

The Time and Effort on Task Toolkit for students

Independent Learning & Time Management



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Session Objectives

Explore

- the purpose and demands of university assessments

Apply

- the 3 steps of the TET Toolkit to your own learning

Reflect on

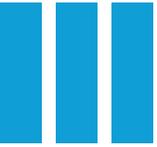
- your existing skills and knowledge, your areas for development and learning strategies

Design

- Your own personalised working plan for your assessment tasks, in order to effectively manage both time and cognitive effort.

Session Outline

- Independent Learning Discussion
- Assessments at university
- Grading and degree classifications
- Planning your time and effort on coursework tasks
- The Time and Effort on Task Toolkit
 - Discussion of current assessment demands
 - Working through the template
- Summary



What does the term “Independent Learning” mean to you?

**Group
Discussion**

Some elements of independent learning

- **Taking responsibility:** you are responsible for your learning progress. You decide how and when to study, not just following the teacher's direction.
- **Self-motivation and less direct supervision:** you need to be motivated to seek knowledge, find solutions, and work on assignments without needing constant supervision. University learning may involve few or infrequent direct interactions, requiring you to organise your own learning
- **Beyond the classroom:** Learning doesn't stop at lectures. It involves reading, researching, reflecting, and applying concepts on your own.
- **Peer Learning:** Independent learning doesn't mean 'on your own'
- **Critical Thinking and Problem solving:** Independent learning develops analytical skills by requiring you to think deeply about issues and develop your own ideas; which are a valuable skill that employers seek.



What underpins your decision about what independent learning to prioritise?

Group Discussion

Assessment at university

- A move away from exams that emphasise recall of info
- Increasing use of project-based ‘authentic’ assessments that mirror workplace tasks, and less vulnerable to inappropriate generative AI use
 - Can be more complex and time-consuming than exams, requiring higher-order cognitive skills (Wald & Harland, 2021)
- Longer-term planning and time management is required across the term
- A strong understanding of the assessment purpose, design, and guidelines (‘assessment literacy’) can improve grade (e.g., Douglas Smith et al., 2013)

Competing demands on time

- 56% of students have some form of paid employment in term time (average 14.5 hours / week) (AdvanceHE, 2024)
- 14% of students have caring responsibilities (AdvanceHE, 2024)
- Many students reduce their hours of paid work as they go through the programme

There is a **huge difference** in the amount of work and effort required to pass, and the amount of work and effort required to achieve a 1st class mark

UK Degree Classification	[Your University] Grading System	Percentage mark
First Class		90 – 100 80 – 89 70 – 79
Upper Second Class (2.1)		60 – 69
Lower Second Class (2.2)		50 – 59
Third Class/Pass		40-49
Fail		30-39
Fail		Below 30

What is your personal target mark?

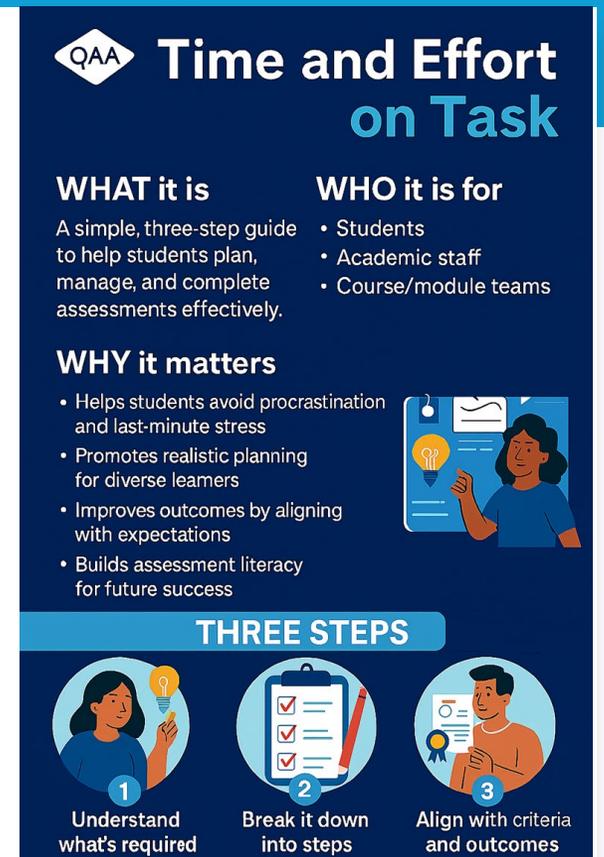
Planning your time and effort on coursework tasks

