CHAPTER 3
Time Management

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- Learn how to utilize time blocking to get things done in a more efficient manner
- Discover some tips and tricks for using digital calendars, how to make them work better and harder for you
- Know how to be consistent in your planning, and what to look for to help with productivity
- Know what to look for in digital planners, including editable planners
- Learn how to do goal setting in any kind of journal for students
- Explore how to use technology to help with time management
- Discover how going paperless can actually provide students with quick, timely feedback, and also cut back on your grading time

SUPPLY LIST

- blank journal with dot grid
- pens
- highlighters
- ruler
- phone or computer used for scheduling/reminders

VOCABULARY

- calendex
- Pomodoro technique
- prospective memory
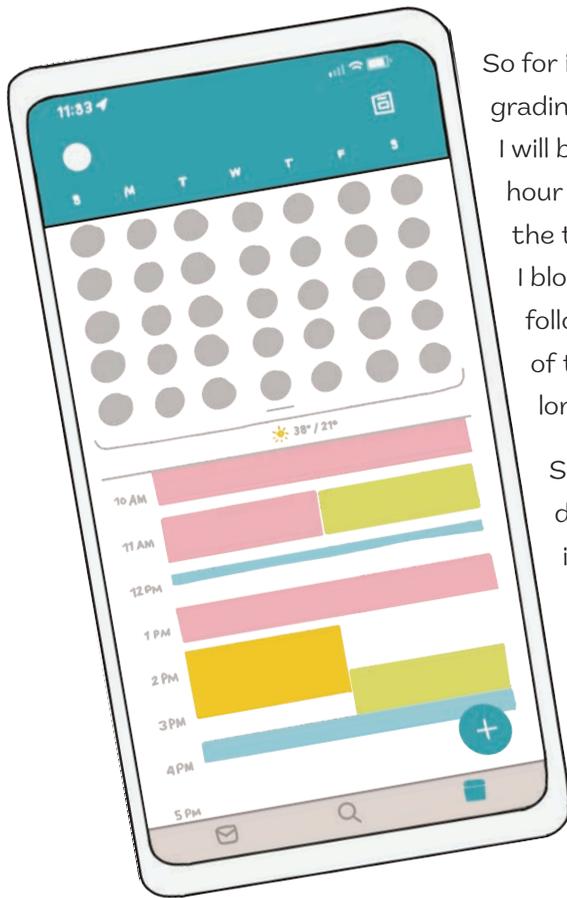- time blocking
- ultradian rhythm

A shley Whillans' book *Time Smart: How to Reclaim Your Time and Live a Happier Life* has an entire chapter on time affluence. According to Whillans, eighty percent of American workers feel "time poor," or that there is never enough time in the day to get all their responsibilities done. Research shows that it isn't often money that makes us happy; at least, not directly—it is when we have more leisure time to be present, rather than being trapped in the constant hustle. When you have time affluence, you are happier and can pursue activities you are passionate about. The way to become time affluent is similar to how you might take steps to better health: small habits and behavior changes. In talking about time affluence, we are talking about the things that you can control, what you are able to give priority to in your life. Your goal is to work toward having more, and better time for you, instead of constantly being stuck in time-consuming, unrewarding tasks.

Time Blocking for Productivity

A couple of years ago, I was watching a YouTube video where a person was talking about **time blocking**. I thought, teachers blocking their time, of course! This is something students do that teachers should be utilizing more for our own tasks and projects. When you think about a student focusing on science for a one-hour block of time and then walking down the hall and working on math for the next block of time, focusing in the moment on that subject area, they are time blocking. Teachers naturally use time blocking techniques when focusing on planning for subjects in elementary, and periods in secondary, but we often don't think about it when it comes to our own individual tasks and planning our days. When you look at the time you have available to you in a day and wonder how you can possibly get it all done, one answer might be time blocking. In a nutshell, time blocking is setting manageable, bite-sized goals with time rather than tasks.

FIGURE 3.1 Not sure where to get started with time blocking? Begin by tracking your day-to-day activities to see where you spend the most time. In this example I wrote the days of the month down the page and the hours in each day horizontally. I chose a color blocking system for what I wanted to track and tried to diligently track what my days looked like. As you can see, I started strong at the beginning of the month and then didn't do very well at the end.

So for instance, if I know that I have to work on grading papers and I look at my available time, I will block out an hour for grading. When the hour is up, I will move on to my next task. If the task is not completed within the hour I blocked out, I need to look for time in the following day or week to add another block of time. I might also look into blocking out longer than an hour the next time.

Some tasks might require you to really dig in and take three hours or more. For instance, when I am lesson planning I easily need more than an hour. Knowing this and blocking enough time at the onset helps tremendously in achieving goals in a measurable time frame.

