**Creating Effective Routines**

1. **Routines Are Good:  Using Your “Routine” to Help You Meet Short-Term and Long-Term Goals**  
     
   Get yourself used to a routine that will work for you and help you succeed in law school. You probably already have several routines that have become commonplace to you. Ordering pizza for dinner and watching Netflix on a Friday night are routines. Game Night on Wednesday with friends is a routine. Going to the gym is a routine. **There is nothing wrong with routine as long as your routine is full of best practices for getting you through law school.**  
     
   This way you can stay on top of due dates and you will not scramble to finish something last-minute. **Your routine will also help you pace yourself.** Rushing to finish a chapter a few minutes before class is not productive. Neither is reading half the casebook a week into the course. By planning ahead and sticking to a routine, you will fill your study schedule with goals to carry out that day, that week, and that month. By sticking to those goals you will manage your time efficiently and cut your stress. You will find that you will have plenty of time to let your inner Elle Woods loose.
2. **Where You Study**  
     
   First, examine if the study space you have is working for you. Questions to ask yourself now:  
     
   •    Do you have a study space that works for you? Relatively quiet, lacking distractions, comfortable, familiar.  
   •    Do you tend to get distracted during your studying?  Do you check your phone, look up when people walk by, or check Facebook often?  
     
   If your study space isn’t working for you, find one that does work. If people are constantly walking by and talking to you, you need to find a new space or put a “tent” sign up telling people that you enjoy talking to them AFTER you get your work done.
3. **Managing External & Internal Distractions**  
     
   Second, examine if you are getting distracted during studies.  Distractions can be external (other people or things) or internal (your own thoughts wandering).  Eliminate external distractions first. Put your cell phone somewhere away from you where you can’t see it or feel it.  Studies have shown that people who have their cell phones on them (even if they are turned off) are much more likely to be distracted than people who do not have their cell phones.  Second, do not have Facebook or other social media open on your laptop. Turn off the notifications on your laptop.  
     
   If you’re experiencing internal distractions – sometimes our minds wander as we study or finding yourself struggling with putting off studying, try the “pomodoro” technique.  Using the “pomodoro” technique is a useful tool to help you maintain your focus through an afternoon or evening of studying. The technique is to focus intently on studying something for 25 minutes. Set a timer for 25 minutes (Of course you may need your phone for this; there are some apps to help you keep this time: Be Focused automatically times your study times in 25-minute increments.) After 25 minutes, you take a 5-minute break.  After four of these, you take a 15- or 20-minute break. And by break, I mean **BREAK**.  You don’t think of your work. You take a walk, rest, relax.  Do this until you get done what you need to get done.  
     
   If you’re really struggling with Procrastination, do something for five minutes at a time. Usually, that will help you realize that it isn’t so bad after all. Break things down into much smaller, bite-sized tasks and that will help a lot with the “fear” of conquering a larger project.  
     
   In addition, periodically changing where you study is good for learning. So if you find yourself losing focus in your current study space, find a new one and change things up a bit.
4. **When You Study (setting up a “routine”)**  
     
   First, take out a calendar and block out the class hours and sleep hours. Remember you need at least 7-8 hours of sleep. Then, take a look at your syllabi.  Put into your calendar any dates for quizzes, midterms or due dates for memos or research assignments in Legal Practice.  
     
   Now, ask yourself when you are most alert and when you focus best during the day. For example, if you work best in the morning, review your class schedule to see how many mornings you have to study. Work study time into those mornings. Because law school does require a lot of reading, you will very likely need to use time in the evenings for studying. But pay attention to when you are at your best and do the most challenging tasks during those times. Do the less challenging tasks when you know you will be most fatigued.
5. **Set Priorities According to Your Goals**  
     
   First, consistently remind yourself why you are here. Write down right now in a prominent place the answer to this question:  
     
   **Why Did I Apply to Law School? Why Am I Here?**  
     
   Keep the answer to that question front and center during your time here. I had a former student who told me she looks at this every morning before she sets out to law school. Place it somewhere so that you can periodically remind yourself of the “prize” at the end of all this. There will be days when you will wonder why you’re here. Remind yourself regularly about your dreams and long-term goals as a lawyer.  
     
   Second, you want to spend the majority of your time during the week on projects and tasks that are consistent with your important goals. You also want to block out space in your calendar for free time and hobbies. Setting priorities and using your time wisely requires that you plan ahead. Use one night or morning a week to review or set your schedule for the week.
6. **Study Time (some tips)**  
     
   My recommendation is to study for one hour or so at a time. Then get up and take a 5-minute break. Listen to some music, take a walk, grab a coffee, or make yourself a snack. Studies have shown that people who study in one hour increments (or a bit more) and take regular short breaks are much more productive than people who study for several hours at a time with no break. For these breaks, your priority is to relax for a short time and get back to your work. Talking to a friend or scrolling through Instagram can open yourself to distractions. Suddenly, you’re making weekend plans or worrying about what someone posted on their feed. You reserve these activities for your free time.  
     
   In addition, after you’ve studied for three hours (taking these short, five minute breaks), give yourself a longer break of at least a half hour.
7. **Don’t Forget About Your Health**  
     
   One thing to keep in mind is your mental and emotional health and well-being. You will spend long hours sitting in class, sitting in the library studying, sitting in a coffee shop reading, and so on. A successful time management plan cannot forget to include room for fun. Law school does not bring an end to your social life. Your success in law school will depend on your health. It does not matter how great your study schedule is if you are stressed. You must make time to keep yourself healthy and happy.  
     
   Schedule regular study breaks and a few hours each week of “off time.” A stressed mind and body simply do not function well. You won’t keep information or process it as effectively. Your study schedule should also leave room for 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night, a balanced diet, and exercise.  
     
   Plan a diet built around brain foods. Consider incorporating more fish (specifically salmon & tuna), wholegrains, leafy vegetables, avocado, blueberries, nuts and seeds into your diet. These foods are healthy and packed with important nutrients. They will help increase your focus, memory, and energy.  
     
   In addition, please make an appointment with [Prof. Thompson](mailto:kthompson@rwu.edu) or [Dean Lalli](mailto:llalli@rwu.edu) or the [counseling center](https://www.rwu.edu/undergraduate/student-life/health-and-counseling/counseling-center) if you need additional support. We are here to help!