

Elaine's timetable

Doing a part-time time research degree and a full-time job

I am a 29-year-old research student with a full-time job studying part-time towards an EdD at the University of Barchester. I work in academia so a doctorate is directly relevant to my job and future career progression. I chose to study part-time because I simply could not afford to study full-time. I do not receive days off in order to study, instead I have to fit my studies around my normal work tasks and home life. An EdD is part taught so at the moment I am studying modules while investigating my research topic. I have now completed my first year and had two papers accepted at International conferences. Managing my job, my research and my home life has not been easy. I cannot offer you a magic bullet to make part-time study with a full-time job easy because the fact is it is hard work. I can, however, share with you the lessons I have learned which may help you be successful and keep your sanity!

It will come as no surprise to learn that organising your time well is essential to being successful. When I first started my EdD I felt that the amount of work that was ahead of me was overwhelming. I was very worried about whether I really could take on this task and manage the rest of my life. One of the first things I needed to do was visualise the tasks ahead and how much time I had to do each. However, this was no simple project management chart because I was managing multiple projects, my research, my job and my home life and they all needed to be integrated into the timescale. My solution was to purchase a large wall chart which takes up a large chunk of my bedroom wall. I mark everything on there from birthdays and dentist appointments to deadlines at work to research objectives. I broke my research down into small manageable tasks that I could allocate weeks of time to. I learned early on that it is very difficult to dip in and out of research because it breaks your flow of thought. I really need blocks of time to spend on a particular topic. I am a great believer of doing one thing at a time. For example, when I was writing my conference paper I stopped doing any work on my research methodology completely and allocated my research time only to the conference paper in order to meet that deadline. After it was done I went back to studying my methodology. I would not have been successful if I had tried to work on both at the same time.

Of course, having a well organised chart and sticking to it are two separate things. Here are some lessons I learned during my first year:

- Never assume you will have more time in the future and put things off until then.
- Be assertive and learn to say no. Try not to let work pressures take over. Avoid outside pressures to be involved in the school/sports committee.
- Schedule time as 'research only' time and be strict with yourself about sticking to it.
- Make sure your family understands that your research is 'work' and you cannot be disturbed during research time.

- Get rid of electronic distractions. Don't have your email open in the background, don't log into msn. Schedule specific times to check and respond to email if you need to.
- Don't put the housework first. Don't feel that you have to tackle that pile of dirty washing/dishes before you can start work. If you can, enlist the help and understanding of your partner. Schedule time separate from your work time to do this.
- Try to stop working in the middle of a task with clear objectives rather than reaching the end of a section. You will find it much easier to get going again.
- Try to find blocks of time to work on research rather than small bits of time here and there.
- Allow yourself time to read and reflect on papers. You may find that you read a paper the night before and only feel like interpreting it the next day.
- Summarise the important points of papers as you are going along.
- Use ENDNOTE
- Have somewhere to organise all the papers you read (I use a filing cabinet)
- Try to do a presentation summarising the work you have done so far fairly regularly. It will help you focus your work and help your supervisor give you feedback. It will also help you prepare for conferences.
- Be proactive about contacting your supervisor if you feel yourself losing focus. It is normal to have lows and doubts about your research. It is easy to feel isolated when working part-time. Make sure you have people to talk to, don't keep quiet. Try to build a good rapport with your supervisor and use msn, the phone, email or whatever method you can to have quick and easy access to them. If you lose focus and stay quiet you will become demotivated and lose valuable time.
- Don't get side-tracked down an interesting research alley. Keep asking yourself "is this really relevant to my research question?"

This is *REALLY* important.

- Be good to yourself. You are taking on a lot. You have a long way to go and you need to make sure you have a life outside of work and study or you will become depressed and resentful. You can only go so long without seeing daylight before your mind and body will rebel. Eat healthily (lots of omega 3 for the brain), exercise and give yourself time with your friends and family without feeling guilty. Make sure you get your sleep. Listen to your body and take breaks when you need to. Make sure you take holidays where you actually just relax and don't think about work or research at all.

Good Luck!
July 2006

A week in the life a full-time lecturer in a new University studying a part-time doctorate

Week 24th – 30th of July 2006	
Monday (planned)	Monday (actual)
6.30 – 7.30 Gym	6.30 – 7.30 Gym
9.00-9.30 email	9.00-9.40 email
9.30-12.00 Work on schedule for new module, Chase Enterprise funding, Print papers	9.40-12.00 Funding officer on holiday, Printer not set up in new office
12.00-1.00 Lunch	12.00-1.00 Lunch
1.00 – 2.00 email – check for supervisor meeting	1.00 – 1.30 email
2.00 – 3.00 Work on schedule for new module	1.30 – 3.00 Work on schedule for new module
3.00 – 4.30 Read and summarise 2 papers	3.20 – 4.30 Located interesting references to be added to the reading list
4.30 – 5.00 email	Supervisor did not get in contact – cannot do much work on methodology until questions are cleared up
6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.	6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.
8.00 – 9.00 45 mins Read and summarise a paper. 15 mins Diary Entry	8.00 – 8.35 Friend phoned, paper not done. Diary Entry
9.00 - Relax/Partner time.	9.00 - Relax/Partner time.