Other times, you might think a task is going to take a ton of time, but odds are it probably won't. For example, my child will often say she doesn't have time to unload the dishes; so I set a stopwatch. This was immensely helpful, showing her it only took her six minutes to unload the dishwasher, instead of dreading a task that she had built up in her head as taking a ton of time. Making it seem like a smaller, more manageable task helped get the job done. Ultimately this kind of learning helps students more instinctively know going forward how much time a task will take and it will be less daunting. They will be more apt to just jump right into the task in the future.

Time blocking only works if you build it up as a habit and make sure you focus on one thing at a time. As soon as you get distracted by something else, you lose your flow. The more present and focused you are on the task

at hand, the more likely you are to unlock your creative and productive flow. Containing the activity or task in a set period of time allows you to bring your full attention to it.

Time Blocking Using a Journal

When doing this in your journal—taking a look at your daily tasks, grouping items together, and then blocking out the time to get those things done— the most important part is estimating the amount of time needed to get those items done. When you know you have only thirty minutes to focus on a task, and you know what that task will be, you are more likely to use that time wisely. Even focusing for fifteen to thirty minutes on a task at a time can quickly add up, helping you get through your tasks with a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day.

Don't forget to factor in non-work aspects of your life—family, social, and personal obligations and desires—that may take time away from scheduled tasks.

I would also recommend blocking out specific time for things that are tempting time wasters, like checking social media or shopping online. Noting these habits and setting aside time to do them makes them measurable and less likely to suck away at your time throughout the day. Instead, you can give that time back to yourself to do something that brings you joy—which is the ultimate goal. If we have learned anything after the last few years of the pandemic, it is that we should value

Forest App for Time Blocking

Something I love to use to help with my time blocking is the Forest app. I can specify the amount of time I need to focus on something, and the app locks my phone for the duration so I can't get distracted. If I stay on task and don't touch my phone, I grow a tree in the app. Eventually, if I use the app enough and continue to stay focused, I can plant a forest plants created by being on task. Additionally, Forest works with a real tree-planting organization called Trees for the Future, and plants trees while people use the app. It's a win-win for me!

our time more; doing things we enjoy and spending our time with loved ones fills our cups more than the hustle.

Time Blocking for Grading and Assessment

Time blocking also works for grading. Teachers are better able to handle large amounts of grading when we try batching it out. A small pile is easier to attack each day than a big stack of essays over the weekend. (As an English teacher, I did this for years and it was the worst part of my job.) When you divide up the work, each batch you complete gives you a sense of accomplishment and, over time, you can start to get that grading done during contract hours and not have to take it home. Also, if you are attempting to give out assignments that only have to be marked right or wrong, have students help with that in class. If you are doing assignments that require more complex grading, try and work in time to conference with students and give small feedback throughout the project's duration, rather than one grade at the very end. This helps both of you: students learn better with formative feedback through the process. Also remember that you don't have to grade everything, but if you're not grading traditionally, make sure you are clear with the students from the beginning what you will instead be looking for in a particular assignment. Teacher clarity has an effect size of 0.75, so don't underestimate how important that is in the classroom.

START YOUR TIME BLOCKING JOURNEY

Create a page in your journal for today's daily tasks or your weekly tasks, depending on how much time you have available and how many items are on your to-do list.

- List out your tasks.

- Put a number next to them on the left-hand side to help you prioritize, if you didn't already write them down in order of urgency.

- On the right side of the list, put an estimate of how long you think each task will take you to get done. Use a different color if that helps it stand out.

- Look at your calendar and find chunks of time throughout the school day, your prep period, and after school to focus on getting these things done.

- Block it out on your digital calendar or write down when you plan to try and get it done this week.

- Try using the Forest app, a Pomodoro extension on your laptop, or something similar to help you focus and not get sucked into time-wasting sites or apps.

- If your timing was off (for instance, you thought going to the office to make some copies was going to take you twenty minutes and it only took ten), take note for next time.

