

Motivation and Time Management for your Bachelor's Thesis

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Introduction

This document is a summary of different motivation and time management methods which can help you write your bachelor's thesis without stress.

In the beginning, theoretical basics will be given and after that it will be all about your relationship with your bachelor's thesis and how you can plan your week stress free in a stressful time. Subsequently, you will find smaller or larger methods of how you can overcome your inner barriers.

In which phase of your working process you are whilst reading this summary does not matter. **Simply read the part that interests you.** In case you have any additional notes, we would be happy to receive your feedback: mercedes.schroeder@stud.leuphana.de

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Time Management and Motivation

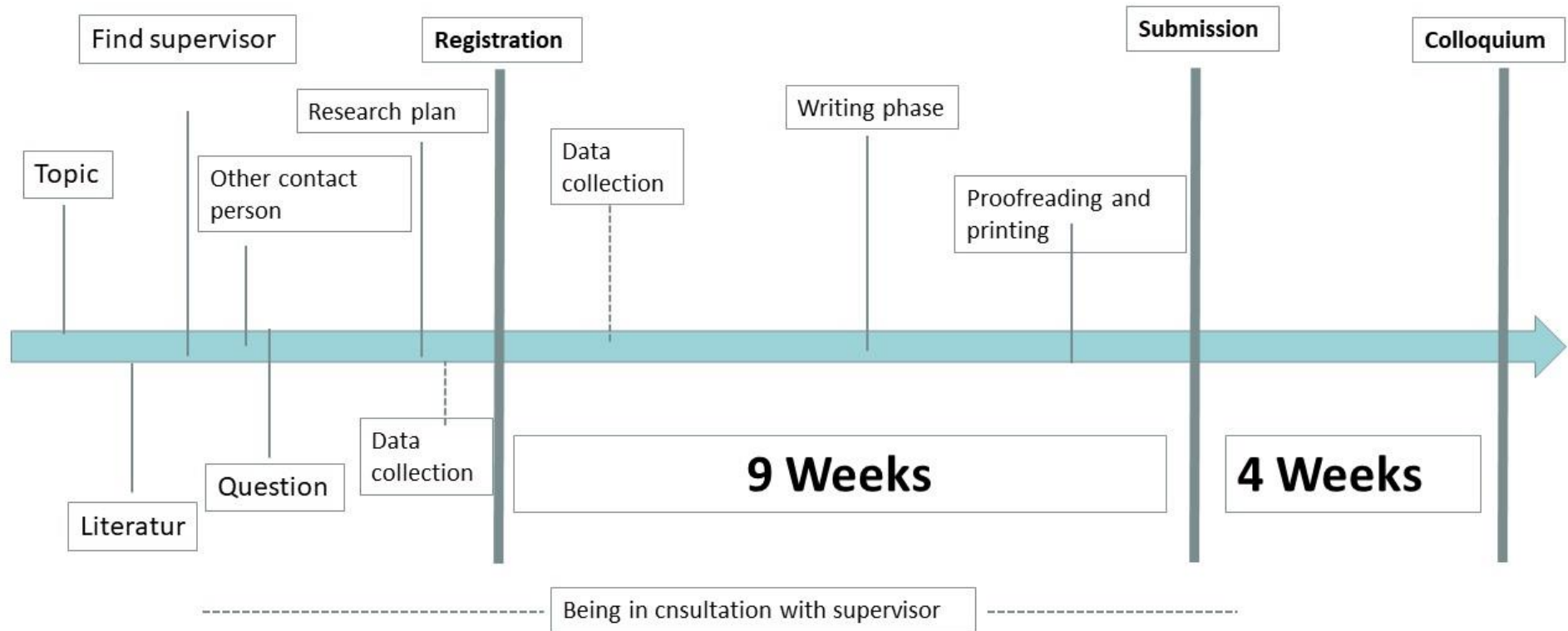


Figure 1 Roadmap for your orientation

Basics on Time Management and Motivation

The text this section is based on is a dissertation by Alexander Häfner on the topic: time management and its influence on performance and wellbeing¹. I have summarized the most important findings here to provide a psychological perspective on the topic in the beginning.

