

Effects of Time-Management Practices on College Grades Bruce K. Britton and Abraham Tesser Institute for Behavioral Research and Department of Psychology, University of Georgia

Table 1
Time-Management Questionnaire Factor Structure and Loadings

Factor/item	Short-Range Planning (Factor 1)	Time Attitudes (Factor 2)	Long-Range Planning (Factor 3)
Short-Range Planning			
1. Do you make a list of the things you have to do each day?	.79	-.10	.00
2. Do you plan your day before you start it?	.72	.15	.10
3. Do you make a schedule of the activities you have to do on work days?	.71	.00	.32
4. Do you write a set of goals for yourself for each day?	.67	-.13	-.05
5. Do you spend time each day planning?	.66	.13	.31
6. Do you have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish during the next week?	.54	.21	.37
7. Do you set and honor priorities?	.50	.43	.18
Time Attitudes			
1. Do you often find yourself doing things which interfere with your school-work simply because you hate to say "No" to people? *	-.04	.63	.20
2. Do you feel you are in charge of your own time, by and large?	.12	.60	.10
3. On an average class day do you spend more time with personal grooming than doing schoolwork? *	.22	.58	-.20
4. Do you believe that there is room for improvement in the way you manage your time? *	.19	.55	.28
5. Do you make constructive use of your time?	.21	.55	.35
6. Do you continue unprofitable routines or activities? *	.05	.52	.17
Long-Range Planning			
1. Do you usually keep you desk clear of everything other than what you are currently working on?	.05	-.03	.61
2. Do you have a set of goals for the entire quarter?	.33	.01	.49
3. The night before a major assignment is due, are you usually still working on it? *	-.07	.42	.47
4. When you have several things to do, do you think it is best to do a little bit of work on each one?	.00	.13	.47
5. Do you regularly review your class notes, even when a test is not imminent?	.39	.31	.42

Note. Factor 1 accounts for 16% of total variance, Factor 2 for 11%, and Factor 3 for 9%.

*These items were reverse scored, for example, responses of "never" were given a score of 5.

Discussion of Findings.

These data suggest that self-reports of time management are related to academic achievement. Furthermore, the effects of time management are independent of SAT score and, in this particular study, even stronger than the effects of SAT score.

We attempt to put these results into perspective: First, we must note that there is normally a range restriction with respect to SAT score. Those students in the lower portion of the distribution, of course, do not get into college. However, as noted above, in our sample the standard deviation was 125 rather than the national norm of 100. Thus, whereas the relationship between SAT score and grade point average would usually be underestimated in college populations, in our sample this may be less of a problem. It is interesting to note that although there is a substantial body of data from the Educational Testing Service indicating that the correlation between SAT score and freshman grade point average is about .42 (Donlon, 1984), we have been unable to find any reports of correlations between SAT score and grade point average beyond the freshman year. Also, our data are based on psychology-course enrolees. We therefore do not have a figure to compare directly with our correlation between SAT score and grade point average of psychology course enrolees of .20. On the other hand, even if the relationship between SAT score and grade point average has been underestimated, our analysis procedures ensure that SAT score cannot serve as a plausible explanation for the relationship between time management and grade point average.

One can take several stances about responses to the time management instrument. Our point of view is that students are describing with some accuracy their actual behaviours and feelings about

time. Another possibility, however, is that responses to the time-management questionnaire represent various response biases and that the results can be explained on the basis of such biases. For example, a plausible case can be made that people who score high on the time-management questionnaire are simply presenting themselves in a favourable light. Being able to present oneself in a favourable light is a very useful skill. It may not only result in a high score on the time-management questionnaire but also help one to get good grades in college, particularly in small classes or in classes with less-objective scoring criteria. With regard to this explanation, the relation between time-management questionnaire responses and college grades is spurious rather than causal.

Two of the independent factors within the time-management questionnaire made a significant contribution to grade point average: Short-Range Planning and Time Attitudes. The Long-Range Planning factor appears as desirable or perhaps more so than any of the other factors, and yet it was not associated with grade point average. We believe that a similar response would follow for any explanation focusing on a single bias as an explanation for the relationship between time-management factors and grade point average. Therefore, we are inclined to discount this class of explanations.

Another interpretation of the relationship between time management and grade point average is that students who happen to do well in school somehow come to develop shortrange planning skills and positive attitudes toward time. Although it is not clear what the mechanism(s) are by which such transformations would take place, this interpretation is not plausible on design grounds. Although high school success could have fostered time management, in this prospective study measures of time-management attitudes and skills were taken prior to the unfolding of grade point average. This sequence of events makes less plausible an interpretation in which grade point average produces time-management responses.

From our perspective the more interesting aspects of these results emerged through considering the factors as descriptions of behaviour. The Time Attitudes factor seems very much like self-efficacy. Subjects report feelings of being in charge of their own time. They are able to say "No" to people. They are able to stop unprofitable routines or activities. According to Bandura (1989), such feelings of efficacy allow, and indeed support, more efficient cognitive processing, more positive affective responses, and more persevering behaviour. The present data seem to be consistent with that position.

Short-Range Planning also seems to predict grade point average, whereas Long-Range Planning does not. Why is this the case? There are several possibilities. In some environments, for some goals, long-term trends may be more important than short-term fluctuations. On the other hand, a short-term window may be optimal in other environments for other goals. The college environment is one in which changes in expectations, demands, and so forth, are relatively rapid and frequent. Different parts of the same course may unpredictably differ in difficulty; the overlapping of demand from different courses is often unpredictable; non-academic life events may cause unpredictable changes in demands, available time, or priorities; instructors may even change their mind about the due date on papers or the date an exam will be scheduled; on occasion, there is no syllabus and even in courses in which there is a syllabus, there are often consequential deviations from it.

Perhaps in this type of environment if the goal is to maximize grades, a short-term planning window is more optimal than a long-term planning window. If this interpretation is correct, then the Long-Range Planning factor might become more important in a less volatile, more stable environment. The interpretation of Long-Range Planning described above does not account for its negative correlation with SAT score. Perhaps this factor should be interpreted differently. Several of the items loading on Long-Range Planning may indicate an inability to tolerate complexity, for

example, keeping a clean desk. To the extent that these items indicate a low tolerance for ambiguity, those persons who score high on this factor might be unable to cope with other kinds of complexity, such as the complexity involved in taking the SAT. These are questions for future research. In sum, the present results show an encouraging relationship between time-management attitudes and skills and grade point average. This relationship may have applied implications because time-management skills can be taught (Hall & Hirsch, 1982). College students are useful subjects for this research, partly because a suitable measure of achievement is readily available for them. The relationship between time management and achievement may also hold in other fields. More research is needed to document this relationship and to determine with greater precision the circumstances under which it does and does not hold.