

# Content Unit 4:

# Time Management



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# 1 MANAGING YOUR TIME FOR LEARNING

As adults, we are particularly challenged **to consciously plan our time and use it productively** – mostly due to obligations regarding our profession and/or family. In relation to learning, this means that it would be advantageous for us to prepare the learning content well, to create a plan for learning and to concentrate on the most important contents. Thus, our limited time can be used as efficiently as possible.



In this unit you will learn about the performance curve and how you can use your knowledge about it for your own learning process. In addition, the importance of breaks and how you could spend them is discussed. Afterwards, on the one hand, you will learn how you can plan the time for learning until an exam. On the other hand, it is explained how you can identify important learning content so that you can prepare successfully for an exam.

## 1.1 Plan your learning process

Have you ever heard about the "**performance curve**"? No? Most likely, however, you have already felt your curve! The performance curve refers to the **different productivity over the course of the day**. This means that you do not achieve the same learning success at all times of the day. You are not always equally efficient when learning.

### Example

Do you know the feeling of being tired after lunch? This is called "food coma". It is the typical moment where your daily performance curve is very low.

A typical daily performance curve looks like this:



Source: <https://karrierebibel.de/leistungskurve/>

After waking up, the curve rises more and more and reaches its peak in the morning. At noon it drops off significantly, before it rises again in the afternoon and slowly sinks in the evening until we finally go to bed. Thus, in a typical curve, the **most productive times of the day are the early morning and mid afternoon**. During this time, we can concentrate best and perform the most.

However, not all people have the same performance curve! Everybody is different, so the performance curve can look different from person to person and rise or fall more often during the day.

### Example

Generally, a distinction is made between two types of people: the **morning person**, who can learn most easily in the morning, and the **evening person**, who is most active in the afternoon or in the evening.

The best way to find out what your own performance curve looks like is to **observe yourself** and maybe even write a diary for 1-2 weeks about how productive you feel at different times.

### But why is this important to you?

Knowing your own performance curve can be a huge advantage at work and when studying, because then you can plan your time accordingly!

**The learning times are best set at the time of day at which we can concentrate well.** This is especially important when it comes to complicated, difficult topics or demanding activities. Other activities for which we do not need much concentration (doing housekeeping, repeating simple topics, sorting documents, etc.), we put on the times when we cannot concentrate that well. Keeping that in mind, the whole day is well spent, and we are less frustrated.

### Practical relevance

David has been attending a course on “Time Management” for a few weeks now. To find out when he is most productive, he has observed himself during learning in the last days. It soon turned out that he can learn easiest very early in the morning. In the evening, however, he cannot concentrate well.

Therefore, from now on, he uses his mornings at home to study. In the afternoon, he does various household tasks and briefly repeats what he has learned in the morning. In the evening he takes time for himself and before going to bed he organises all the learning materials for the next day so that he can start learning immediately in the morning.

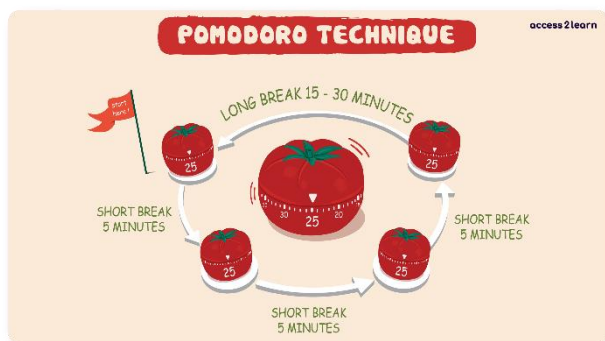
## Take breaks

Time is running out and you want to get as much done as possible? Then it is all the more important that you do not work all the time but take breaks. Your **brain and your body need rest periods to recover, to store what has been learned and to be able to get back to full performance.** If the brain does not get any breaks, it is even bad for productivity and your peak performance times can no longer be used properly. A conscious planning of breaks is therefore important for learning success!