General findings of his research (Häfner 2011, p. 193):

- Time management seems to be more important for the wellbeing than for performance. This means that through sincere time planning, your grade is unlikely to change → **you can obtain a very good grade without good time management, however you will probably not feel so great during and after the research and writing phase**
- A well-balanced distribution of the workload will lead to less stress in the long term.

After Häfner (2011, p. 54) time management represents a combination of various techniques, such as:	Additionally, the following aspects can be understood in this context (especially in guidebooks) (Häfner 2011, p. 55):
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Setting priorities with the emphasis of the benefit of individual tasks- Goal formulation- Strategy development- Mental process simulation- Formation of conduction interventions- Development of process- and result-related feedback- Analysis and evaluation of the own behavior- Self-reward- Occupation with the interpretation and if applicable reinterpretation of events that are critical to your goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Arrangement of framing conditions for the work- Application of relaxation methods- Observation of personal resources- Efforts towards a healthy lifestyle- Development of social competences- Influence on the general life attitudes

An important similarity between the psychological and the broader understanding is the fact that in both cases, planning is very important.

This entails that one can use time management for the pure optimization of the conduction of work as well as in the context of the entirety of ones' personal life which is where relaxation and wellbeing come into play.

¹ Häfner, Alexander: Dissertation: Zeitmanagement und seine Wirkung auf Leistung und Befinden (2011)

Table 14. Selected sources of used time management techniques

Time management strategy	Short description of the technique	Theories / research alleys	Some selected sources
Priority- and goal setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of all tasks to do • Work out utility of tasks • Prioritize the tasks (A, B, C) • Formulate precise, reachable, proximal and challenging goals 	Goal-setting theory	Latham & Locke (1979) Latham & Locke (1991) Locke & Latham (2002) Smith, Locke & Barry (1990)
Strategy development and process simulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of action steps for goal-accomplishment • Selection of doable action steps • Prevention of possible barriers and formulation of counteractions • Definition of the path to the goal • Selection of first, easy steps as an introduction to task completion 	Intentional strategy Research on mental process simulation Research on task planning Goal-setting theory	Diefendorf & Lord (2003) Earley, Wojnaroski & Prest (1987) Gollwitzer (1999) Achtziger & Gollwitzer (2006) Gollwitzer & Brandstätter (1997) Latham & Locke (1991) Locke & Latham (2002) Taylor, Pham, Rivkin & Armor (1998)
Daily structure while utilizing procedural intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of daily tasks • Setting priorities in these tasks • Deleting, postponing, and delegating tasks • Predict timeliness of tasks • Defining what needs to be done for the important tasks • Selection of suitable situations • Selection of suitable action steps • Anchorage of action steps through procedural intention 	Intentional theory Findings on time management	Claessens, Van Eerde, Rutte & Roe (2004) Gollwitzer (1999) Achtziger & Gollwitzer (2008) Gollwitzer & Brandstätter (1997) Koch & Kleinmann (2002) König & Kleinmann (2006a, 2006b)
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process and result feedback • Measurement of the degree of goal-accomplishment • Visualisation of the degree of goal-accomplishment 	Goal-setting theory Research on cognitive-behavior-oriented interventions	Andrasik & Heimberg (1982) Latham & Locke (1979) Latham & Locke (1991) Locke & Latham (2002) Luthans & Davis (1979)
Self-reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reward for the successful realisation of tasks or subtasks 	Goal-setting theory Research on cognitive-behavior-oriented interventions	Andrasik & Heimberg (1982) Locke & Latham (2002) Luthans & Davis (1979)
Behavioral analysis under influence of personal interpretation of time-related requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SORK-Analysis • Cleft technique for cognitive restructuring / modification of cognitive evaluations 	Research on cognitive-behavior-oriented interventions	Andrasik & Heimberg (1982) Luthans & Davis (1979) De Jong-Meyer (2000)

Figure 2 Summary of the general time management techniques by Häfner 2011

Your Bachelor's Thesis and You

First and foremost, you should repeatedly remember that this thesis will only add 15 CP to your overall performance which is less than 10% (more specifically 8,3%). The bachelor's thesis only accounts for 12 CP!

