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# Honorable Time Management

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## **Honorable Time-Management**

By Ashley Barnett\*

Although college courses require only a few hours of in-class time per week, students struggle to balance academics, friends, hobbies, and other responsibilities. It is evident that those attending college must learn the best way to take control of their time outside of the classroom in order to maximize their overall university experience. A student could start by developing and maintaining time management of homework. Poor time management habits acquired in young adulthood may set a precedent for poor time management habits in later adulthood. This could impact future academic endeavors, personal responsibilities, careers, and families. Also, the lack of time management of homework has the potential to place pressure and stress on a student. When the demands of school feel too large to defeat, stress impacts the student's physical and mental wellbeing.

Some studies have investigated the relationship between time management and intellectual accomplishment, suggesting that managing time well is positively correlated with academic success (Britton & Tesser, 1991; Panek, 2014). According to Panek (2014), it is possible that today's technology, including social media, YouTube, and Netflix, offers unlimited outlets for college students to fill their free time outside the classroom and avoid their schoolwork. Therefore, self-control must be exhibited in order to manage time well and avoid overuse of media or other means of procrastination.

In addition, previous research has suggested that those attending college must learn the best way to take control of their time outside of the classroom in order to maximize their overall university experience and avoid the feeling of stress. A study conducted by Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips (1990) sought to observe if there was a relationship between a college student's time management skills and his or her academic performance as well as stress levels. The researchers found that when students believed they were in control of their time, they displayed greater academic performance as well as greater work/life satisfaction. Similarly, Misra and McKean (2000) proposed that time management of schoolwork and perceived academic stress are negatively correlated.

The present study was designed to increase the time management of homework in an undergraduate honors student studying psychology through the behavioral treatment method of self-management. Time management behavior, perceived stress, and procrastination through media and technology will be compared and observed during baseline and treatment phases.

### **Methods**

For the purposes of this study, time management was defined as the ability to complete school-related tasks according to a written and planned daily schedule. The participant was an honors student and lived on her college campus. She was a graduating senior and her intense course

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requirements and patterns of procrastination of homework made her a practical participant in this personal study.

The data was recorded by means of self-evaluation and frequency. Each day, checkmarks were placed next to completed assignments. Then, the number of tasks that were completed out of the total number of tasks written down for the specific day was calculated. In other words, the frequency of time management was recorded in percentage of opportunities.

From September 19, 2016 to November 13, 2016, a period of eight weeks, an ABAB reversal experimental design was implemented in order to observe time management of schoolwork during two baseline and two treatment phases. This design allowed the student to confirm that the target behavior was truly increasing with treatment as well as make adjustments to the way the behavior was treated when necessary.

In order to increase the target behavior, self-management treatment was implemented. Techniques of self-management in the treatment phases included goal setting, self-monitoring, and positive reinforcement. Several self-management techniques were implemented in order to consistently complete school-related tasks according to a written and planned schedule because studies suggested that successful self-managers used multiple strategies to modify their target behaviors (Choi & Chung, 2012).

The first self-management technique that was applied during the treatment periods was goal setting. In light of Britton and Tesser (1991)'s research that displayed a significant relationship between GPA and short-range planning of time, daily schedules were utilized as opposed to weekly ones. It is possible that students with higher GPAs are skilled at short range planning, which includes adjusting to constantly fluctuating schedules, assignment deadline changes, varying sleep schedules, or last minute personal plans (Britton & Tesser, 1991). Thus, a written schedule was created at the beginning of each day that allotted a realistic amount of assignments and time windows for studying on a particular day. Consequently, long-term assignments were broken down into smaller, concrete and feasible daily goals (Jackson, 2009; Xu, 2016). In addition, future exams were considered when writing daily schedules. Evenly distributing studying throughout the week has the potential to increase student grades due to greater material retention and furthermore decrease the stress and anxiety that cramming for exams creates (Perrin et al., 2011).

It was also important to set realistic goals for time management to be successful. Realistic goals allowed positive reinforcement to be applied and increased the probability that time management of schoolwork would occur in the future (Miltenberger, 2016). A fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement was used for the first treatment phase. Meeting daily goals for three days in a row was exchanged for a small reward of a specialty coffee from Starbucks. Meeting daily goals for all seven days of the week was exchanged for the ability to pursue a reward of choice, such as a fun experience with friends, time to pursue a hobby, or shopping. The fixed ratio schedule of reinforcement was changed to a continuous schedule of reinforcement for the second treatment phase in order to increase the target behavior more consistently. Also, the student often felt fatigued in the afternoon and went to grab a coffee from Starbucks before starting homework as opposed to after completing everything on her written and planned daily schedule. As a result, the

positive reinforcement was changed to watching a show or movie of choice on Netflix once all daily goals were accomplished.

The third and final technique of self-management used was self-monitoring. Since the percentage of opportunities of time management was recorded daily, this allowed the student to self-evaluate advancement toward the goal of completing the planned, daily tasks, seven days a week. It was also meant to allow the student to develop a positive view of academic productivity and personal goals. Through these three self-management techniques, the ultimate goal of treatment was to complete the planned, daily tasks, seven days a week and consistently display time management of schoolwork.