### Example

A popular way to plan breaks is the **Pomodoro Technique**. The Pomodoro Technique works quite simply:

First, you learn for 25 minutes and then you take a break of 5 minutes. You repeat this and after the fourth learning phase, a longer break of about 30 minutes is made. Or in other words: three times of studying 25 minutes + 5 minutes break, **another 25 minutes of studying, then long break (about 30 minutes).**



The advantage of the Pomodoro Technique is that the time is clearly divided into learning phases and breaks. Thus, the motivation to concentrate during the 25 minutes of learning is higher and distractions can be left aside. The technique works best if you divide your learning contents into portions that you can do well in 25 minutes. Then you can finish learning before a break and you are not interrupted. To stop time, you can, for example, use the alarm clock/timer app on your mobile phone.

However, it is important that you **choose the intervals that work well for you**. You can, for example, have one hour of learning and 10 minutes break – also 10 minutes of learning and 1 minute mini-break are possible.

But what could you do during the break? The brain needs breaks to process what it has learned so far and to gather energy for new things. This means that the break must really be relaxing for the brain. Short breaks are great for getting a drink or a snack (drinks and nutrients are important for the brain) or doing a short relaxation exercise. Longer breaks can be spent on physical activities such as tidying up, light sports or a short walk outside, so that your brain gets fresh oxygen, which is good for concentration. Even just sitting on the couch or on the balcony and paying attention to the noises of the environment or enjoying the sun, is good for the brain and ensures that we feel fit for learning new things again.

#### Practical relevance

John, who attends the course to become a health and fitness trainer, wants to have relaxing breaks as he already does enough practical training sessions where he has to move a lot in his education. Therefore, he usually uses his study breaks to sit down on his sunny balcony with a snack and his favorite protein shake and relax.

#### Important

Attention! Even if it seems almost impossible for us: Not only during learning, but also during the break, we should not use our smartphone! But why?

Even if we just want to quickly check Instagram or WhatsApp, our brain receives a lot of information. There is hardly anything else that occupies our brain so much. So this is exactly the opposite of the recovery that our brain actually needs during the break. All devices with a screen, including a tablet or television, therefore should be banned from learning breaks. Our brain deserves a break!

## Reflection

In this chapter, you learned about the performance curve and why it is important to schedule breaks when learning. Reflect on the following questions:

- What time of the day is the easiest one for you to learn?
- How can you organise your days in the future to make the most of the times when you can concentrate best?
- How would you like to organise your breaks in the future?

Write down your thoughts!





## 1.2 Tips and tricks for your exam preparation

In many courses or training, you have to take at least one exam. By completing an exam you can "prove" that you **have actually learned** the contents and **possess the required knowledge**. This is important, for example, when searching for a new job.

When talking about exams, many people get a negative feeling. But with the right preparation and when taking some tips into account, exams can be mastered without major problems. Therefore, in this chapter, you receive some tips on how to prepare for exams and how to master them successfully.



To be able to prepare for an exam, it is important that you **get an overview of the contents and materials you have to learn**. Usually, the content relevant for the exam is announced early enough by the teacher. Take a close look at it and check that everything is clear and understandable for you.

The **contents of the exam should be familiar** to you because usually, you have already worked on them during the course. Before you start learning, ask yourself the following questions:

About which topics  
do I already know a  
lot?

What topics are  
difficult for me?  
Where do I still  
have uncertainties?

Many people tend to start learning with the things they already know, as they get the feeling that they are successful when they already know a lot about these topics. But since the time to study for an exam is often very limited, you should **first deal with the topics where you still have uncertainties**. Those that you are already good at, should be learned at the end.

### Practical relevance

Tynne is currently in the middle of her Italian language course. Next week there will be a short vocabulary test, for which she is currently preparing. She already knows some words very well. Others, however, are difficult to pronounce, and thus, she cannot remember them. She usually starts learning with the simple words so that she is successful right from the beginning, because she knows the Italian words. After that, she starts learning the more difficult words. But it is hard for her to concentrate until she has learned all the vocabulary.

During a conversation with her teacher Isabella, Tynne realises that it would make more sense to start learning with the words she doesn't know yet. After a few days of implementing this, Tynne already sees success, as she now knows almost all vocabulary – even the difficult ones she didn't remember before. She always repeats the simpler words at the end, as this does not take a lot of time.

To figure out the topics you still have uncertainties in and you should focus on when learning, you could ask someone from your family or your friends to test you. Or you try to carry out practical tasks from the training to see weaknesses.