FIGURE 3.2 In this weekly layout, I was super busy, and plotting out the meetings I had to see my available time to better time block tasks really helped.
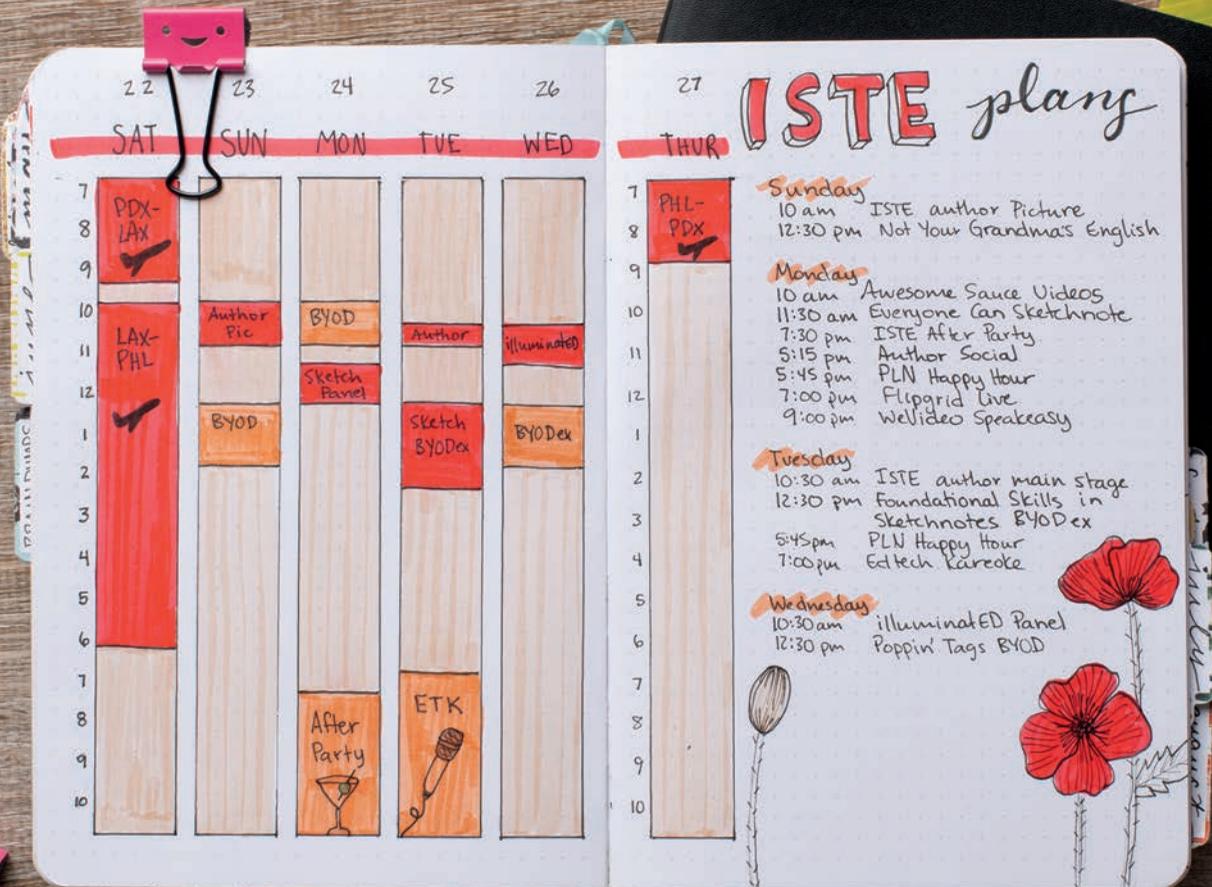
While this isn't task-oriented, it uses the same principle of blocking out time. In this instance, I have blocked out the units we will study throughout the year and the time I think it will take to accomplish it. Of course, as we know, this isn't ever set in stone and things like lesson plans and yearly plans have to stay fluid—but it does help to think long-term while planning your curriculum.

