

# Academic Stress

Every student faces stress sometimes. You may not always be able to avoid it, but you can make choices that can help you stay resilient and positive. In fact, stress management is an important academic and life skill that you can learn.

When it comes to managing academic stress, it can be helpful to take a bit of time to **look at the big picture** and **impose some structure on your life**. Structure can help you ensure you complete your academic tasks and other commitments, and support your well-being.

At SASS, we can help you manage academic stress by offering information and support on such topics as:

- time management and organization
- reading efficiency
- procrastination
- understanding academic expectations, and more.

If you would like one-on-one help, book an appointment with a learning strategist. There is no need for you to manage challenges without support.

## Stressors and reactions

### Common stressors affecting students:

- lack of time or resources
- financial worries
- unclear academic expectations (e.g., how to study for tests)
- homesickness, loneliness, loss
- language barriers, cultural adjustment stress, and isolation

### Common reactions to stress:

- loss of focus and concentration
- irritability
- physical tension and/or illnesses
- avoidance/procrastination
- exhaustion, lethargy
- loss of self-confidence, self-esteem
- sadness, low mood
- feeling of being overwhelmed
- changes in eating, sleeping, and exercise habits
- social withdrawal

# Adopt a helpful mindset

## Take stock

- Identify your sources of distress.
- Determine which sources of stress may be under own control, and which aren't. Focus on the things you can change.
- For stressors that you have some control over, **ask**:
  - What do I need to handle this problem? (information, help, time, a skill, etc.)
  - Where can I get what I need? (library, TA, professor, SASS, classmate, etc.)
  - When will I take care of this?
- Reflect on what you have done previously to help you cope in similar situations. What resources listed in this section of our website might help you?

## Change your mindset

- It can help to remember that **how we perceive situations** is an important factor in our stress levels.
- Ask yourself, "What's the worst that can happen? Is it likely?"
- Keep things in perspective.
- Determine the most important thing to do right now and start with that.
- Believe in your ability to figure things out and do your best under the circumstances.

## Resources for a helpful mindset

- [Student Wellness Services](#) offers stress-related [workbooks](#), support groups, and appointments.
- It's common for students to doubt themselves; there's even a term for it: "impostor syndrome." Take a look at our [information on a growth mindset](#) if you are feeling doubt in your academic abilities, or book an appointment with a learning strategist or a counsellor.

# Prioritize and plan

## Add structure

- Make a task list; make it as complete as possible.
- Break large tasks into small, specific ones (try [our assignment planner](#)).
- Prioritize each item on the task list. Consider factors like due dates, how many marks something is worth, its difficulty level, personal priorities, etc.
- For each task list item, estimate how much time it might take.
- Make a [schedule](#) for the week and block off time for items on your task list and for relaxation and sleep.
- Reduce, postpone or eliminate your optional responsibilities.

## Anticipate stressful events and plan ahead

- Set priorities and deadlines to reach your targets; try our [term calendar](#).



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- Block off extra time for unexpected events or to catch up.
- Use our [end of term planning chart](#) to get a handle on multiple tasks with close deadlines.
- See our resources on [test anxiety](#) and on [presenting with confidence](#).

## Make a change

### Change your behaviour

- Acknowledge your accomplishments every day.
- Promote your health: eat well, sleep enough, exercise appropriately.
- Break big tasks into smaller, more manageable steps.
- Make room for some fun!

### Change your situation

- Reduce distractions.
- Study somewhere else.
- Go to sleep earlier at night.
- Review your course or program with your prof, an academic advisor, or a career counsellor.

### Bust your stress

- Try relaxation techniques, yoga, or T'ai Chi, or go for a walk or a run. Watch a comedy. Talk to a loved one.
- Do what you know works for **you**: use your own healthy stress-relieving activities.

### Get help

- Make an appointment with a [counsellor at Student Wellness Services](#) or with a [learning strategies advisor at SASS](#).

## Resources at Queen's

Queen's offers a wide range of support for students who are managing stress. (You may like to look into getting support from more than one of these resources because stress can have a few different sources.)

- [Student Wellness Services](#): SWS can help with sleep, nutrition, counselling, physician appointments, etc.
- [School of Graduate Studies](#): Check out SGS resources for [newly admitted graduate students](#) as well as the [Habitat](#) resources for living well and staying well in graduate school.
- [Faith and Spiritual Life](#): The Faith and Spiritual Life office provides confidential counselling, ceremonial services, interfaith community development and spiritual support to students, faculty, and staff on campus.
- [Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre](#): 4D strives to be a home away from home for Indigenous students and a site of information and support for the broader Queen's community.



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- [Queen's University International Centre](#): QUIC is a support service for everyone at Queen's. Through its activities, it promotes an internationally informed and cross-culturally sensitive learning environment.
- [Career Services](#): Career Services offers a comprehensive range of [accessible services](#) to support and empower students in making informed decisions about their career, further education, and employment goals.
- [Society of Graduate and Professional Students](#): The SGPS offers a free and confidential peer advisor program that provides advice, strategies for self advocacy and referrals.
- [Academic Advisors](#) (Scroll down to *Academic Counselling and Tutoring* for a discipline-specific list of advisors.) Academic advisors can help you choose courses and programs and navigate academic administrative processes.
- [Ban Righ Centre for Mature Women Students](#) If you are a woman returning to education after a time away, or you are continuing your education while juggling family responsibilities, the Ban Righ Centre can help.
- [Student Experience Office \(SEO\)](#) The SEO provides a number of supports for students, including the [peer mentor program](#).
- [Financial Aid](#) Queen's offers a wide variety of financial assistance options for students in need.
- [Campus Security & Emergency Services](#) Campus Security's mandate is to promote a safe and welcoming environment that recognizes and is respectful of the diverse nature of the Queen's University Community.

There are plenty of resources on campus to help you; please ask for help if you can't find what you're looking for.