It is also recommended to get an overview of the framework conditions of the exam:

- What documents and materials do you need for learning?
- Are you allowed to use supporting tools during the exam? If so, which ones?
- What kind of questions will be asked?
- What criteria must be met to pass the exam?
- How long is the exam going to be?

If you want to find out more about the exam questions, e.g. about the type of question or the specific learning material, please contact your trainer. She or he will certainly help you.

Have you collected all the required learning materials, all the necessary information about the framework conditions of the exam, and know where you still need to practice most? Then you have the basis to start with more detailed planning!

## Creating a Learning Plan



To make exam preparation as efficient as possible, it is recommended to create a **learning plan**. This takes a little time at first, but ensures that you can't forget anything and, above all, don't have any time problems.

In a learning plan, it is noted **when you want to deal with which content**, so that the entire material is covered until the exam. This results in daily and weekly schedules.

Here's what you should consider at the beginning of planning your learning:

When is the exam and how much time is left until then?

What exactly do I need to learn for the exam?

How familiar am I with the exam contents? Do I have to invest much or not that much time in learning?

Do I have to schedule time also for other tasks or exams or is this the only exam at this time?

Write down the **content** you need to learn and the **exam date**. For each topic, it makes sense to note what exactly you need to learn and where you can find it (which pages from what book or script, how many online learning units,...).

Now it is time for a detailed planning of the days or weeks before the exam. You can do it as follows:

- 1 Think about **how many hours you need to learn for each topic**. Write the number of hours down right now. When calculating the time, **be generous**. It's better to plan 2 hours and finish in 1,5 than to plan 1 hour rather than having enough time to finish.
- 2 Set **priorities**: What do you need to learn most extensively? Be sure to plan enough time for these topics!
- 3 Define **milestones**. Milestones are special events or outcomes that are precisely timed, such as the exam date or the completion of a particular topic. Be sure to note the date for each milestone.
- 4 **Print an overview** of the days or weeks remaining until the exam. You can find templates for this online, e.g. here: [https://studyscript.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Studyscript\\_learning\\_plan\\_print\\_template.pdf](https://studyscript.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Studyscript_learning_plan_print_template.pdf). Alternatively, you can try to design such a plan with your hands on a blank sheet of paper. Print out a sheet for each week until the exam so that you have an overview of the whole period.
- 5 Get an **overview of which days you have time to study and for how many hours**.
- 6 Write the milestones you have defined before in the plan.
- 7 Now enter all topics you have to learn and the estimated number of learning hours in the columns for each day, so that all topics are covered. Also consider during what time of the day you can learn best, i.e. when you can concentrate most easily (performance curve!).

When creating the learning plan, distinguish between sessions for learning and sessions for repetition. Because, as you already know, it is important to repeat things again and again to keep them in your brain. Therefore, plan enough sessions for repetition.

An example of a learning plan can be seen here:

Learning Plan 09.01.2023 - 15.01.2023							
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
08:00-09:00							BREAK
09:00-10:00	Learning English vocabularies Book p. 20		Repeating EN vocabulary p. 20		Practising English listening CD Exercise 5 + Book p. 21	Repeating EN vocabulary p. 34	
10:00-11:00						Repeating grammar p. 23	
11:00-12:00							
12:00-13:00							
13:00-14:00				Learning English vocabularies Book p. 34			
14:00-15:00							
15:00-16:00		Learning English grammar Book p. 23					
16:00-17:00							
17:00-18:00							
18:00-19:00							

When creating the learning plan, make sure that you **plan enough breaks**. As you already know, it doesn't make sense to study for a whole day. Give your brain time to rest.

It is also important to consider sufficient **buffer times**: Plan more time than you would normally need. There might always be some issues that spontaneously prevent you from learning. Therefore, do not plan to finish studying the evening before the exam, but a few days earlier.

You create this learning plan only for yourself. So do not compare yourself with other colleagues. Only consider your own learning pace to get a realistic plan.

Check your study plan everyday, so that you can't forget anything and make sure you're on time. You can also combine this with **writing a learning diary**. Furthermore, it makes sense to **tick off completed learning units**. Then you can immediately see what you have already learned. And, in addition, it is always a nice feeling when you can put a tick behind something.

