



Coffee with Caroline

Caroline Topham

Programme Lead Dr Caroline Topham has been hosting “Coffee with Caroline” drop-in sessions for students to discuss their wellbeing. In this article, Caroline answers some of your queries. Have more?

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How can I maintain a healthy work-life balance?

This is so important and getting into good habits now will help to set you up for a healthy work-life balance for the rest of your life. There will always be times when we need to work late or have a particularly busy period, but this should be every now and then, and not the norm if you can help it. Not everyone has the luxury of being able to choose a good work-life balance all the time – at the end of the day we all have to pay the bills – but if you find yourself spending a lot of time working, but not actually getting a lot done, then maybe your work-life balance is something you need to address.

For me, a good work-life balance is partly about good planning, and partly about respecting your own wellbeing. Planning well helps you to use your time efficiently; instead of spending a week twiddling with an assignment, set yourself some deadlines. For example, spend an hour on your literature search, four hours of reading time (with a break!) then the next day you can crack that essay question. Planning little rewards and downtime can help you to stick to the plan.

Now for the second part: respecting your own wellbeing. When you have a lot to do it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking there is no time for breaks or relaxation, but this is a false economy. If you feel overwhelmed with work, this is a sure sign you need to take a good break and focus on your wellbeing, even just an hour off can help. Take a walk, call a friend, cook a meal, spend some time doing anything that you find calming. Investing in your wellbeing this way will pay off, as you will be able to be more productive when you do choose to work.

Peer pressure has role to play here too: if your friends are pulling ‘all-nighters’ or your colleague is always the last to leave the office it can be tempting to think that you should be too. However, this style of working is often a result of bad planning and procrastination, and in ten years you will be very glad you took the time to look after yourself when you see your colleague is off work with stress and burnout. No one is going to tell you to look after yourself, so learn to do this for yourself! It's important.

If you think you might fall into the procrastination trap (we've all been there!), have a go at these training sessions from the University for some practical advice on how to use your time efficiently:

<https://www.salford.ac.uk/skills/personal-effectiveness>

How do I relax when stressed about assignments?

A good starting point is to try and identify what exactly is causing the stress. Having to complete assignments doesn't have to be stressful, so maybe there is an underlying issue which is causing the stress. For example, is it a topic you feel under-confident about? Have you run out of time? Do you feel like

you don't know how to start? If you can identify what the barrier is before your stress levels get too high, then you can take action to fix it.

Without exception, getting started with assignments as soon as they are set will always work in your favour as it gives you time to identify the gaps in your skills or knowledge and then take steps to work on them. I really recommend these tutorials from the library when preparing for your assessments; they have some practical hints and tips to help you do your best:

<https://www.salford.ac.uk/skills/university-assessments>

How do I manage my time when I have multiple deadlines due at the same time?

The best way to manage deadlines that are close together is to set yourself a false deadline. For example, if you have two weeks to complete two assignments, spend a week on one and set yourself a 'pretend' deadline one week earlier than the actual deadline. Then when it's done, leave it alone! Now you have a week to work on the next assignment. See the link below for a nice tutorial about 'owning your learning' which can help you to take control in situations like this:

<https://www.salford.ac.uk/skills/personal-effectiveness>