Dear Alice,

How do you find time to be with your friends, family, and boyfriend, and study for school?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Carl Sandburg may have said it best when he wrote that “time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.”

The hard fact is that time is not something you can find, make, buy, or save. There are but 1440 minutes in a day and we have the choice in how we spend each one. You might think of it like money in a bank account. Any minutes wasted are simply lost at midnight, but a new allocation of 1440 minutes arrives just one second later. Did you know that by the time you are 70 you will have spent 23 years sleeping, eleven years working, eight years playing, six years eating, and five years grooming?

First, start by asking yourself a couple of questions: what are your priorities and what are your goals? Have you tried prioritizing? You can then assess these priorities, analyze your needs, rank them by urgency and priority level, and then do the most urgent and higher priority things first.

If the activities that you identified are all priorities, then it's time to take out your planner and figure out how, when, and for how long to hang with friends, see your family, squeeze in your boyfriend, and study in ways that match your goals. For those in school, the recommended order of prioritizing activities is as follows:

- Sleep
- Meals
- Academics (classes & studying)
- Work (but only if required to stay in school)
- Personal time
- Friends, family, and relationships

Some might disagree with sleep and meals being listed above all else. It’s a known fact that students with good sleep and proper nutrition learn better and feel more able to participate in
other activities (work, play, etc.). Here are a couple of additional tips for motivation to address all of your times in the same amount of time:

- If procrastination is a problem, do your most difficult or distasteful task first. Getting it over with can help reduce anxiety.
- Divide up large projects into subprojects. It makes them less intimidating, reduces procrastination, and allows a sense of accomplishment even before the project is complete.
- Complete at least one task each day, even if it's a small part of a larger project.
- Schedule time to worry. Try not to worry about task B when you're working on task A. Schedule task B and tell yourself that you'll worry about B at that time and not before.

When in school it's also common for the need to have schedules that flex a bit from week to week. For example, you may decide to talk with your friends less this week so that you can adequately prepare for your upcoming exam. Then, next week, when the work load lessens, you can catch up with folks. Combining stuff might work, too: for example, you can study with your boyfriend, get groups of friends together, etc. A quick word of caution: recent evidence suggests that multi-tasking makes people less efficient and compromises work quality. Therefore, you might benefit from logging off of social media sites, turning off music/television, and not answering the phone while studying, sleeping, etc.

The best part of a "life-management" plan is that it puts YOU in charge! These strategies might sound too structured for some, but organizing one's life, and being disciplined about following a self-imposed plan is sometimes the best way to get things done - whatever you want those things to be.

In addition to checking out the related questions, you can reflect on John Stuart Mill's statement: "From this time, what is worth relating of my life will come into a very small compass; for I have no further mental changes to tell of, but only, as I hope, a continued mental progress."

Alice!
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