Stick Figure Method

- A possibility to make the relationship between yourself and your thesis more transparent is to actively work with it.

Draw a stick figure on a piece of paper and write...

- By the head, what cognitive talents you have;

Do you like to organize, coordinate, plan, arrange, learn...?

- by the neck, for what you would like to get engaged;

What should be said? What is especially important to mention?

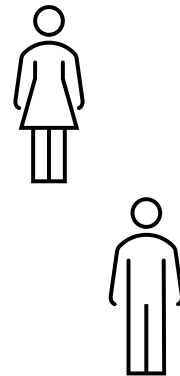
- By the heart, what your passions are;

What do you stand for? What is close to your heart?

- By the hands, what kind of technical abilities you possess?

Which methods have you already utilized and which ones are close to your heart?

- By the feet, what is important to you as a guideline: What do you need to work efficiently? What should be kept in mind? What should be done in order to support your process?



Changing the Weekly Structure

The Eisenhower-Principle²

- Important and often used technique
- Name based on one of the former US president Dwight D. Eisenhower (it is said to have applied it to himself)

General idea: goal-oriented categorisation of tasks

- Division into four categories that should help simplify the decision of what to do next.

Two parameters:

The **Importance**

A task is categorized as important if it is necessary for goal accomplishment. A task that cannot be connected to any goal achievements counts as unimportant.

The **Urgency**

A task is urgent if it loses its purpose at some point in the near future. If it does not matter when you complete the task (in the near future), the task is not urgent.

With these two parameters, which can be depicted on a horizontal and a vertical axis, one can divide tasks into four quadrants:

↑ Importance	Important but not urgent Time exactly and complete yourself	Important & urgent Immediately complete yourself
	Neither important nor urgent Do not work on	Not important but urgent Delegate
	Urgency →	

Following the Eisenhower-Principle you should approach the respective tasks of the quadrants like this:

Important and urgent: These tasks are of highest value concerning the achievement of your goals. You should therefore finish them personally and immediately. Only if you handle these tasks yourself can you be sure that they will definitely be concluded.

Important but not urgent: As these tasks are also important for goal accomplishment, you should handle them personally, too. However, the accomplishment of these tasks is not bound to a specific

² https://www.lernen-heute.de/selbstmanagement_eisenhower.html

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point in time soon. It will therefore be sufficient if you set a certain point in time for these tasks to be concluded.


Urgent but not important: These tasks should be finished soon, however, it is not necessary that you need to handle them personally. Eisenhower suggests the delegation of these tasks if possible.

Not important nor urgent: Tasks that do not bring you any closer to your goals and do not have a set point in time to be finished have the lowest value to your work. These tasks can be left undone when in doubt.

Critical reflection:

- How does one define “important” and “urgent” for oneself?
- Does not help if the tasks pile up in a smaller area; this can easily happen as important tasks are usually not urgent and urgent tasks are usually not important.

The Eisenhower Quadrat after Covey³

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	1 Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Urgent problems • Projects with a pending submission date 	2 Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Broadening of personal competences • Discover new possibilities • Planning • Relaxation
Unimportant	3 Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions (calls, messages etc.) • Some letters, some reports • Some conferences • Any activities 	4 Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivial tasks • Busyness • Some mail • Some calls • Waste of time • (pleasant activities)

Determining what's happening⁴

1- Think about the past week: How much of 100% have you spent for each sector?

Sector 1:

Sector 2:

Sector 3:

Sector 4:

³ From: Die sieben Wege zur Effektivität von Stephen R. Covey (1989)

⁴ From: Die sieben Wege zur Effektivität von Stephen R. Covey (1989)

2- This is what can be entailed when spending a lot of time on the following sectors:

Sector 1

Leads to stress, burnout, crisis management, you are continuously “putting out fires”

→ most of the time, 90% 1 and the rest spent on 4, no more time for 3 and 2

Sector 3 (and 4)

Lead to short-term orientation, crisis management, chameleon characteristics, you consider goals and plans as useless, you feel like a victim (without control), shallow or broken relationships, you are dependent on other people or institutions

→ irresponsible life which considers aspects as important that really are not

Sector 2

Leads to visioning, perspectives, balance, discipline, control and few crises

→ Taking time for tasks we know we must do but mostly do not tackle because they are not as urgent.

