



# FAST FACTS

## Managing Your Time

*Words of Advice from  
Randy Pausch's Last Lecture*

***“Each of us must decide:  
Am I a fun-loving Tigger  
or am I a sad-sack  
Eeyore? Pick a camp.”***

—Randy Pausch

***“If you can dream it,  
you can do it.”***

—This advice was famously  
given by the great Walt Disney,  
but is applicable to everyone.

As is common on many college campuses, a faculty member will be invited to give a “last lecture,” imparting wisdom as if it were truly the last time he or she would speak publicly.

Carnegie Mellon’s Randy Pausch, who lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in July 2008, undoubtedly presented the most renowned “last lecture” in the history of the practice when he spoke before a standing room-only crowd on campus in September 2007.

A celebrated professor, computer scientist and co-founder of CMU’s Entertainment Technology Center, Pausch was well qualified to lecture on many topics. Furthermore, given his recent terminal diagnosis, many expected him to talk about that experience. But Pausch chose to lecture on living; more specifically, he spoke on how to lead a fulfilling life. In his own self-described Tigger-happy way, Pausch assured the audience: “If you lead your life the right way, the karma will take care of itself. The dreams will come to you.”

The video of his lecture, “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams,” was posted on the Internet and has been viewed millions of times ([www.thelastlecture.com](http://www.thelastlecture.com)). *The Last Lecture*, a book Pausch wrote after giving his talk, became a national best-seller.

The timeless lessons Pausch imparted are relevant and inspirational to both young and old, students and nonstudents. (In fact, the book was required reading for freshmen entering Carnegie Mellon in 2008.)

Academic Development has put together an overview of time management tips drawn from *The Last Lecture* and supplemented with student input. This Fast Fact is not intended to replace Pausch’s entertaining talk nor his warmly written book; rather, it can provide students some food for thought as they strive to achieve balance among classes, schoolwork, relationships and life.

***“Time must be explicitly  
managed, like money.”***

We all have 168 hours in each week—no more, no less. How you decide to spend this valued commodity is up to you, but you want to use your time wisely so that you won’t feel regretful about wasting it. Be sure to schedule all the things you *have* to do first, such as work, sleep, study time, appointments, practices, etc. Once you have planned your scheduled commitments, the remainder of the time is yours to do with as you please. Think of it as a checkbook: once you pay your bills, the rest of

the money is yours to enjoy and spend freely. The Time Management Fast Fact ([www.cmu.edu/academic-development/publications/fastfacts.shtml](http://www.cmu.edu/academic-development/publications/fastfacts.shtml)) includes several tips on making good use of your hours, such as prioritizing and scheduling, eliminating distractions and exploiting idle time. Be sure to visit the AD website for more information on improving your time management.

***“How to explicitly manage your time? The power of a list. Keep a notebook with you. On each page write a topic that uses your time. My notebook might have one page with ‘Calculus,’ another with ‘Crew,’ another with ‘RA Duties,’ another with ‘Personal.’ As you think of things to accomplish, whip out the notebook and write each task down on the appropriate page. Next to the task draw an unfilled circle. As you accomplish parts of the task, fill in the circle appropriately. If you only halfway finished the paper you have due, there should be a half-filled circle. Lists really help you stay organized and know what is in front of you to be accomplished.”***  
—Megan, Tepper School of Business

***“Whenever possible, I try to plan things at least a week in advance so I can devote specific amounts of time to things and prioritize tasks/projects. When I planned my work schedule around attending Relay for Life, I wanted to make the least number of trips to campus, since I don’t live close. So I made sure to pack my books into my car and drive to campus before Relay, so that I could just go straight to work after my shift. And since I drove, I didn’t have to worry about wasting precious sleeping time by waiting for the CMU Escort service.”***  
—Jessica, BHA

## **“You can always change your plan, but only if you have one.”**

Develop a study plan, keep a to-do list and break down large tasks/ assignments into manageable chunks. Don’t wait for the mood to strike you to study—plan, plan, plan! You can print out a blank study schedule from [www.cmu.edu/academic-development/publications/planners-schedules.shtml](http://www.cmu.edu/academic-development/publications/planners-schedules.shtml).

Small steps are easier than large steps. When you have a task, break it down and identify the action required for each piece. Use to-do lists.

***“It works better for me to have a list of priorities than a ‘plan.’ Then when new commitments come in, you can see where they fit in the priority list, and if they’re high enough up on the list then your ‘plan’ will change.”***  
—Stephano, Tepper School of Business

***“Frequently I work in groups on homework assignments or on extracurricular projects. The hardest part of starting any of those groups is meeting with everyone. I’ve found that setting a date for the meeting is a better move than waiting to make sure that the time is 100% okay with everyone. If there is a conflict, we find a new appropriate time or meet twice. Having the plan to meet allows change to be founded on something concrete.”***  
—Rachel, CIT

***“I dropped Principles of Economics my freshman year, just because I didn’t want to get a ‘bad’ grade and didn’t want to put up with work. And now, I am in a position of not knowing how to fulfill my general education requirement. I really didn’t plan and now I am in a sticky situation.”***  
—Jungup, CIT

## **“Ask yourself: Are you spending your time on the right things?”**

Ask yourself whether your “causes, goals, interests” are worth pursuing. Whether it is a class, a club or a personal interest, the value you place on a task should merit the time you devote to it. After putting emphasis on your schoolwork, you can then spend free time on extracurricular activities.