FIGURE 3.3 A calendex is a combination of a calendar and an index, a way to see how things work in a calendar over time at a glance. You can usually use this method to plan across a bigger span of time, such as months in advance.
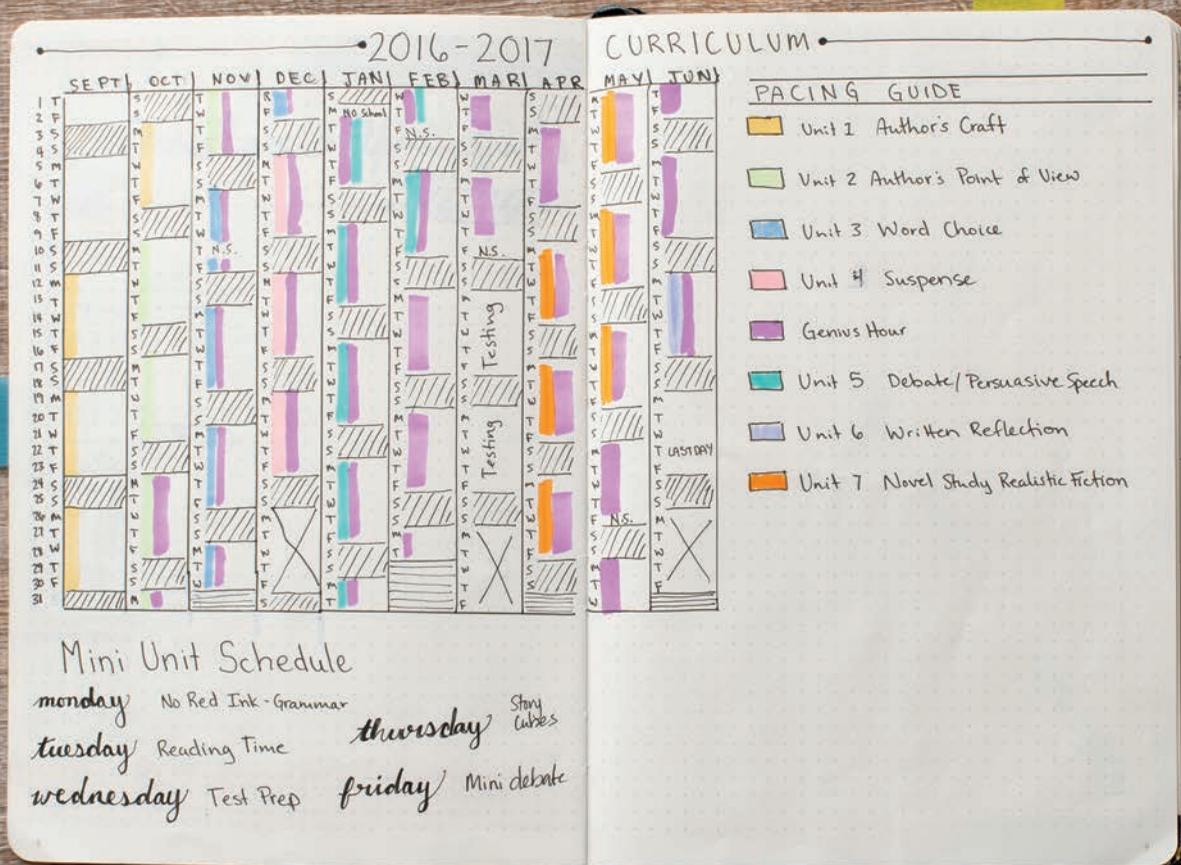
TIME BLOCKING CHALLENGE

Plan out your week of classes and meetings, and then take a look at your available time and the tasks you have to complete. Try blocking out time for the following things:

- Give yourself some personal time back in the morning and evening. In the morning, try blocking out some "you" time. You could journal, read, do a quick morning workout, or have a cup of coffee while listening to music. In the evening, block out some time to do reflective or gratitude journaling. If there is another project or activity that you would like to do (a creative craft, learning something new, baking something, etc.), block out a twenty- to thirty-minute window just for that purpose.

- Work on batching your grading. Do small amounts of grading in a designated time, no more or less, and don't bring that work home. Do it during contract hours.

- Pick an item that needs to get done around the house and block out time for it. One of my personal favorites to do this with is wiping down the kitchen counters at night. I love waking up to a clean kitchen, but it isn't something I prioritize at night. I should, as it lifts my overall mood the next day—I know this, so I need to block the time out. Figure out that one item for you and schedule time to do it, maybe even time the task so you have a realistic time allotted for it during the rest of the week.
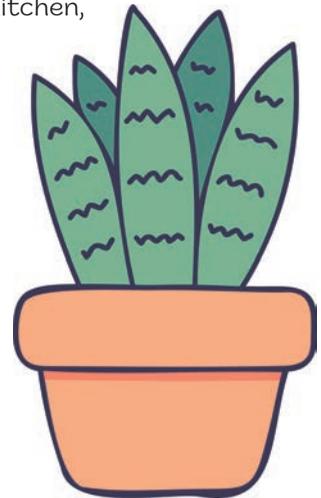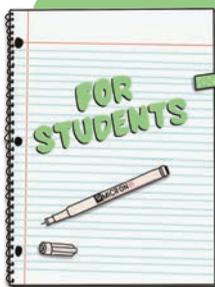
TIME BLOCKING FOR STUDENTS

Similar to how time blocking can benefit adults, this technique can be very helpful for students. As you can see from figure 3.4, a student's school day is very full. For high school students especially, prioritizing their schedules and blocking chunks of time for homework, studying, practice, and work—as well as their social lives—is critical for their success and for understanding how to better use their time.

Some people are able to prioritize and dedicate their time with little or no effort—it's just how their brains work. Others might struggle with these skills but would never think to use a timer or block out time for tasks. Many students could benefit from being shown how to use time blocking to better manage their time.

As students begin time blocking their days, they will start to notice how full their schedules really are, and how having one point of focus and getting it done in a set period of time can help them complete their tasks efficiently. It can also make planning their weekends helpful and better prepare them to tackle areas of their lives that may once have seemed overwhelming. Again, the goal is not to be so overscheduled that you can't be present in the here and now, but procrastinating and having a ton due all at once doesn't help teenagers either.

Aesthetic Study Background Playlist

I love listening to music when I need to read or focus. I prefer music without lyrics so that I don't get distracted and sing along. Follow the QR code to see some of my favorite playlists on Spotify and YouTube.