Changing your week ⁵

1. Defining roles

I would like to spend time in the following roles each week:

Example:

Student, Sister, Flatmate, Daughter, Friend, Personal Growth

2. Choosing goals

Set goals for each role each week

Ideally, these are short-term goals that bind you long-term

Examples:

Role „Personal Growth”

Goal: once a week, take half an hour to define roles and set goals

Role „Student – Bachelor’s Thesis“

Goal: 20 hours per week, concern myself with my bachelor’s thesis

3. Integrate goals in the week

Utilize a week or calendar overview to sort your time and manage it in a way you like and that is realistic.

⁵ Note Tutor: I personally use this method when I am facing an especially busy week. Then, I only plan from 8 am to 6 pm to keep it realistic.

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Hint: Do not forget to plan time to relax, this is called “transformative time” – meaning the time that you need to get from A to B etc. Also, daily things such as cooking, shopping or cleaning should time a place here.

You can also apply this method monthly, yet considering the time frame of a bachelor’s thesis, I suggest weekly structures.

Study Hacks – Motivate yourself

The following input stems from the book „Die Besten Study-Hacks der Welt: Teil 1: Motiviere deinen inneren Schweinehund“ by Dr. Daniel Hunold and Mirjam Reiß, Greifswald 2017. I have summarized it for you to get an overview of their advice. The authors suggest utilizing these hacks within 48 hours. So best you read these once you are really ready to change something.

Maybe you are familiar with one of these following scenarios?

- You are seated at your desk and want to study, yet you stare at your phone and spend your time in the world wide web.
- You made your way to the library especially early today and only wanted to grab a nice breakfast at the cafeteria. But there you meet a friend, and you start talking so you stay with them until midday without having accomplished anything.
- You have planned to accomplish especially many tasks today, but after two hours you just do not feel like it anymore and you start imagining what else you could do with this time.

In all these situations, a not so little creature plays an important role regarding your behavior.

This is what we call your inner *Schweinehund* in German! Let's call it your inner couch potato.

This imaginary figure or creature represents a natural mental barrier that needs to be overcome. It is not only annoying. In fact, it serves an important purpose. It protects you from overwhelming yourself. It regulates your ambition to solely think about the future and pushes you to think about the current as well. Without it, you would spend all day at the library like a zombie without any friends or happiness.

Here, I have summarized some facts and hacks to train your inner couch potato.

Universal Motivational Hacks

1. Your couch potato is lazy⁶

- remove possible temptations (such as your cell phone) from your view and close surrounding. This helps your couch potato to stay away from naughty thoughts.
- Use free programmes such as Blocksite, to stop your couch potato from procrastinating (= to postpone tasks to be completed) in the first place.

2. Negotiate with your couch potato⁷

- Try to reach your goals. But not against the will of your couch potato but in unison with it.
- Try to reach a solution that satisfies both parties when negotiating.
- The needs and wishes of your couch potato should always only be considered AFTER yours.

⁶ Jonas, Klaus; Stroebe, Wolfgang; Hewstone, Miles (2014): Sozialpsychologie. 6. vollständig überarbeitete Auflage. S. 188-189. Berlin.

Aronson, Elliot; Wilson, Timothy; Akert, Robin (2014): Sozialpsychologie. 8. aktualisierte Auflage. S. 165-167. Halbergmoos.

⁷ Storch, Maja (2009): Machen Sie doch, was Sie wollen. Bern.

Examples:

- Research until 4 pm and only go to the beach after.
- Write two pages of your thesis before you watch "Game of Thrones".

3. The I-Would-Like-Principle⁸

- Delete the phrasing of "I have to" from your vocabulary. Only you decide about your life.
- Instead, use the phrasing "I would like to..."
- Try the Edge-Of-The-Bed-Technique⁹.