Not all plans can always be adhered to. There can be various reasons for this: You could get sick, someone could visit you spontaneously or there could be unforeseen appointments. In addition, it often happens that you can't concentrate well on some days and thus learn a little slower.

All this is completely normal and you do not have to panic immediately, because this is why you have planned buffer times. However, it is important that you **regularly check if you are in time**. If you notice that you are already behind your plan, then you should adjust your learning plan accordingly. This way you can make sure that you still have enough time to cover all topics.

If you have little experience with learning plans and are unsure about how to do the planning, you can check your learning plan by using the **ALPEN method**.

<p><b>A</b> <i>Activities, tasks and meetings are written down</i></p>	<p>Did you write down all your activities that are planned until the exam? Also go through your calendar and make a note of other fixed dates (seminars, family celebrations, etc.) that you can't study. You must take these into account when managing your time.</p>
<p><b>L</b> <i>Estimating length</i></p>	<p>Do you know how many hours/days all the identified activities and tasks will take? Assessing this correctly can be difficult at the beginning. Plan a little more time rather than too little.</p>
<p><b>P</b> <i>Planning buffer times</i></p>	<p>Have you taken into account unforeseen events? It's normal that you can't always stick to your learning schedule for 100 %. You might be distracted by phone calls, children, illness, etc. To avoid panic after those events, you should plan more time than necessary.</p>
<p><b>E</b> <i>Establishing priorities</i></p>	<p>Despite good planning and buffer times, time may be running out. Make sure that you plan only one particularly urgent task per day and several additional tasks. So you can tick something off every day and also know what tasks are not that important for the overall success.</p>
<p><b>N</b> <i>Noting level of success</i></p>	<p>It is recommended to check briefly everyday whether you are on schedule. If some learning sessions took more or less time, you may need to adjust your plan or move tasks to another day.</p>

### Example

When scheduling buffer times, you can stick to the 60-40 rule. You plan 60 % of your time for learning and the other 40 % as a reserve.

If your time is running out and you're not sure what content to focus on, the **80:20 rule** can help: Most topics consist largely of simple content and a small part is difficult to remember. If you have limited time to study or have a lot of topics to learn, it's better to **learn the easier 80 % of each topic first**. The rule is that these 80 % can be learned with only 20 % of the total learning effort.

If there is still time left before the exam, the remaining 20 % that need more effort are learned. Even if you don't learn everything from the more difficult part, you can at least say or write something about each topic.



### Example

We assume that it would take you 10 hours to learn the whole learning content. As you don't have so much time for learning until the next lesson, you decide to focus on the easier part of the content (= 80 %). This can be learned within 2 hours (= 20 % of the whole time you would need for the whole content). If there is some time left, you can start to learn the other 20 % which is the more complicated content.

### 1.3 Prioritise learning content

If we are interested in a topic, learning is easy for us. Our natural curiosity allows us to become a researcher. If we attend an exciting course, we can benefit a lot from the information and recommendations of a learning unit. And this acts as a basis for dealing more deeply with the learning content.

#### Important

However, it is often not possible to learn all content in the same depth because there might be too much content and only limited time for learning.

So, what can we do if we want to take an exam on the learning content and are unable to work through all the material in detail by the time of the exam? In this case, it makes sense **to focus only on exam-relevant content and learn this very well.**



**The following tips will help you to identify exam-relevant learning content so that you can prepare for the exam in a more targeted way:**

- Especially at the beginning of a course, the trainer usually explains which **learning goals** you should achieve. Make a note of them!
- In many cases, you will receive a written description of **the requirements that apply to an examination**. This is usually information about the structure of the exam, the criteria according to which it is assessed, the scope and type of examination (written,



oral, practical) and the topics to be learned. Read them carefully and mark important information!

- Read through your learning materials and **highlight the most important words and phrases** you can use to explain the content to someone else! Then make a note: What are the major subject areas? What are the main questions on each topic? Write down the answers for these questions and use the marked words and sentences! You've already created a **summary**.
- **Just ask your trainer** what content is essential!
- **Ask for older exams** on this course: What types of questions were asked? Which topics were the most common ones?
- On which topics **was a lot of time spent in class?** What was repeated particularly often?