### Baseline and Treatment Results

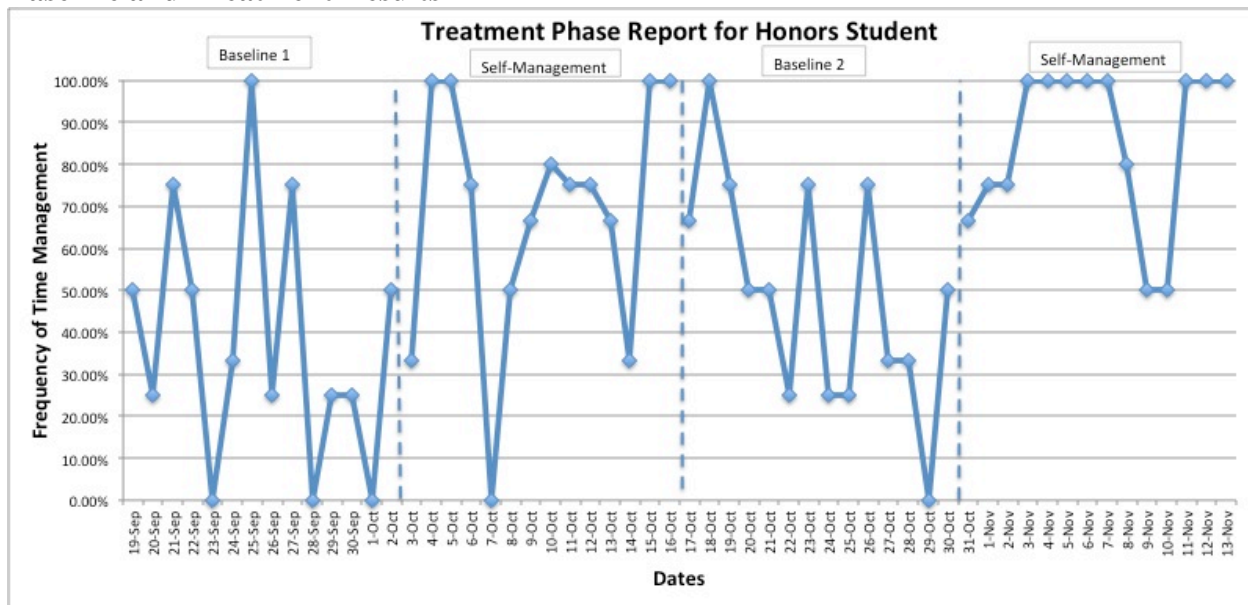


Figure 1. Frequency of time management of homework in percentage of opportunities recorded throughout the eight week ABAB research design.

Although it was possible that the student would demonstrate a reduction or no change in time management after treatment was implemented, the techniques of self-management treatment did increase the target behavior of time management of homework during treatment phases as desired.

### Discussion

If the self-management techniques applied during treatment were effective, it was expected to not only provide the student with a greater ability to manage time wisely, but also reduce stress or anxiety and decrease procrastination due to media and technology.

During the entire first baseline phase (9/19/2016-10/2/16), the student did feel stress and anxiety caused by schoolwork. She desired to complete all assignments and tasks well, but found that she did not have enough time to do so because of unrealistic daily goals, procrastination, starting assignments or tasks too late in the day, or failing to begin projects far enough in advance. She noted that she did have free time to complete schoolwork during the day, but most days felt like

she did not have enough energy after class to get moving and start working at a decent hour. She often put off the schoolwork until after she rested, had coffee, or ate dinner.

During the first treatment phase (10/3/16), the self-management techniques including goal-setting, self-monitoring, and positive reinforcement were implemented. However, a little more than halfway through this baseline period, the student recognized that prolonged extinction of poor time management was occurring due to a concurrent schedule of reinforcement. She was buying a regular cup of coffee from Starbucks whenever she felt she needed a jolt of energy, so poor time management was unintentionally reinforced and extinction was not occurring the way it should have been. Likewise, the desire for a specialty Starbucks drink was not strong enough to act as a positive reinforcement. Therefore, the positive reinforcement in the second treatment phase needed to be changed.

During the second baseline phase (10/17/2016-10/30/16), assignments and tasks began to pile up, which led to discouragement and the desire to pursue procrastination, social media, or television in order to escape the stress of schoolwork. Since there was an immediate reinforcement of a competing behavior, the delayed positive outcome seemed less appealing (Critchfield & Kollins, 2001; Miltenberger, 2016). For example, although watching television for a few hours offers a smaller gratification than getting into graduate school, it has a greater impact on time management of homework simply because it is immediately reinforced with entertainment and the ability to detach from reality for a moment. Also, the importance of time management was clearer than it had been in the first baseline phase. Poor time management on Monday influenced the student's ability to manage time well on Tuesday because she was busy trying to complete the uncompleted tasks leftover from Monday as well as the responsibilities assigned for Tuesday. Since the student had seen the positive effects of managing time well, it was hard to completely disregard following daily schedules although treatment was not being applied. Therefore, this baseline phase was slightly higher than the first.

During the final treatment phase (10/31/16-11/13/16), the student observed that her time management was more likely to be reinforced when she did her homework in the library versus in her bedroom. Therefore, the student began to do homework in the library more often because she knew this environment allowed her to complete all her tasks. As a result, she was able to receive her positive reinforcement or reward of watching a show or movie of choice on Netflix. This continuous reinforcement worked as a reinforcer when delivered because the student knew she was not procrastinating, but simply rewarding herself for completing responsibilities and achieving the daily goal. Fine-tuning the positive reinforcement made treatment more effective, and a considerate amount of stress was absent in comparison to the previous baseline phase.

Overall, baseline phases seemed to be less consistent than treatment phases. This displays that self-management treatment worked and allowed the student to adhere to completing school-related tasks according to a written and planned daily schedule. Frequency of time management tended to decrease dramatically on weekends, suggesting that weekends need to be considered in future experiments since they are typically less structured and more relaxed than weekdays.

Finally, as with previous studies conducted earlier by other researchers, this study demonstrated that control of time is beneficial for a college student's academic and personal wellbeing. It should

be noted that this experiment has successfully increased the student's time management, reduced stress when treatment is applied, set a precedent for positive time management habits in the future, and taught the student how she might enjoy watching television responsibly and with greater gratification after daily responsibilities are taken care of.

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