Such a I-would-like-to-attitude can help you when dealing with your inner couch potato. It can now see the goal-orientation in your eyes and is much more motivated to do what you tell him to. If instead it notices you despise the university work, it will definitely not support you.

4. The Dressage-Method¹⁰

1. Write down, what kinds of habits you would like to establish.
2. Conduct this new habit as often as you can – ideally multiple times a day because repetition will help your brain.
3. Stick to it. If you miss it once, this is not the end of the world. What is important is to continue the next day.
4. Tell others about your goals. This way you build positive social pressure.

New habits take approximately two months to get used to. But you will start noticing positive effects after a few days.

Can be combined with the method "Gamification"

And is necessary for basically all methods in the chapter: [Structure lends wings](#)

⁸ Corssen, Jens (2006): Der Selbst-Entwickler: Das Corssen Seminar. Wiesbaden.

Brummel, Sean (2015): Einen Scheiß muss ich: Das Manifest gegen das schlechte Gewissen – Aus dem Amerikanischen erfunden von Tommy Jaud. Berlin.

⁹ One way to make yourself aware of this is the Edge-Of-The-Bed-Technique by Jens Corssen. You wake up in the morning, sit at the edge of your bed and ask yourself whether you would like to go to university today or rather stay in bed. If you decide to go to uni today, set the goal to be the best you can be today.

¹⁰ Hornig, Markus (2016): 30 Minuten Gewohnheiten ändern. Offenbach.

Richter, Mischa (2017): Gewohnheiten ändern: Durch Gewohnheiten glücklicher Menschen Motivation, Disziplin und Konzentration aufbauen – Mit mehr Erfolg und Effizienz Ziele erreichen. unabhängig veröffentlicht.

Duhigg, Charles (2013): Die Macht der Gewohnheit: warum wir tun was wir tun. München

Getting Started ¹¹

5. The Get-Started-Method

Step 1: Understand that you can only start today. You either study today or you do not. The procrastination is absolutely not helping.

Step 2: You need a clear goal that is easy to reach to get started. In the beginning it can be helpful to only plan to study for 30 minutes, to research a specific thing or work something out. This is a manageable start which you can easily get motivated for.

Step 3: Just do it. The more you discuss with your inner couch potato the worse the situation will get. 30 minutes are not long, and it will endure. Promise! (Also, check back in with the couch potato negotiation.)

Step 4: Continue tomorrow. You have gotten started and should add to this later. "Tomorrow" you tell yourself. You study for half an hour again or even a little longer. You slowly increase the duration. Your inner couch potato is comparable to an engine: it has to get used to the situation until it can go to full performance without taking damage.

6. The Rubicon-Method¹²

You develop facts that force you to work on your task.

- Create obligations and cross your personal Rubicon.
- Do not plan too much.
- Set realistic goals.

Examples:

You would like to work through the script within one week?

- Arrange a meeting with your lecturer for the week to discuss open questions concerning the script.
- Give €20 to a friend and ask them to donate it if you have not finished the script after one week.

You would like to be at the library at 8 am tomorrow morning?

- Arrange to go to the library together with a fellow student at 7:45 o'clock.

You would like to finish your seminar work until the end of the week?

- Book a vacation beginning in seven days and pay for it immediately.

Caution, this is an advanced method!

→ If applied wrongfully, you may disadvantage yourself

7. The Salami-Technique

¹¹ Allen, David (2015): Wie ich die Dinge geregelt kriege – Selbstmanagement für den Alltag. München.

Höcker, Anna; Engberding, Margarita; Rist, Fred (2017): Heute fange ich wirklich an! – Prokrastination und Aufschieben überwinden – ein Ratgeber. Göttingen

Rückert, Hans-Werner (2005): Schluss mit dem ewigen Aufschieben – Wie Sie umsetzen, was Sie sich vornehmen. München.

¹² This dates back to Julius Caesar, who shrunk back from a civil war against his opponents for a long time. Once he had crossed the river Ribicon, there was no going back and the conflict proceeded.

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- Divide a larger task into smaller subtasks. You can complete these one after another.