The [Time and Effort on Task \(TET\) Toolkit](#) is designed to help you with coursework planning

It is based on 3 steps:

- Establishing expectations of prior knowledge and skills
- Breaking down the assessment task into sub-steps (with time and effort estimation)
- Checking to maximise success

You will use this template today to help you make an **individually tailored plan** for an assessment task



QAA **Time and Effort on Task**

WHAT it is
A simple, three-step guide to help students plan, manage, and complete assessments effectively.

WHO it is for

- Students
- Academic staff
- Course/module teams

WHY it matters

- Helps students avoid procrastination and last-minute stress
- Promotes realistic planning for diverse learners
- Improves outcomes by aligning with expectations
- Builds assessment literacy for future success

THREE STEPS

- 1** Understand what's required
- 2** Break it down into steps
- 3** Align with criteria and outcomes

The graphic includes an illustration of a woman pointing at a screen with a lightbulb icon, and three circular icons representing the steps: a woman with a lightbulb, a checklist, and a man with a certificate.

Hands-on activity: make a working plan for your assessment task

- Choose a coursework task
- Look up the assignment briefing document/guidelines for that task
- Work through the template with this task in mind on paper or on your device
- Remember this is a plan for YOU – it is OK for your plan to be different than your peers

Step 1: Establishing your relevant knowledge and skills

Knowledge and skills	List all relevant items	Where can I find help with this? – consider options from previous modules, or university-wide services.
Have I completed similar assessments before? <i>(Consider format e.g., essay/presentation and topic at any course/level)</i>		
What knowledge from the course might help me complete this task? <i>(Consider links with other modules too)</i>		
What knowledge from outside the course might help me complete this task? <i>(Consider any real-world relevance or applications of the topic)</i>		
What academic skills do I already have that can help me? <i>(e.g., literature searching, data analysis, or referencing)</i>		
What academic skills do I need to develop that can help me? <i>(e.g., literature searching, data analysis, or referencing)</i>		
Have I gained skills outside university that are relevant? <i>(e.g., work/hobbies can build skills in teamwork & time management)</i>		
Is there specific software, equipment or tools/resources I need to complete this task, and do I know how to use them?		

Working through the template

Assessing prior skills and knowledge

Identify an assessment task that you would like to work on.

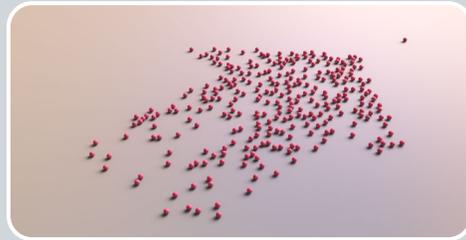
Use the TET-Toolkit template for students and go through step 1

Don't spend too long on this step at first - just put down the main things that come to mind

Assessing prior skills and knowledge



What are your strengths?



Which areas would you like to get more support with? Who could you ask?



How did your peers complete this table? Can you find any similarities or any differences?



What actions can you take, to develop your skills and knowledge, if needed?

Step 2: Breaking down of task into sub steps

(Feel free to add or remove as many steps as necessary)

Step	Description	Estimate your likely Time-on-Task using a flexible range (e.g., 4-6 hours)	Estimate how much mental effort is needed (e.g., high, moderate, low)	Target date for completion (consider workload on other modules)	Where can I find help with this step? (consider options from previous modules, or university-wide services)
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
Total					

Working through the template

A bit about **Time**

- **Student perceptions** of workload often **differ** from the **instructor** and depend on prior academic experience (Money et al., 2017).
- **Appropriate workloads** can support a **critical** and **inquiry-based approach** resulting in **deeper learning**. (Scully and Kerr, 2014).
- Assessment demands should be designed **to orient you to distribute appropriate amounts of time and effort** across all the important aspects of the course (Gibbs, 2010).
- Having access to suggested guidelines about time requirements can help you to better **manage your academic and non-academic time** (Michel et al., 2020).

