If there’s one thing almost all students learn from their boarding school experience, it’s time management. According to the boarding school alumni I’ve talked to, figuring out how to manage time on your own before college is a real blessing. And although almost every boarding school graduate heads to college with a good understanding of time management, this chapter will give you some tips and tricks, so you won’t have to learn these skills the hard, painful way.

When I say the hard, painful way, I mean when you realize a bit too late that if you had managed your time properly you would not have had to pull an all-nighter, scramble to learn material minutes before an exam, and exhaust your brain so that it does not operate properly during the test. Believe me, you do not want this to happen. And now I hear you asking, “So how do I avoid this awful fate?”

Well, it all begins at the beginning: in class. First and foremost, be organized. Have a different, designated notebook, binder, and/or folder for each class. Legibly write the date on everything you get and every new sheet of notes. Next, give your undivided attention to your teacher and classmates. Listen carefully to what the teacher has to say, and take good notes. By good notes, I don’t mean take down everything that comes out of the teacher’s mouth. Rather, you should:

- Take down crucial points of the topic.
- Use bullet point or outline form. Complete sentences aren’t necessary.
• Use abbreviations, like “/” for “or,” “>” for “more than,” and “↑” for “increase.”

Over time, you will probably find yourself developing your own shorthand, which is a good thing and will allow you to take better, more in-depth notes.

One thing that makes boarding school special is its widespread use of discussion-based classes (some schools call this the Harkness Method) where students are taught by engaging in discussion rather than solely through their teacher’s lectures. Teachers provide important information as a basis for conversation, and students build off of it. Don’t be afraid to participate in the discussion; your opinion and knowledge will be valued by the class. Active engagement in these types of classes helps your brain do a better job of processing the information in your notes. You will be able to learn a lot more by participating, which will help you when it comes time to study.

Also, when your teachers announce assignments and upcoming evaluations, make sure to write down those dates. Don’t think this is necessary? You’ll find out that you’re wrong when there are so many different due dates, exam dates, club meetings, and sports practice times to keep track of that your head is spinning. Here are the five steps you need to take to ensure that you remember everything important and keep up with your busy life as a prep school student.

1. **Get an agenda or planner.** Whether your agenda is an actual book, an app on your phone, or a calendar on your computer, make sure you have a place to take down the assignments for each day so there won’t be a paper you forgot to submit or a quiz that caught you by surprise.

2. **Next to each homework assignment, write an approximation of how long you think the assignment will take.** By the end of the first week of school (which is also the length of time teachers tend to be forgiving about forgotten or incomplete assignments), you should have an idea of how long a particular type of assignment should take. Thomas Hunt, my advisor and sophomore English teacher, notes, “If you determine that you have 3 hours of homework, you’ll obviously need to find 3 hours of time to do it. Where do you find that time? Before dinner? At a study hall? During a free period?” Mr. Hunt also suggests that the difficulty of the subject should influence the order in which the homework is done. He advises, “Homework that uses up the most mental energy should be done first, while your mind is fresh.”

3. **Put together a daily schedule that also indicates blocks of time when you’re going to do homework, go to and come back from sports, and eat dinner.** Why are schedules so important? One of the tips I picked up in a new student seminar is that schedules give you a better sense of control. For example, during swim season, it’s especially important for me to have a schedule. The girls share the same pool with the boys and divers. This means...
that swim practice is at a different time every day (sometimes even during study hall). Having a schedule has been crucial in helping me figure out when to do homework while dealing with a demanding athletics schedule.

4. **Do not wait until Sunday to start weekend homework.** Even if your school has a few classes on Saturdays, do some homework for other subjects on Friday nights. Finish some work on Saturday as well, so that you don’t panic Sunday night.

5. **But don’t be overly strict with the schedule either; be realistic and allow yourself some leeway so that it doesn’t fall apart.** Give yourself ample **time to rest.** It’s important to take a breather outside in the fresh air (I know, fresh air can be a foreign concept at times), eat that yummy snack you’ve been saving, or talk with some friends. You need to go easy on your precious brain. My house counselor likes to remind us to set a “stop-work” time and stop working then. For me, even during the notoriously tough junior year, my “stop-work” time was midnight. At that point, I would stop my work, do my nightly routine, and jump into bed. If you take advantage of every free block in your day and structure your time in a manner intended to allow you to complete everything by your “stop-work” time, you will almost always finish by the “stop-work” time.