Example:

Divide your bachelor's thesis in smaller subtasks → Figure 1 Roadmap for your orientation

8. The Five-Minutes-Technique

- Tell your inner couch potato: “You will only study for five minutes today” and sit back down at your desk. After five minutes you will notice your inner couch potato was whimpering unnecessarily and studying is not as bad as it was trying to make you believe.

This is how you make it to until the end

9. Prevent the What the Hell – Effect¹³

1. Set long-term goals. If you are unhappy with your performance today, focus on your performance for the whole week. This way you can easily catch up with the lost day. Also, you can plan one free day a week on any weekday. This way your inner couch potato will not be able to convince you that you have failed your goal and might as well stop here.
 2. Be aware of the What the Hell-Effect. If you deviate from your plan, you should be especially careful. You are in a more difficult situation and need some extra motivation. You could for example set an extra-large reward for yourself (“treat-method”) or you could get some support by meeting a friend at the library (“the Rubicon-method”).
- Set long-term goals. A calendar depicting the month or year hanging above your desk can act as a visual support.
 - If you failed a subgoal (“The salami-technique”) be especially careful and think about with which study hack you can motivate your inner couch potato to not give up.

10. The goal-orientation technique¹⁴

- Remind yourself of what it is going to be like once you handed in your bachelor’s thesis when you go to bed at night.

11. The break-hack¹⁵

This is how you pull off the perfect break:

- Plan breaks beforehand.
- Stick to the plan.
- Attach the break time to activities.

Once you finish the activity, your break is over.

- Once the cup of coffee is finished → so is the break.
- Sandwich or apple finished → break finished.
- Walked around the library once → break finished.

12. The Eat that Frog-Method¹⁶

- Write down unpleasant tasks and tackle those first thing every day for a maximum of 30 minutes.

Write each unpleasant task which takes a maximum of 30 minutes on a piece of paper. Attach a small bag of candy to it and put it into a large cup. Each day you will draw one piece of paper from the cup and finish the task.

¹³ Jonas, Klaus; Stroebe, Wolfgang; Hewstone, Miles (2014): Sozialpsychologie. 6. vollständig überarbeitete Auflage. Berlin. Aronson, Elliot; Wilson, Timothy; Akert, Robin (2014): Sozialpsychologie. 8. aktualisierte Auflage. Halbermoos.

¹⁴ Corssen, Jens (2006): Der Selbst-Entwickler: Das Corssen Seminar. Wiesbaden. Landmann, Meike; Schmitz, Bernhard (2007): Selbstregulation erfolgreich fördern. Stuttgart.

¹⁵ Schnabel, Ulrich (2012): Muße – Vom Glück des Nichtstuns. München

¹⁶ Tracy, Brian (2010): Eat that Frog – 21 Wege, um sein Zaudern zu überwinden. Offenbach.

Structure lends wings

13. The 25.000- Dollar- Method

The day before:

1. Sit down in the evening and write down what you want to accomplish the next day.
2. Sort the tasks after importance starting with task 1 with the highest priority.

On the day:

3. Complete task 1.
4. Check whether the priority of the other tasks has changed. If necessary, reorganize them.
5. Complete the next task in line.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5.

In the evening:

7. Check which tasks have remained and prioritize them again for the next day.

Caution: You will not complete all tasks within one day. This is alright. You should rather be proud of yourself for accomplishing the most important ones

- Follow the seven steps of the 25.000-Dollar-Method.
- Be proud of yourself for accomplishing the most important tasks.
- Try to make this technique a routine. → The Dressage-Method)

14. The 5 S-Method

We waste 27 % of our working time if we are unorganized!

1. Get rid of things!

Anything that you do not need on your desk you can get rid of. This way you create clarity and remind your inner couch potato that your task has priority.

2. Systematize!

Everything that you really need gets its assigned spot. This way you will never have to spend a lot of time looking for your documents. Keep in mind here, that you can easily reach the most important things or documents.

3. Standardize!

In the multitude of exams, theses, BAföG-applications etc. it is easy to lose the overview. This is why you should use notes, descriptions and markings. These can help you find things and your inner couch potato can never protest because of your messiness again.

