

Systems Activity 5: The Catch-up Week

Often we can find ourselves adrift.

Term is a few months old and we've fallen behind where we wanted to be - we've let things slip, our systems have collapsed and we know we need to get back on track.

If that describes your situation at all, what you might need is a catch-up week. A catch-up week is a carefully planned and timetabled week where you work with much more organisation and focus. The aim is to plan like crazy, then throw yourself into a highly strategic seven days of concentration to recover all that lost ground.

Catch up weeks need planning on paper first, with particular tasks assigned to particular days, even to particular time-blocks. They need a checklist of tasks you need to do, each of which gets crossed off when it's done.

Planning a week like this can feel daunting, so we've given you a simple place to start. First collect together all the work you want to catch up. Some will fill you with dread, others will be fairly straightforward. Why not arrange them all somewhere on this continuum:



Least Daunting

"I'll quite enjoy this."

Most Daunting

"I'm dreading this."

Now you can plan your catch up week. We've suggested a 'one big task per day' structure, and filled the week with the kind of things that might go in each day. You could follow our plan if you wanted, but the activity becomes even more effective when you design your own, or design one as a study-group.

Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four	Day Five	Day Six	Day Seven
<p>Complete: ...a job you should have done ages ago that really needs finishing</p> <p>or a short job that will take 30 minutes and get you started</p>	<p>Finish: a piece of homework ahead of the deadline</p>	<p>Complete: the piece of work you're most dreading</p> <p>or explore a possible future career online</p>	<p>Complete: a one-hour re-read and re-write of your notes on any difficult topic</p>	<p>Start: The reading and research for a piece of work you know will be challenging</p>	<p>Complete: ...a job that's fallen behind schedule</p> <p>or a short job that will take 30 minutes or less</p>	<p>Finish: a piece of work to <i>twice the standard</i> you would consider your 'normal' level of effort</p>

If you can take action on these seven steps as the week goes by, you'll be significantly closer to living that stress-free, pressure-free life we all dream of.

And the best thing is, you can celebrate at the end of the week! Take some time off, and reward yourself.

So every time you feel demotivated or overwhelmed, forget the big picture. Instead, make a plan for a super-organised catch-up week. Return to this activity or design one of your own, using the advice below to help you...

- Some students plan a week like this at the start of every half term to get them up and running
- Some students have alternated weeks like this, one on, one off.
- Towards exam season or coursework deadlines, we've seen students plan two or three weeks of organised and time-blocked activities to keep them on track.
- The best plans we've seen include rewards, with students scheduling something good to keep them going.