Weekly Planning and Time Blocking

A plan turns "I should study" into a real time and place. Time blocking gives every hour of the week a job, including rest.

AFTER THIS GUIDE YOU CAN

- Estimate how many study hours your course load needs.
- Build a time blocked week with fixed blocks first.
- Sort tasks by urgency and importance.
- Run a short weekly review to reset the plan.

Key terms

Time blocking	Scheduling specific blocks of time for specific tasks, such as "Tuesday 2 to 3:30, Math problem set."
Fixed commitments	Things that happen at set times no matter what: classes, labs, work shifts.
Study block	A planned session with one clear goal, ideally soon after the related class.
Credit hour rule of thumb	Plan about two hours of work outside class for each hour in class each week. A 15 credit load often means about 30 more hours.
Urgent versus important	Urgent tasks demand attention now; important tasks move your goals forward. Protect time for important tasks before they become urgent.
Buffer time	Open space left in the week for surprises, so one late night does not wreck the plan.
Weekly review	A short session, often Sunday, to check the coming week's due dates and adjust the plan.
Pomodoro method	Work in focused sessions of about 25 minutes with short breaks between them.
Procrastination	Delaying a task even though the delay will cost you. Often a way to avoid an uncomfortable feeling.
Task breakdown	Splitting a big task, such as a paper, into small steps that each fit in one study block.

The big ideas

- Start with the fixed blocks: classes, labs, work, sleep. Then place study blocks in the gaps.
- Place study blocks close to the class they support, while the material is fresh.
- Schedule rest and fun on purpose. A plan with no rest gets abandoned by Wednesday.
- Break big assignments into steps with their own dates. "Write paper" is not a task; "find four sources" is.
- A plan is a draft. The weekly review is where you fix what did not work last week.
- Leave buffer time. Life will take some of your hours whether you plan for it or not.

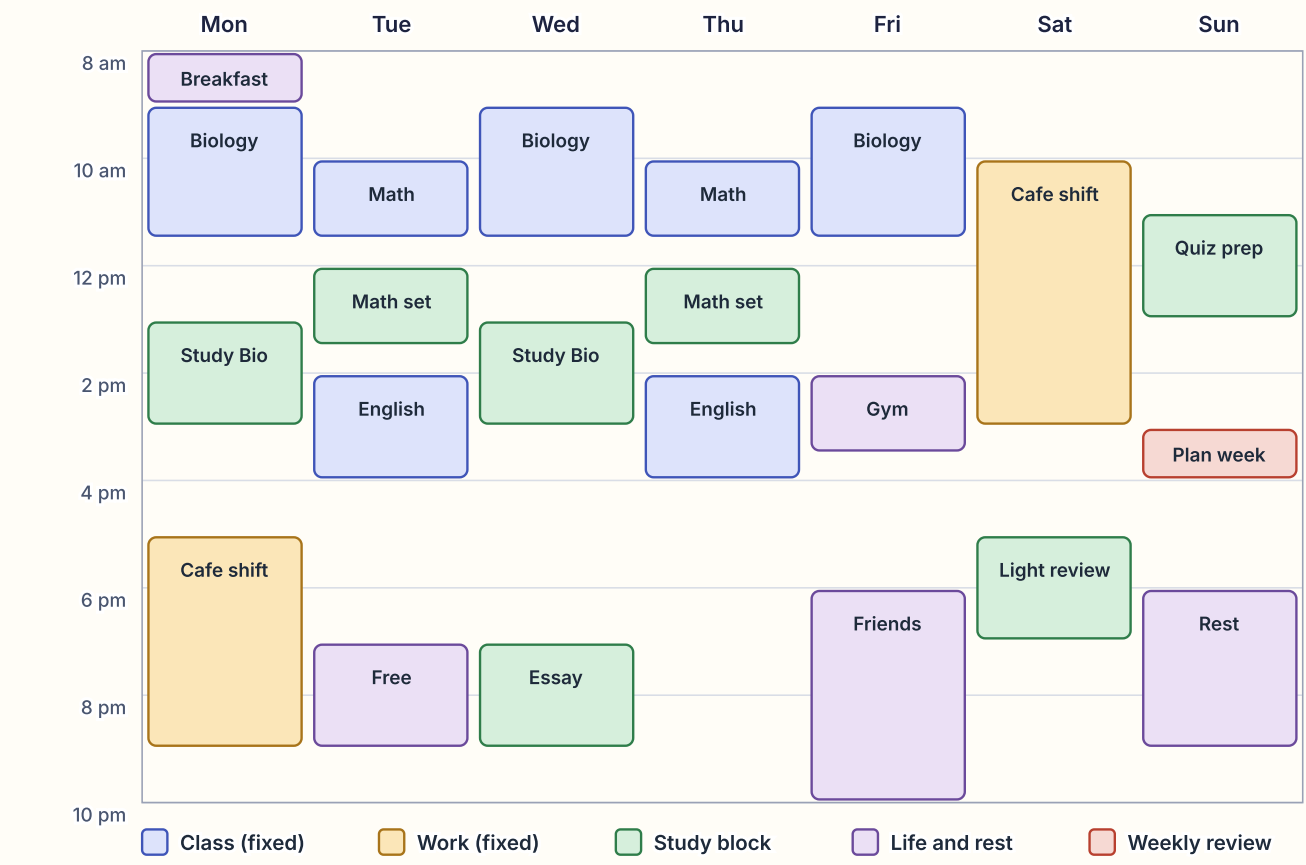

Figure. A time blocked week.

Worked example

Week 2 in Ridge Hall. You carry 15 credits and work two cafe shifts. Your roommate Sam "just hopes" studying happens.

1. Block the fixed items: Biology Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, Math and English Tuesday and Thursday, cafe shifts Monday evening and Saturday.
2. Add study blocks right after the classes they support: Biology review Monday and Wednesday afternoons, Math problem sets Tuesday and Thursday.
3. Break the English essay into steps across the week: outline Wednesday night, draft Saturday, revise Sunday.
4. Add gym Friday, time with friends Friday night, and a slow Sunday morning.
5. End with a 30 minute weekly review Sunday evening, and leave Tuesday night open as buffer.

Common mistakes

- Planning only study and no rest, then quitting the plan.
- Writing "study" with no subject, goal or time.
- Leaving big projects as one giant task the night before.
- Scheduling hard study in the hours when you are always tired.
- Never reviewing the plan, so the same problems repeat each week.

Check yourself

1. What goes on the planner first?
2. About how many outside hours does a 12 credit load suggest per week?
3. Rewrite "work on paper" as a task you can finish in one block.
4. Why place a study block soon after the related class?
5. What is buffer time for?
6. Which should you protect first: an urgent text or an important assignment due in five days?
7. What happens in a weekly review?
8. How long is a typical Pomodoro work session?

Answer key

1. **Fixed commitments: classes, labs, work and sleep.** Everything else fits around them.
2. **About 24.** Roughly two hours outside class per credit hour.
3. **Example: "Find and save four sources for the paper."** Small, specific steps are easier to start.
4. **The material is fresh, so review is faster and gaps show up early.** It also catches confusion before the next class.
5. **Absorbing surprises without wrecking the week.** Illness, extra shifts and long assignments happen.
6. **The important assignment.** Important work left alone turns urgent at the worst time.
7. **Check next week's due dates, look at what worked, and adjust the plan.** It keeps the plan honest.
8. **About 25 minutes, then a short break.** Short focused sessions protect attention.

Help is real. If you or a friend are struggling, talk to your campus counseling center. In the United States you can call or text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) any time. Outside the US, contact your local crisis line.

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