A bit about **Effort**

Mental Effort: the subjective feeling of effort that accompanies the cognitive operations involved in completing a task (Wolpe et al., 2024)

Factors affecting levels of effort:

Interest levels

- A strong **intrinsic interest** in a topic may feel **less effortful** and lead to deeper learning (Kember et al., 1996).

Time and Intensity

- Duration and intensity of a task increases effort requirements; making individuals to assess whether the desired action is worth the required effort. (Endres et al, 2025).
- The amount of time spent on a task does not always have a straightforward relationship with subjective effort, or with eventual outcome in terms of grades (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005).

Time and Effort: not a straightforward connection

Examples:

- Some tasks may be time-consuming but low in terms of cognitive effort if you are already experienced and skilled with a specific task e.g. fixing a reference list
- Other tasks may involve a higher cognitive load but a short amount of time; e.g. re-drafting a concluding paragraph to make a clearer argument.
- The effort required for a task could increase as the task's duration increases; e.g. analysing data may require less mental effort in the beginning of the task, in comparison to several hours after working on the same task continuously.

Time and Effort: not a straightforward connection

Can you think of some tasks that ***you*** may find require different amounts of time and effort?

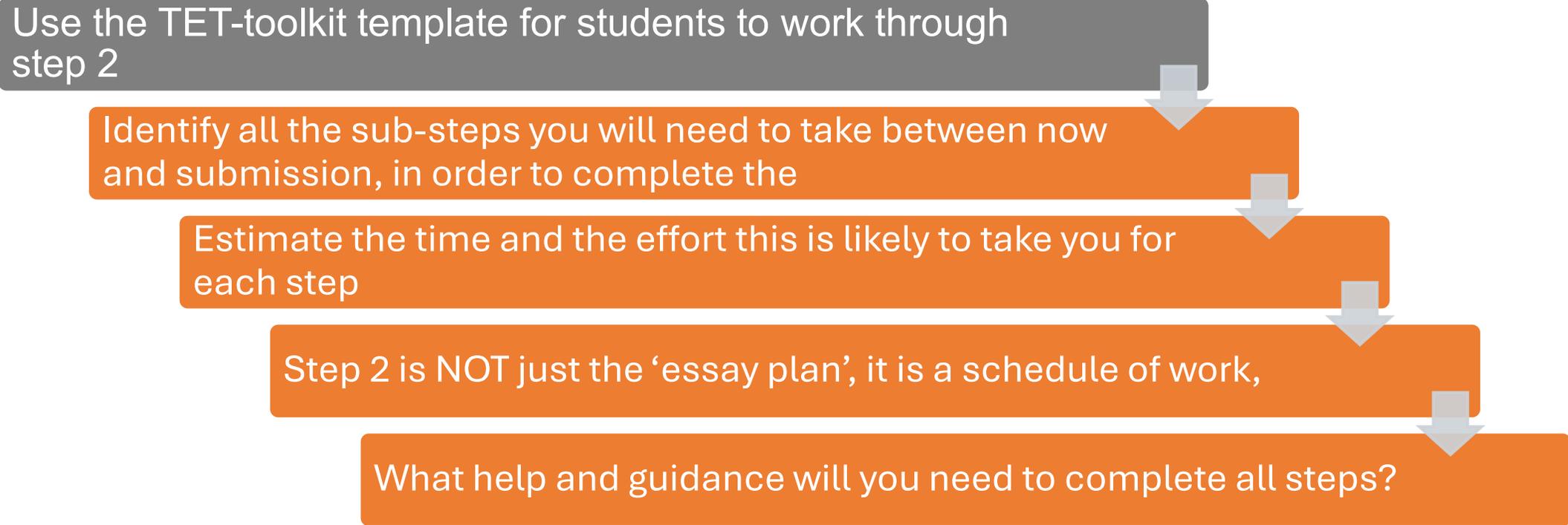
For example, think of any tasks that may be:

- time consuming but effortless
- Quick but effortful
- Time consuming and effortful
- Quick and effortless

Would the amount of effort you need, change, if you are doing the same task for a shorter or longer period?