***“I ask myself that all the time, and the answer for me is definitely NO! I waste so much time on things that have little long-term value it’s ridiculous. So I think it’s an important question to ask, but actually implementing ideas that come from it is an entirely different monster.”***  
—Stephano, Tepper School of Business

***“This is a very good question to ask yourself. I prioritize tasks by how much weight they carry in my classes. I don’t like to slack in any classes, but when there’s a time crunch, sometimes things have to get pushed aside. For instance, if an assignment is weighed more, grade-wise, then I’m more likely to devote more***

***“It doesn’t matter how well you polish the underside of the banister,”*** noted Pausch. ***So don’t worry about unimportant details.***

***“You’ve got to get the fundamentals down, because otherwise the fancy stuff is not going to work.”***

***“Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”***

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*time to that project. Also, with class readings, I first complete the ones for classes that require responses or quizzes.”*

—Jessica, BHA

*“It’s not about what your parents want you to do, or your friends, or even all the things you want to do. There will be those weekdays where you have five hours of class, two academic meetings, a lecture series, volleyball, and then dinner at your friend’s apartment. Can you do it all and get your homework done? When I have days like these, I acknowledge that homework is the least desirable, but nevertheless must be done.”*

—Rachel, CIT

## Develop a good filing system so you’ll know where everything is.

Organization is a skill, a value and a challenge. How many times have you sat down to study only to find you can’t find the course syllabus, a calculator or your class notes? If you take some time to organize your room, your study space and your course materials, it will most likely reap long-term benefits. For example, three-hole punch the syllabi for each class and put them in the front of each notebook or folder.

*“I kept telling myself after I got to college, ‘I don’t need to get binders and notebooks to keep all my notes. That is so high school.’ And I just kept all the papers, assignments and exams in my bag. It was okay for the first few weeks, but everything got so hectic and I couldn’t find anything I was looking for.”*

—Conan, CIT

## “Rethink the telephone.”

Rethink text messaging, IM, online gaming, MySpace and Facebook, too. Although we seem to need computers for everything now, try closing your laptop the next time you work on a problem set or do a reading. E-mails need not be essays and phone calls need not be monologues: use only the energy and the materials necessary for a task—no more, no less. Complete your homework and then allow yourself 30 minutes to communicate via these means.

## “Delegate.”

Especially when working in groups, delegation is the key to effective time management. Another time saver is recognizing when and whom to ask for help. After considering how to efficiently and successfully complete a task, ask for help if you decide that you are not the best person for the job. Talk to a friend who has already taken a course, or attend a walk-in Peer Tutoring session. Trust the people around you if you are uncertain about doing something on your own.

*“I used to have problems delegating tasks because I wanted to make sure that everything was done correctly and efficiently. But as part of my job as Multicultural Intern in the Office of Student Affairs, I have learned to delegate quickly because my specific department is only comprised of the Coordinator of Multicultural & Diversity Initiatives and me. There’s no way that two people can put together all the events, so we delegate tasks to relevant multicultural student organizations.”* —Jessica, BHA

*“When I work on a project (planning an RA outing, for example), I tend to want to control every aspect of decisions. But I don’t have the time for that! I worked on a lab report last year with a group of four. Instead of answering all of the questions independently, we delegated different tasks to each member. Our specialization created deeper information in the cover report for the lab.”*

—Rachel, CIT

## “Take a time out.”

Sleep in on a Saturday morning. See a Thursday movie in McConomy with friends after your night class. Do jumping jacks in your hallway between chapters. Take deeper breaths. Be kind to yourself. If you manage your time effectively, you will have more free time. So start building in moments of complete randomness to your day; in doing so, you may very well keep your life, your values and your experiences in greater perspective.

*“You can’t be working the whole time or you’ll go crazy. That’s why there are many clubs or interest groups out there. I am not specifically in any certain*

*“All you have to do is ask.”*

*“Brick walls are there for a reason. They’re not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. The brick walls are there to stop the people who don’t want it badly enough.”*

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*groups, but sometimes, even when I know that I need to do homework, I just take a break and do something for my own sake, because then I am more energetic and refreshed.”*

—Conan, CIT

*“There are some times when I am so intent on completing something that I work on it for way too long. I may take a break to call someone I haven’t talked to in a while, cook a meal, or take a nap. Usually these things re-energize me. During the busiest times of year when taking a break like this seems like a waste of valuable time, I switch to another assignment, maybe one that I feel is less challenging. In that way, I’m not wasting time, but I’m still taking my mind off of the project that I’m stuck with.”*

—Jessica, BHA

## Conclusion

Your college years are an exciting time, a busy time. By optimizing your schedule, you can make the most of your days at Carnegie Mellon, while taking steps toward realizing your dreams. “If you lead your life the right way, the karma will take care of itself,” promised Randy Pausch. “The dreams will come to you.”

So, work hard, work smart, and embrace your inner Tigger!

## For more time management tips, see:

Randy Pausch’s lecture on time management at <https://www.cmu.edu/randyslecture/>

Our “Time Management” Fast Fact and “First Year Fast Fact, Week 2 — A Lot to Do” both available in our office and on our website.

**While you’re busy working your hardest and most efficiently, also work on being your best.**

*“The only way any of us can improve is if we develop a real ability to assess ourselves. If we can’t accurately do that, how can we tell if we’re getting better or worse?”*

*“Don’t complain, just work harder. Too many people go through life complaining about their problems. Complaining does not work as a strategy. We all have finite time and energy. Any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won’t make us happier.”*

*“A lot of people want a shortcut. I find the best shortcut is the long way, which is basically two words: work hard. As I see it, if you work more hours than somebody else, during those hours you learn more about your craft. That can make you more efficient, more able, even happier. Hard work is like compounded interest in the bank. The rewards build faster.”*

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