Many parents take over the role of time manager for their kids, but this is such an important life skill that working with students to acknowledge and take control of their schedules will serve them well into the future.

(continues)

Have students plan out their weeks, looking at available time and tasks. Try blocking out time for the following things:

- In a homeroom/advisory class, have students block out their current schedule, including weekends.
- Have students make note of any upcoming assignments, quizzes, or tests they have in each of their courses.
- Have students create a list of things that motivate them to study and/or what they can reward themselves with when the test is over.

FIGURE 3.4
In this example a student can block out the time between 7a.m. and 7p.m. and write down their schedule. This can help students visually see where their chunks of free time or study time fall and how to prioritize their days. Do you think your students could benefit from this process?

MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDYING
ERASER

- Fun pens + highlighters
- Post-it's + flags
- Stickers + washi tape
- Time-blocking my study time
- Creating a to-do list + checking things off
- Aesthetic Background videos on youtube
- Study videos on social media for inspo
- Snacks
- Soda, Boba Tea, iced coffee
- Clean room + desk
- Study music playlist on Spotify
- Quiet surroundings

Exam Dates

WHAT TO DO WHEN EXAMS ARE OVER
pick one paid and one free activity!

Go to a coffee shop and bullet journal
Take a nap
Buy a new Book
Buy new eye liner
Buy a Boba
Go for a hike or walk with friends
Buy a Special Coffee
Get a pedicure
Go out for treats with friends
Take a bath
Do a face mask
Get a manicure
paint your nails
Give yourself a little bit of a reward!
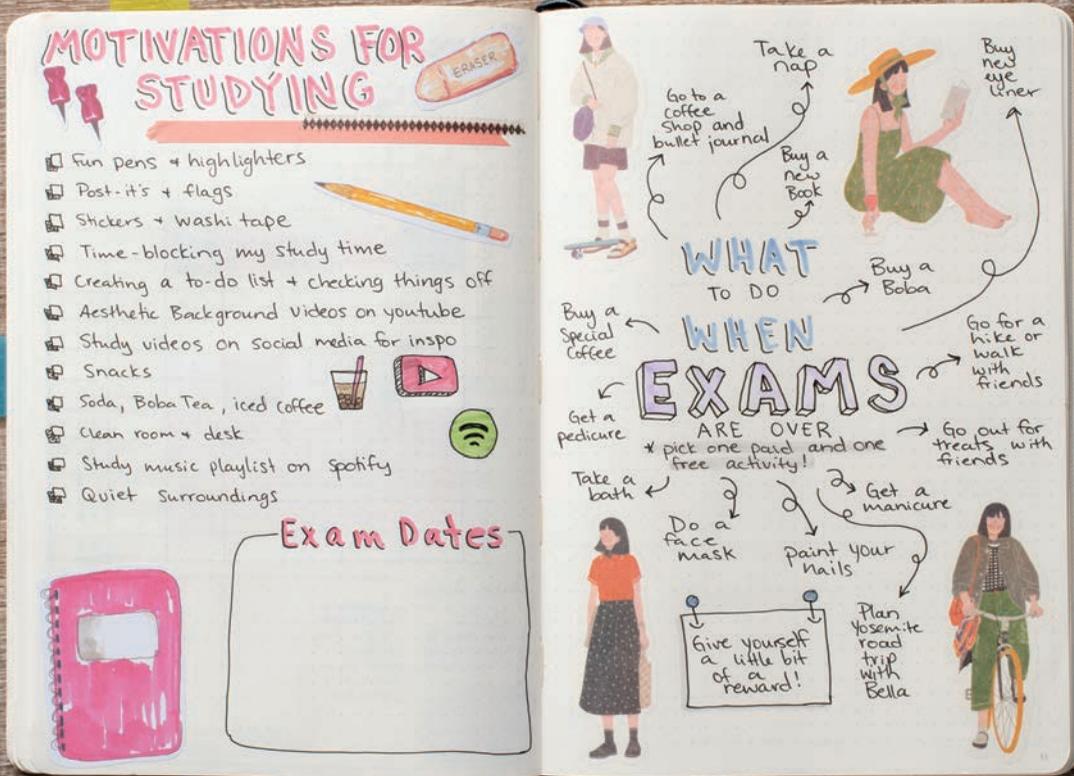Plan Yosemite road trip with Bella

FIGURE 3.5   Have students brainstorm together ideas that help them get in the mindset of studying. Having others voice their ideas will help students get a better idea on how to set their space for studying. Even watching a quick TikTok or YouTube video on studying could help prompt ideas. I also love the idea of introducing them to aesthetic backgrounds on YouTube. If you haven't been doing that in class already, I highly recommend it.