Time and Effort estimation

Use the TET-toolkit template for students to work through step 2



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graph TD; A[Use the TET-toolkit template for students to work through step 2] --> B[Identify all the sub-steps you will need to take between now and submission, in order to complete the]; B --> C[Estimate the time and the effort this is likely to take you for each step]; C --> D[Step 2 is NOT just the 'essay plan', it is a schedule of work,]; D --> E[What help and guidance will you need to complete all steps?];
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Identify all the sub-steps you will need to take between now and submission, in order to complete the

Estimate the time and the effort this is likely to take you for each step

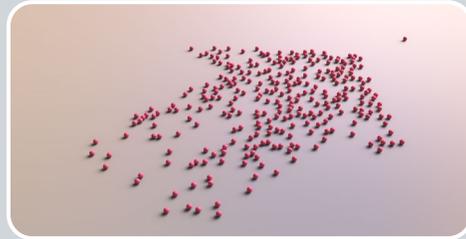
Step 2 is NOT just the 'essay plan', it is a schedule of work,

What help and guidance will you need to complete all steps?

Time and Effort estimation



What are your strengths?



Which areas would you like to get more support with? Who could you ask?



How did your peers complete this table? Can you find any similarities or any differences?



What actions can you take, to make sure you meet your plan?

Step 3: Final checks for maximising success

Item	Yes/No	Further comments
Review the assessment brief. Are the steps above covering the whole task? <i>(Have I missed anything?)</i>		
Review the marking criteria. Will the steps above help me to meet all of them? Have I added any steps that are not relevant? <i>(Could I do more to maximise my grade?)</i>		
Is the total estimated amount of time realistic, for the grade I am aspiring to achieve? <i>(Consider how much of the module this assessment is worth – e.g., 100%, 50%, 30%? Consider coursework demands on other modules)</i>		
Do I understand what skills and knowledge will be developed by this assessment task, to support future success on the course? <i>(Make a list)</i>		

Working
through the
template

Maximising success

Use the TET-toolkit template for students to work through step 3



Consider the checklist for maximising your success



Do you need to make any changes to your planning?

Maximising success



What actions can you take, to make sure you meet your plan?



How did your peers complete this table?
Can you find any similarities or any differences?



Consider when it will be an appropriate time to review your plan again

Things to remember

- Given the heavy time demands of a university course, and competing outside demands, efficiency is essential
 - Plan your time – the TET template is a useful tool to help with this
 - Understand where you can get help – there are many services to support you!
- Remember the importance of sleep - extra studying at the expense of sleep is counter-productive (Gillen-O'Neel et al., 2012)
 - Sleep helps us to consolidate memory for information learned during the day
 - People learn better when well-rested
- **Effective time management** and **self-care** will help you avoid stress, and enable effective independent studying and coursework preparation

Final reflection

- What challenges do you anticipate in managing your time and cognitive effort over the next few weeks, and what support or strategies could help you address them?
- Looking at your current study habits, what is one practical change you can make this week to improve your efficiency or wellbeing (e.g., using the TET template, seeking support, or protecting your sleep)?

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Resources

- [Project Website](#) and [Toolkit website](#)
- [TET toolkit staff guidance](#)
- [TET toolkit template for staff](#)
- [TET toolkit student guidance](#)
- [TET toolkit template for students](#)

Suggested Reading

Click the link to learn more about the ‘Enhancing Assessment Literacy’ project: [Enhancing Assessment Literacy - Balancing staff expectations with students’ effort and time](#)

Douglas Smith, C., Worsfold, K., Davies, L., Fisher, R. & McPhail, R. (2013) Assessment literacy and student learning: the case for explicitly developing students ‘assessment literacy’, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38 (1), 44-60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.598636>

Gillen-O’Neel, C., Huynh, V. W., Fuligni, A. (2012). To study or to sleep? The academic costs of extra studying at the expense of sleep. *Child Development*, 84 (1), 133-142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01834.x>