4. Clean!

Once you finished studying for the day you bring everything back to order. This serves the examination. You remind yourself to save your documents. Things that have piled up you can

note on a piece of paper and you arrange your papers for the day at the library tomorrow so that you do not miss anything.

5. Self-discipline and continuous improvement

The last point is the most important one. The best system will not work if the mess takes over again after a few days. It will take a few weeks until you internalized this method ("The Dressage-Method"). Afterwards you will notice how happily your inner couch potato works in a clean area. It will respect you a lot more because it can tell that you have everything under control and that it is in good care. Together you can continuously improve the system in order to complete your tasks faster and spend more time together in recreation and fun.

15. The Focus- Check- Method ¹⁷

Rule of thumb by Cal Newport:

Learning success = time x degree of attention

- Each evening before bed, sit down and write down how long you have studied for, how focussed you were and how much you have accomplished.
- In case that your focus was too weak, think about how you could improve it (see for instance Your couch potato is lazy)

¹⁷ Newport, Cal (2016): Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World. New York.

Make studying more interesting

16. Gamification please¹⁸

Works well in combination with The Dressage-Method

- Give your daily routine a playful character.
- Engage in a friendly competition with your friends following pre-set rules.
- Use apps, to build habits and report your progress.

Examples:

- You set a date with your friend for the library. You meet and make a bet who can go without their phone longer. The loser buys the winner a coffee in the next break.
- You agree to study at least one hour each day. Whoever makes it longer than the other person will have a meal prepared for themselves by their opponent in the weekend.

It is important here that the playful character of the hack remains in the focus in order to prevent too competitive behavior. It is not about showing the other person how great you are at any price but about getting on with your studying better.

There are software and apps to help you out here as well.

A free app is Habitica. With Habitica you can organize your to-do-lists, habits and study plans among other things. If you complete the tasks you set for yourself, your digital character will build itself. You get stronger and can fight monsters together with friends. If you are fond of games, this can definitely help you with your examination phase and beyond.

Another app is forest. This app helps you to stay focussed. You can plant trees with this app, but they only grow if you do not look at your phone for 30 minutes.

17. The Treat-Method¹⁹

- Before you sit down and study, write down what kind of reward you will get. Here, small daily successes should only be rewarded with small treats.
- Only when you reached your goal are you allowed to reward yourself.
- If you fail your goal multiple times, it is set too high, and you should divide it into smaller subgoals (→ salami technique).

Examples: Pastry, walks, beer, red wine, read a fun book, theatre- / cinema visits, Netflix

18. The learning environment effect

- Listen to yourself and ask your inner couch potato what exactly annoys it.
- If it is connected to your learning environment, change it in a way that makes it feel comfortable.

Examples:

- The library is too loud? → find another spot or use ear plugs.

¹⁸ Sailer, Michael (2016): Die Wirkung von Gamification auf Motivation und Leistung. Empirische Studien im Kontext manueller Arbeitsprozesse. Wiesbaden.

¹⁹ Scheich, Henneing (2006): Lernen und Gedächtnis. Ein hirnbioologischer Blick auf Bildungsfragen. In: Nuissi, Ekkehard. Vom Lernen zum Lehren. Lern- und Lehrforschung für die Weiterbildung. S. 87-90.

- It is raining? → Study from home today.
- The library is too grey for your liking? → take a small talisman, a photograph or a small object that makes you happy with you. Or → study outside or in a café.
- You can not study at 8 o'clock in the morning? See if you are better in the afternoon.

And what if all of that does not work?

As long as your procrastination stays within the range of usualness it might be unpleasant, but it does not present a serious problem. If it takes on larger dimensions, however, and might threaten your study completion or lead you to surpass social and financial limits, meaning you suffer from it psychologically, we highly advise you to seek professional help. As a first point of reference, we would like to suggest the [psychological counselling by the Studentenwerk OstNiedersachsen](#). Here you can also get information on alternative help systems. We wish you all the best and success, friendship with your inner couch potato and fun with your thesis and further studies.