Tuesday (planned)	Tuesday (actual)
9.00 Client Focussed Systems Meeting	9.00 Client Focussed Systems Meeting
10.30 MSc student meeting	10.30 MSc student meeting
11.30 Project meeting	11.30 Project meeting – met someone who could chase up enterprise funding
1.00 – 2.00 Lunch - Read & summarise a paper	1.00 – 2.00 Met colleague for lunch instead – moved to evening
2.00 – 5.00 email, Collect rail tickets, Set up printer, Obtain signature for fees application	2.00 – 5.00 Papers printed , Postgraduate supervisor not in, email to reschedule
18.00-19.30 Swimming	18.00-19.30 Swimming
8.30 – 8.45 15 mins Diary entry	Too tired to read paper or make diary entry – moved to Wednesday

Wednesday (planned)	Wednesday (actual)
6.30 –7.30 Swimming	6.30 –7.30 Swimming
9.00 – 9.30 email	9.00 – 9.20 Diary entry , 9.20 – 10.00 email
9.30 – 12.00 Read MSc student interim reports and write feedback	10.00 – 12.00 Read MSc student interim reports and write feedback
12.00 – 1.00 Lunch	12.00 – 1.00 Lunch (read paper)
1.00 – 2.00 email	1.00 – 2.00 email
2.00 – 5.00 Web programming	2.00 – 5.00 Web programming
6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.	6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.
8.00 – 9.00 45 mins Read and summarise a paper. 15 mins Diary Entry	8.00 – 8.35 30 mins Summarised paper. 15 mins Diary Entry
9.00 - Relax/Partner time.	9.00 - Relax/Partner time.

Thursday (planned)	Thursday (actual)
6.30-7.30 Swimming	6.30-7.30 Swimming
9.00 – 10.00 Informal meeting	9.00 – 10.30 Informal meeting
10.00 – 10.30 email	10.00 – 11.30 email
10.30 – 12.00 Web programming	11.00 – 12.00 Web programming
12.00 – 1.00 Lunch with colleague	12.00 – 1.00 Lunch with colleague
1.00 – 2.00 email	1.00 – 3.00 urgent action on enterprise funding
2.00 – 5.00 Work on methodology	3.00 – 5.00 Informal meetings
6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.	6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.
8.00 – 9.00 45 mins Work on methodology. 15 mins Diary Entry	8.00 – 8.35 35 mins Still no word from supervisor, read and summarised a paper instead. 15 mins Diary Entry
9.00 - Relax/Partner time.	9.00 - Relax/Partner time.

Friday (planned)	Friday (actual)
6.30-7.30 Swimming	6.30-7.30 Swimming
9.00 – 9.30 email	9.00 – 10.00 email
9.30 – 11.00 Web programming	
11.00 – 1.00 Recruitment meeting	11.00 – 12.40 Recruitment meeting
1.00 – 1.30 email	12.40 – 1.30 Informal discussion with colleague on methodology
1.30 – 2.30 Recruitment follow-up	1.30 – 2.30 Recruitment follow-up
2.30 – 5.00 Web programming, email	2.30 – 5.00 Web programming, email
6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.	6.00 – 8.00 Meal. Relax/Partner time.
8.00 – 9.00 45 mins Work on methodology. 15 mins Diary Entry	8.00 – 8.35 20 mins wrote up thoughts on methodology and emailed supervisor. 15 mins Diary Entry
9.00 - Relax/Partner time.	9.00 - Relax/Partner time.

Saturday (planned)	Saturday (actual)
7.00 – 9.00 Gym	7.00 – 9.00 Gym
3hrs Work on methodology / Diary Entry	9.30 – 10.00 Breakfast. 15 mins Read paper.
Shopping	10.00 – 11.30 Shopping
Phone Mum	11.30 – 4.30. Phoned mum. 25 mins Read paper at lunch. Relax/Partner time
Relax/Partner time	4.30 – 5.45 60 mins Read 2 papers. Left summaries until tomorrow as information not processed yet. 15 mins Diary Entry.
7.00 – late Friend's house for dinner	7.00 – late Friend's house for dinner

Sunday (planned)	Sunday (actual)
3 hrs Work on methodology / Diary Entry	10.00 – 11.00 Breakfast. Re-read two of yesterday's papers.
3hrs Housework	11.00 – 3.00 Housework
Relax/Partner time	3.00 – 5.00 TV/Partner time
	5.00 – 7.00 Pulled some of the summaries together to support research question (1½ hr s). Diary Entry (15 mins).
	7.00 – 11.00 Relax/Partner time

	Planned Time	Actual Time
Read & summarise 5 papers	4 hours	5 hours 55 mins 8 papers
Methodology	10 hrs	1 hr 10 mins
Diary	1 hr 45 mins	1 hr 50 mins
Total	15 hrs 45 mins	8 hrs 55 mins

Thoughts after writing this diary

At first I was quite alarmed at how often my plans differed from what actually happened. Then I realised two important things. Firstly, I had to be flexible. There are many variables that are simply out of my control and it is pointless getting stressed about them. I just need to make the best of the time I have. Secondly, the amount of time you spend on research is not as important as the amount of quality work you get done. I concentrate on tasks not time. If it takes less time than I planned to complete a task then I don't force myself to do more to fill the time unless I want to. I find that the diary really focuses me on how much time I actually have to complete tasks so that I can organise the time needed well in advance. I do find that as I approach deadlines that research time eats into my leisure time but I always make specific time for my family/partner, exercise and meals.