Using Digital Calendars

Something that I have done from the beginning of my career is utilize my digital calendar. One of the first things I did was create a recurring meeting time for every Friday after school to reflect on my weekly lessons. As a new teacher, I thought it would be good to record how things went, what I wanted to change, what I would keep, and so on, so that I could remind myself of what I learned when I would prepare for the next year. This helped me develop a habit of making these recurring notes to myself. I still make them for various things. For example, I have a meeting reminder pop up on my calendar every Wednesday to remind my team that if we need to put anything into the weekly newsletter, it is due by noon! I might sound annoying when I remind my fellow team members, but they often thank me later for the reminder, and we have been consistent as a team at getting out our information to the rest of the staff. I even put a reminder in during a freak snowstorm last year to buy my daughter new winter clothes in October so that we weren't surprised again (or having to buy winter snow pants when everyone else was buying winter snow pants). I thanked myself this year once I got over the cryptic calendar memo of "buy winter clothes for Molly." I make these reminders for everything from working out, to putting the trash out, to newsletter reminders. Without the help of my digital devices, all my little notes and reminders to myself would go missing or disappear into the ether.

Making the Most of Digital Reminders

Digital tools like Siri and Alexa can help us remember and accomplish tasks. I love using these tools in my home and when I am on the go. Let's talk about how to utilize them to maximize efficiency in and out of the classroom.

According to a study done by Northwestern University in conjunction with Microsoft, digital reminder systems can serve as an aid to help people

remember information, especially those things that rely on something called **prospective memory**. Prospective memory is a form of memory that is needed to perform or recall a planned action at a future point in time. These are common in daily life and can range from something super simple like knowing that Tuesday is garbage day, to something more vitally important like remembering to take certain pills at certain times. The use of virtual assistants like Siri, Cortana, and Alexa in our digital devices has become much more popular in recent years, and shows no signs of slowing. The market intelligence firm Tractica, which focuses on emerging technologies, released a report, "Artificial Intelligence Market Forecasts," where they predicted annual global AI software to grow from $10 billion in 2018 to $126 billion by 2025.

I use my phone all the time for quick scheduling reminders, and when I'm at home I use Alexa to remind me of specific things that I need to remember to do. When setting these reminders, it's important that you include a date or time. For example, when I am at work or in the car I might ask Siri to set an alarm on my phone for 3 p.m. to remind me of my next meeting. When I am at home I might ask Alexa to set a reminder for ninety days to remind me to cancel a free trial of a streaming service I just signed up for. Whether setting a reminder for a future event, or a reminder to do something before a future date, automation and AI make the process easier.

BE JUDICIOUS WITH REMINDERS

Keep in mind that setting too many reminders or even setting them for the wrong time of day can have negative effects. Too many reminders can distract us at work or can even make us feel overwhelmed or bad about ourselves. If your gym emails you a reminder to come work out when you are super busy with work and just can't make it that day, you may end up starting to ignore or even unsubscribe from reminders.

DIGITAL REMINDER CHALLENGE

First, think about what kind of digital tool you might want to use for reminders. For example:

- Timers on your phone (with Siri on your iPhone or Google Assistant on your Android)
- Digital calendar reminders (with your work calendar system or another like Cozi)
- Reminders at home on devices like Google Home or Alexa
- More advanced "rule" timers like IFTTT

Next, brainstorm a list of some reminders you might like to set now, and then when you develop a system that works for you, set reminders on the spot as you think of them so you don't have to think of it again. Ask yourself these questions:

- **What could you help yourself remember in your everyday life using digital reminder tools?** For example, I have a reminder on my phone at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2:30 p.m. to drink water, since those are times I will be working and will have my phone near me. At home, my Alexa reminds me on Tuesdays at 5 p.m. to take out the garbage.

- **What could you help yourself remember a month from now?** This could be anything from a birthday to canceling a subscription. This kind of reminder requires you to think about the best time to be reminded. For example, I recently needed to change a subscription for my dog's natural food. Since I am mixing it with dry food, he doesn't eat as much as they think I need, so I needed to cancel the next shipment. I knew I would need a prep time where I had a computer, and I knew it wouldn't take me very long. I found the date the next shipment would be sent, and I backed up a week from there to set my reminder to cancel. The reminder helped me to stop the order before it was shipped.

- **What could you help yourself remember even farther in the future?** My note a year in advance to buy new winter clothes for my daughter before the storms hit was a perfect reminder for me, and now my daughter is ready for a fun snow day.

Digital Reminder Tools

Follow the QR code to see a post about some of my favorite tools for digital reminders.

Emojis and Color Coding Tips & Tricks

Calendar reminders can look boring, blend together, and if left alone, they can sometimes not highlight when something is more important than something else. One way to avoid this is to visually differentiate reminders by adding color coding or even emojis. Visually separating events in this way can also make a busy calendar look less overwhelming.