I know, a lot of you might think it’s impossible to get to sleep by midnight if you have multiple tests and quizzes the next day. The key is studying ahead of time. Your teachers will usually give a week’s notice of test dates and a few days’ notice for quizzes (or else students tend to revolt in fury). The weekend before the day of multiple quizzes and tests, get a head start. Here are a few tips.

**TIPS**

- Begin organizing your notes, handouts, index cards, chapter outlines from online, and so on.
- Split the material into subtopics.
- Spread the studying over a few days, studying a couple of subtopics per day.
- Figure out which subtopics you need to concentrate on the most and make sure you are able to review these in great depth **before** the night before the test. That way, if you don’t understand a part of the material, you have enough time to ask your teacher for help. By studying ahead of time, you won’t need to stay up extremely late the night before your exams.
Another misconception is that it's impossible to avoid an all-nighter when there's an essay due the next day. You should spread out writing an essay or completing a project over multiple days, just as you would do when studying for tests and quizzes. Don't plan to save essays and projects for the last minute—they are designed to be done over a long period of time.

For essays, split the process into three parts:
1. Brainstorm and find textual evidence to support your thesis.
2. Write a rough draft of your essay.
3. Edit the rough draft and create a final draft. (It is better to have fresh eyes when you edit, as opposed to editing right after you finish writing.)

Projects follow a similar pattern:
1. Do your brainstorming and research.
2. Gather materials for your project.
3. Write a rough draft.
4. Edit the rough draft and create a final draft.

This way, you won't have to stay up all night before a project is due. Break up what you need to do over a considerable period of time, and pencil it into your schedule.

If you follow all these tips throughout the term, you will be a lot more prepared for the final exam than you think. Generally, I start studying for the final the weekend before the last week of the term. Figure out which classes are hardest for you, and start studying for those classes earlier. An advantage to this is that you can find your teachers with time to spare if any questions arise during review.

That said, my advice up until now is useless if you don't learn to concentrate—it is a crucial element of time management. My house counselor is absolutely correct when he says, "When you're reading something, you should not be looking at your phone or mentally cataloging what else you have to do that day. When you're writing, you should not be clicking over to something else on your computer." So, to make sure you're truly concentrating when you're doing schoolwork, try the following:

1. Keep your phone on silent and put it far from your reach. During a break from studying, reward yourself by checking your ever-so-important texts.

2. Stay away from social media during homework time. If you don't have the best self-control over checking Facebook every 5 minutes, install a website blocker. I've blocked all social media and video hosting websites between the
hours of 4 and 11:59 p.m. That way, I won’t be tempted by TV shows or the Tumblr dashboard, but I still have Internet access for schoolwork. Some think my method is extreme, but it’s surprising how much time you can waste on social media websites. By switching back and forth between Facebook and your assignment, you will be wasting time by having to constantly readjust your flow of thoughts. One of my instructors, Mrs. Booth, said, “A boarding school student’s schedule is hectic, so it’s important to take advantage of every little chunk of time. Even just 10 wasted minutes can hinder you in the long run.” Keep in mind that the 10 minutes you spend on Facebook here and there eventually add up.

3. **Find a distraction-free environment to do your studying.** I cannot stay in my room with my roommate if I’m trying to get work done; we are extremely counterproductive when we are together. Instead, I head to the library and take over a cubicle. The library is normally where students can silently and seriously complete their work, so it’s a great distraction-free zone.

In all honesty, I slept a good amount for a junior, sometimes even more than friends whose classes weren’t so rigorous. If I hadn’t actually used these tips I’ve given to you, I’m pretty sure I would have quickly sunk in the sea of schoolwork, despair, and many sleepless nights. I definitely slept more than I did at times during my sophomore year because I’ve now learned to manage my time more efficiently. I can say with confidence that these tips have worked well for me during my two years at boarding school, and I hope you can learn from them, too. Best of luck!