## Practical relevance

John attends a training to become a health and fitness trainer. He has a job and does not want to spend most of his free time studying for his exams. Therefore, he pays particular attention to the instructions for the exam: At the beginning of each module, he notes the learning objectives mentioned by the trainer. The examination requirements vary. While the module "Endurance and Strength" is mainly tested practically, he has to complete an online test for the module "Relaxation". Whenever John hears or reads tips for the exam, he writes them down in his favourite colour orange. In this way, he immediately sees the exam-relevant content during preparation. He is also marking the most important words and phrases in his learning materials with an orange highlighter. One week before the exam date, he starts to study intensively. He takes all information written or marked in orange to create a mind map with the most important terms.



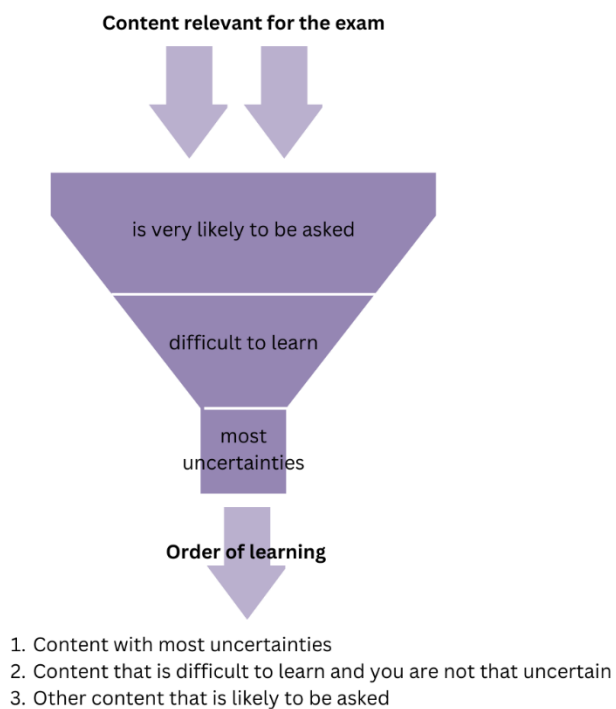
Oliver's mind map for exam preparation for the module "Relaxation"

Then he writes down the answers on the respective topic. He has already created a wonderful summary, which he reads and thinks through every day until the exam. John feels well prepared and can do the online test relaxed.

After identifying the content, we have to deal with during preparation for the exam, we often ask ourselves – usually due to time constraints – an essential question: In **what order** should we learn all these contents? How can we **make the best use of our learning time**?



The "Exam Preparation Funnel" below will help you to define **your individual starting point and productive order of studying for the exam**:



<b>Step 1</b>	Which content is <b>most likely to be asked</b> ?
<b>Step 2</b>	Which of the contents identified in Step 1 <b>are the more difficult ones</b> ? Learn these contents first, then go on to the easier ones!

<b>Step 3</b>	Which of these more difficult topics <b>make you feel most uncertain?</b> Start learning here!
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### Important

Be gracious to yourself if you need more study time than you previously thought! It is normal that the **actual learning effort cannot be realistically estimated in advance**. Therefore, plan buffer times for learning, which you can use, but do not have to!

### Reflection

Imagine you have decided to take a course on a topic you have been interested in for a long time! This course concludes with a certificate that is also useful to you professionally. To obtain this, you have to take an exam. Since you do not have that much time for learning, you want to focus on the essential content.

How can you succeed in recognising exam-relevant learning content? Name individual points that you pay attention to from the first day of the course, so that you can prepare well for the exam!

## 1.4 The day of the exam

When you think of an exam you have already taken, can you remember how you felt about it? Were you nervous that day, did you feel stress or even some anxiety? If you answer with yes, then you should know that you are not alone. All this is nothing unusual, because that's how it goes for many people.