When I set up recurring meetings for staff and teams, I use different colors and add emojis to make them stand out. To develop a system I first brainstormed what topics would be most useful to group and separate by color coding, including:

- Meetings
- Trainings
- IEP/504 meetings
- Class periods
- Projects/prep/planning
- Grading time
- Homework (assigning a color to this and tests allows you to visualize when you are starting to assign too much for students)
- Tests
- Important family members

Microsoft recently began sending briefing emails to those using their Enterprise system, with the goal of helping you better sync between your email and your calendar and be more intentional. The system tracks requests, emails from collaborators, documents you might need in a meeting, and suggestions to block out time for things like focus time, taking a break, or catching up on email and messages. It essentially acts as a personal productivity assistant using AI to help you figure out priority communication
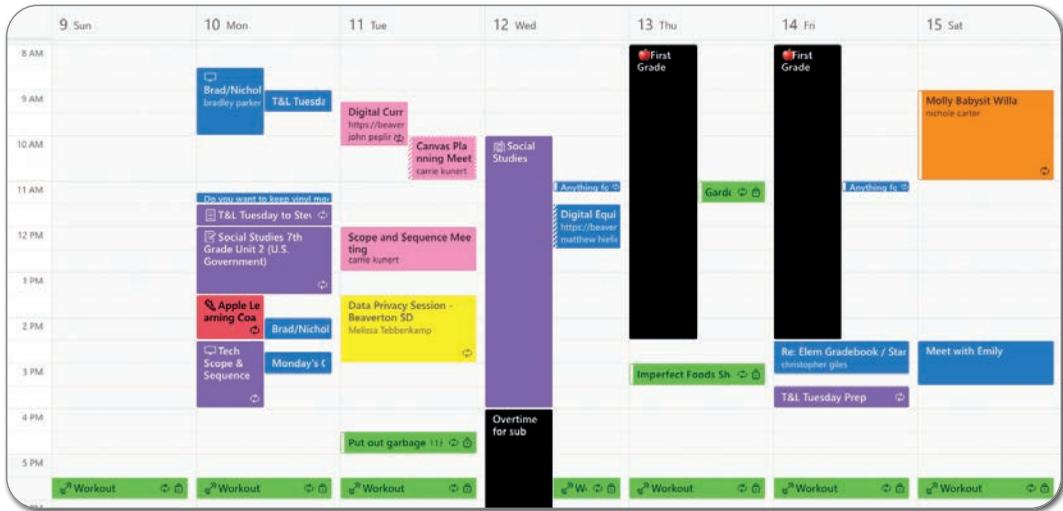
FIGURE 3.6 Coding my digital calendar is helpful for me. I can see that personal things are green, my daughter's appointments are in orange, etc.. What categories would you identify and how would you color code them? How would you use emojis to highlight appointments?

and what needs attention. The email is sent to you because someone in your organization flipped the switch to allow the briefing to go through but you also have the ability to unsubscribe. Google also has a Google Assistant morning briefing. So, AI is using time blocking and color coding too! The more you use these tools as intended, the more you can get out of them.

Meeting Invitations Tips & Tricks

Another thing I've gotten into the habit of doing is using the description notes for calendar meetings. I add things like links to the notes document we are using, and if it is a virtual meeting, I will add the virtual room link and password to the description. If I am working with a team and we are doing a long-term project, sometimes we get into the habit of leaving notes to ourselves of where we left off at our last meeting so we know where to pick back up.

Scheduling Tips & Tricks

If you work closely enough with a team or department, sharing your calendar can also be very helpful. There are visibility settings that allow you to share everything in your calendar or show when you are busy. If you are keeping your calendar updated, this is extremely helpful for support staff as well. When trying to schedule meetings for IEPs or 504s, using the calendar and scheduling based on everyone's shared calendars is infinitely better than having to do a ton of back-and-forth emails. Additionally, on both Microsoft and Google calendars, you can use a feature to find a time that best works for everyone (on Google it is called Find a Time and on Microsoft it is called Scheduling Assistant). You can create multiple calendars, so if you wanted to create a calendar for assignments and/or big projects, it is easy to look at each other's calendars when planning to share the load for the students.

Task Lists Tips & Tricks

Both Microsoft and Google calendar systems also have a to-do list feature that you can use to build reminders with specific dates and times into your calendar. Some may find a digital to-do list more helpful than keeping a to-do list in their handwritten journal. Finding the best approach to work for you is the ultimate goal.

Technology To Help With Time Management

There are lots of digital tools to help you think about where you have spare or wasted time that you could use more efficiently. There is always time and space to sit down and waste twenty minutes mindlessly scrolling through an app; however, if you are trying to stick to some work boundaries, then making the best use of the time you are given during contract hours is important. Apps like Rescuetime can be useful in helping to track your usage on different websites and apps, which can in turn help you set goals and reflect on your progress toward those goals.

