopt a hands-on approach.

You might find some of the tasks we ask you to attempt hard right now, but they will become easier with practice. Remember that developing your study skills is a *process* which will be ongoing throughout this module and in your progress towards your degree. We don't expect you to have become an expert by the time you reach the end of this book! The activities we've provided are a hands-on way of ensuring that you really are learning something.

Where to find planning tools

You should use the study planner on the module website, or you could use the calendar functions on your computer or PDA, to draw up your schedule, and perhaps integrate it with an organiser you already use. Your university course is not the only context in which you need to focus on and see through a project in a set amount of time. You may find that a

simple timetable like the ones above is easiest to get to grips with – in which case you could create one using your computer and print it out. Or just put one together with pen and paper. Whichever method you adopt for pacing yourself, remember that your timetable is a plan of action, not an end in itself!

The [Skills for OU Study](#) website contains a wealth of resources to help you manage your time.