To **minimise** the **worries and stress of this day**, hereunder you can find some tips you can apply in the future:

- Plan your learning process so that you have already learned all the contents a few days before the exam and then only have to repeat them. If you have a practical exam, get sure that you have practiced everything a few days before the exam. You then know that you are well prepared and you get confidence for the exam by repeating the contents.
- Try not to learn or practice too much the day before the exam to reduce nervousness. It would be good if you could find an activity for the day before an exam that allows you to take your mind off. You could do sports, meet friends or pursue another hobby.
- Use the day before an exam to already prepare some things. For example, you can consider:
  - What can I already prepare and do?  
You could get your clothes ready the evening before, take a shower, wash your hair, put all the materials you need for the exam (pens, notes, calculators, tools,...) in your bag, etc.
  - When should I leave my home tomorrow and how do I get to the exam location?  
Take a close look at the timetable of public transport, plan when you should leave the house, plan buffer time so that you are not late even in the case of a traffic jam
- Go to bed early the evening before and do not drink alcohol to be fit on exam day.
- Get up early enough on the day of the exam to not run out of time.
- Eat only easily digestible food before an exam so that you feel comfortable, do not get too tired and do not get any stomach ache. Nuts, fruit or wholemeal bread, for example, are suitable for this. Also, don't forget to drink enough.

- On the day of the exam, remember that you are prepared well due to your precise learning planning and organisation. If the exam takes place at noon or in the afternoon, you can of course repeat the learning contents, but there is no need to panic and feel like you have to go through everything again.
- Believe in yourself and go into the exam with a positive feeling!

On an exam day, dress in a way that you feel comfortable. Because we all know how nerve-wracking it can be if your clothes are too tight or too short, if you dress too warmly or if something is constantly pinching.

The time shortly before the exam is usually the hardest. Again, don't panic. Put on a smile and **think about what you have already achieved and how proud you can be when you have also mastered this test**. Also keep in your mind that this is "only" an exam. This means that even if you do not pass the exam, it is not the end of the world, and you usually have the opportunity to do the exam later again.

In any case, avoid thinking too much about the content shortly before the exam, because usually you get the feeling that you cannot remember anything. It is best to distract yourself, e.g. by listening to music or talking to your colleagues about something different than the exam.

Also, don't forget to reward yourself for your hard work after the exam. So it's best to plan something that you can look forward to afterwards.

### Practical

Lucie is always nervous before exams. Since the day of the exam has always been exhausting for her, she now tries to make it as pleasant as possible. Therefore, she prepares everything that is possible in the evening before. For example, she thinks about when her bus leaves for the exam location, she gets clothes ready, she prepares her breakfast and she packs all the tools she needs for the exam into her backpack.

Since she has already prepared everything the day before, she can comfortably drive to the test. Before the exam, she talks to her friends about the weekend. So she can start in the exam without any stress.

### Reflection

How could your day of an exam and the day before be structured, so that you are not too stressed?

### Task

Create a learning plan for your next exam. You can use the tips and template from this chapter as support.

Then you can review the created plan together with your teacher to find out whether it is realistic.

## 1.5 Summary

Attending a course is time-consuming and it is often difficult for us to find enough time for studying. Therefore, it makes sense to consider some tips and tricks in order to learn a lot by **getting a good overview** of the whole content and with as little effort as possible.

Sometimes, it is difficult for us to concentrate. This might be affected by the time when we are learning. For most people, learning is easiest in the morning and afternoon. We should all **consider our individual performance curve** when studying.

It is also important to **plan enough breaks**. Our brain needs this in order to recover and be receptive again. Therefore, it is not advisable to study throughout the whole day.

Get an overview of the **content** you need to learn for an exam and the framework conditions of the exam as early as possible in order to plan your learning process. In addition, it makes sense **to start learning those contents that you haven't learned yet and that are most difficult**.

By **creating a learning plan**, you can organise and structure your learning process. It is easy to see when you should learn and also, if you are on time, or if you have to adapt your learning times.

It is not always possible to learn all contents in the same depth due to limited time resources. Therefore, it makes sense to **focus on exam-relevant content and learn that in detail**. Right from the beginning of a course, it is recommended to ask the teacher about exam-relevant content and to mark important information when reading a text. To spend your time until an exam efficiently, you can use the "**Exam Preparation Funnel**".

Since the exam itself is often associated with a lot of stress, it makes sense to get everything that is possible done the days before the exam. It is also not advisable to keep on learning on the day of the exam. Try to not think too much of it during the hours before. You could, for example, spend this time talking to your friends about something different. Then you are more relaxed when the exam starts.



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