Rescuetime App

When you find you have thirty minutes here or an hour there, you can utilize technology to help stay on task. For instance, another time blocking strategy is called the **Pomodoro technique**, where you give yourself twenty-five minutes to work on something and when that twenty-five minutes is up, you get a five-minute break to do whatever you want. There is a Chrome extension for this technique that will actually block time-sucking sites like Facebook or Pinterest during your twenty-five minutes and then unlock them again during your break.

Pomodoro Extension

We know that the brain needs downtime to recharge and make connections to what we have learned. In the article "For Real Productivity, Less is Really More," published in *Harvard Business Review,* Tony Schwartz mentions that our brains work in ninety-minute rest–activity cycles. Indeed, fifty years ago, sleep researcher Nathaniel Kleitman found that our bodies rest in ninety-minute periods at night. Most people don't talk about this part of the study, but our bodies continue to function in a ninety-minute cycle during the day, too. We go from higher to lower alertness every ninety minutes. This is called

our **ultradian rhythm**. While we might be more familiar with the circadian rhythm—the cycle our body goes through in a twenty-four-hour period—this is something that happens in a period shorter than a day but longer than an hour, literally the definition of ultradian. Finding time to rest after at least an hour and a half helps us with productivity. In a very real sense if I am working in the garden, working on a renovation project, or even writing a chapter in a book, there is a certain limit for me on how long I can give all my focus or energy. I have noticed that I will at some point start to get sloppy or make mistakes because I have pushed past an hour or two. I have started to understand the importance of being able to give all of my focus or best effort to a project for a good ninety minutes or so, and then give myself a rest or turn to a different activity. When I don't do this I can easily get frustrated or make a mistake. Utilizing tools that help us track the time and remind us to take breaks is a good thing. It also makes us think differently about how we might lesson plan with students! If we can understand that it is natural for our body to need a break or our mind a rest after a certain amount of time, then we should be paying attention to the student experience not just in terms of content but also in increments of time. To maintain their focus and engagement, and ensure their best output, think about these cycles and how to use them for optimal learning.

Finding time in your schedule to go incommunicado is also valuable. Sometimes the phone ringing and the emails coming into your inbox can be distracting; scheduling yourself focus time for short thirty-minute chunks—where you are solely focused on one task and not answering emails or phone calls—can actually free you up to hit that optimal workflow nirvana. A number of tools can help ensure you can responsibly go offline for a brief period without feeling like you have to check your work notifications. These include things like automatic email responders, switching your phone to "do not disturb" mode, or turning on an automated response about not being available on things like Microsoft Teams.

Switching over to digital submissions from students also helps cut back on grading time. There are built-in technology tools that help you save time; most secondary schools now operate with the use of a learning management system. Get to know the ins and outs of your school's grading program. Using an automatic grade "complete/incomplete" for turn-in is much more efficient than collecting piles of papers for every assignment. We know that offering feedback in a timely manner is essential for student learning. When we take weeks to grade work and pass it back, that feedback is doing a fraction of the good that timelier feedback would be able to do. I have found that by utilizing technology for grading I was able to cut my grading time down to a quarter of what I was doing when I was hauling stacks of papers home. Plus, when I made the switch, my students got more feedback than just a smiley face on their paper.

✔️ Chapter 3 Key Points

- The idea of time blocking to get our best focus and productivity helps when taking on tasks and mapping out your day. We see evidence of this in research on ultradian rhythm and can use digital calendars and digital assistants with helping keep track of our time spent on different activities.

- Once you understand what works for you in a planner based on a better understanding of your priorities and how you best work with time management and productivity it is easier to find a planner that can work for your specific needs.

- Using different tools to help you be better at time management ultimately comes down to time affluence, becoming richer in how you spend your time on yourself instead of giving your time to someone or something else.

ISTE Standards Addressed

This chapter addresses several ISTE Standards, including:

2.1 Learner

Educators continually improve their practice by learning from and with others and exploring proven and promising practices that leverage technology to improve student learning. Educators:

a. Set professional learning goals to explore and apply pedagogical approaches made possible by technology and reflect on their effectiveness.

2.3 Empowering Leader

Leaders create a culture where teachers and learners are empowered to use technology in innovative ways to enrich teaching and learning.

c. Inspire a culture of innovation and collaboration that allows the time and space to explore and experiment with digital tools.

Reflection

After reading chapter 3, take some time to consider how you will apply some of the strategies to your own life and journal setup.

1. When practicing time blocking, were you able to put in any time for yourself, or were you able to get some time back to yourself?

2. How do you feel about your ability to judge how long a task might take? Is this something you need to work on?

3. How did focusing on being more intentional with your time, aiming toward time affluence, feel while trying some of the challenges in this chapter? Did you see any benefits to your personal or professional life?