The Work/Rest Balance

You're here at Bard to learn, which inevitably requires work. Studying, writing, and analyzing data all take time, resources, and genuine effort. It's important to understand that, **in order to do work, you** *need* **to rest, as well.** Recognizing the need for a work/rest balance is the first step in making your work life more sustainable, but putting this into practice can feel daunting or unfamiliar. In this handout, learn about what it means to achieve a work/rest balance and how to incorporate it into your daily life.

What is rest?

Rest can mean any number of things:

- **Making sure your basic needs are met.** It's difficult to get work done unless you are fed, well-rested, and comfortable. Go to the dining hall and eat something, or maybe take a nap in your dorm room. If there are structural impediments preventing you from getting your needs met on campus, please contact your deans, the Office of Equity and Inclusion, and/or the Disability Service Office. These numbers and emails are available on Bard's website.

- **Recharging your battery with entertainment/relaxation.** It's okay to put the pen down or close your laptop if you're having trouble working. Go watch your favorite movie or listen to music. Maybe close your eyes and practice some breathing exercises. Ground yourself with something fun or relaxing before tackling work.

- **Community and connection.** Call up or text a friend to see how they're doing. Join a club on campus and put your energy into your social environment. Maybe even set up a meeting with your professor to chat openly about your academic interests. Rest, for some folks, may be all about connecting with others.

There is also one major misconception about rest:

- **Rest is NOT a reward.** Rest is an essential part of life, and an essential ingredient for doing work. No one should ever deny themselves rest as an incentive for completing work. Instead of staying up all night to complete a late assignment, just go to sleep. There's no sense in making yourself exhausted. Instead of promising to get yourself a video game for finishing a project, go ahead and get the game now! Gaming can be incorporated into your work/rest cycle as you complete that major project.

Read on for tips on inviting more rest into your life.

1. **The Pomodoro Method**. This is a classic learning strategy that derives its name from the tomato-shaped kitchen timer (*pomodoro* being Italian for *tomato*). The Pomodoro Method is all about disciplining yourself into making time for work *and* rest by completing alternating intervals of rest/work. **It's especially effective for those who struggle with stopping their rest to make time for work *as well as* those who struggle with stopping their work to make time for rest.**
   a. **Choose a timer.** If you have a kitchen timer, use one of those! You could also pull up the Timer on your Clock app on your Smartphone, or find a similar website on your computer as you work. You could also use your watch or a clock, but it's helpful to use something that will make noise to indicate when time is up.
   b. **Choose your intervals.** Depending on how much time you have, set your intervals for how long you'd like to work/rest. One Pomodoro might be 30 minutes - 30 minutes - 30 minutes, or 15 minutes - 10 minutes - 30 minutes. Pick whatever intervals you'd like, as long as you stick to them.
   c. **Make a plan.** What do you want to do during your Pomodoro? Decide what Work and Rest will look like for this session. Perhaps it will be: 1) Work on reading article for 20 minutes. 2) Play Legend of Zelda for 15 minutes. 3) Continue working on article for 30 minutes.
   d. **Start working/resting!** Follow through with your Pomodoro and do as many sessions as you want. The idea is that you alternate between work and rest, holding them both on equal footing, and thus resulting in a more sustainable work session.
   e. **The Pomodoro Method doesn't work for everyone.** If you struggle with getting in and out of tasks smoothly, this method would likely be unhelpful for you for long-term use. Particularly, many neurodivergent folks that experience hyper-focus have reported that this method is incredibly ineffective for them. Feel free to give it a try, though!

2. **Breaking the myth of the Weekend/Weekday Divide.** There's this unspoken understanding that the weekdays are for work, while the weekend is for rest. This is a social norm that limits our ability to have a smoother, more balanced relationship with work and rest. It's okay to rest during the week and work on the weekend.
   a. **Rest during the week**. If we have meetings and classes during the week, it may feel like we have no time to get more hands-on work done. Instead of dedicating every waking weekday hour to papers and writing and calculating, take breaks between fixed scheduled events. Have bursts of rest during the week to counteract working five days a week.

b. **Work on the weekend.** If you have more free time on the weekend, you can consider bringing work into your weekend schedule. Perhaps Saturdays can become your day of visiting the library to work on assignments, uninterrupted by classes.

3. **Set boundaries.** It's hard to relax when your email notifications are on. Make sure to turn work *off* when you are resting, in whatever ways are effective and make sense for you. Similarly, when you are working, make sure to set your Nintendo Switch or your knitting supplies aside. Additionally, if you require a quiet workspace or rest environment, be sure to assert yourself and create the conditions you need. This might require speaking up to roommates who are playing loud music or putting your phone on do not disturb.

4. **Create study groups.** For many folks, socialization – hanging out with friends – is rest. Why not combine the ills of work with the joys of friendship? Book a room in the library or set up a picnic space outside to work with your friends. Not only will this be a more fun way to get stuff done, but it also creates accountability since you and your friends can set work and rest timers for one another.

For more Learning Strategies and academic support, go to the Learning Strategies page on the Bard website.