

# Top 10 Tips for Balancing your Teaching and Research



## Introduction

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Finding the right balance between teaching and research is an important part of being an academic and faculty member. This can seem quite challenging; establishing a balanced workload is key to success and progression as an academic.

This snapshot will take you through some top tips to help you succeed in finding balance. We surveyed faculty members working within Higher Education institutions regarding how they have been able to succeed with this task, it shares faculty recommendations as well as helpful hints and tips from Taylor & Francis authors.

The top tips below can be adapted as appropriate to suit your own unique circumstances and can help you establish a balanced workload.

### Top 10 Tips:

1. Combine your Research and Teaching
2. Learn to Say No
3. Start with an Effective Plan
4. Dedicate your Time Efficiently
5. Collaborate with Students and Colleagues
6. Seek Support
7. Focus on your Passions
8. Prioritise
9. Have a Work/Life Balance
10. Allocate Different Spaces for Teaching and Research

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## Combine your Research and Teaching

Use your research in your teaching, and your teaching to inform your research. Think of teaching and research as one entity, rather than being in competition with one another. As Williams states in *Doing Research to Improve Teaching and Learning*:

**“Truth is, good teachers use research (or variations of it) to inform their teaching every day, sometimes without knowing it. They are constantly reviewing assessment data, making critical observations of their students and themselves, and collecting qualitative and quantitative data.”**

When you integrate your research into your teaching, this will engage and interest your students through the discussion of current research and its real-world application. Additionally, using your research in lectures could save you time when it comes to preparing your lecture materials.

“Aim to do research that ties in with your teaching”

“Teach specialised (research focused) modules”

“Using research as basis for seminar”

## Learn to Say No

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This may seem like an obvious top tip but an important one, nonetheless. You need to be confident enough to say no, whether this is to students or to additional admin tasks that are not imperative.

You may feel uncomfortable saying no, but it is important in order to set realistic expectations in the workplace. You will find that when you start saying no you will have more time available to carry out your important research and teaching tasks. Furthermore, it will reduce your stress which in turn will improve your wellbeing.

The respondents of our survey mentioned the importance of being boundaried with students. This could include having limited consulting hours for students.

“Say no to non-essential tasks”

“Learn to say no to additional admin tasks”

“Learn to say no to other jobs”

## Start with an Effective Plan

Be well-organised and create a clear plan, within this set yourself manageable deadlines for each task you need to complete.

One way to do this was suggested by Kate Woodthorpe in her book, *Survive and Thrive in Academia*:

**“Every week/month write a brief summary of what you are doing and where you want to be in 12 months’ time. As the anniversary comes around, review what you were doing a year ago, and continue adding to that summary... There will be peak times in the academic year when teaching has to be the focus and other commitments have to take a temporary backseat, for example. Using an ongoing diary like this will enable you to effectively identify key pressure points, so you can better plan and utilise your time.”**

Faculty members surveyed offered advice when it comes to planning; it was suggested to always plan in advance, stay ahead of deadlines and once you have created a thorough plan try not to deviate from it.

“Make a schedule and stick to it”

“Plan around deadlines”

“Setting mini deadlines for tasks”

## Dedicate your Time Efficiently

One way to dedicate your time efficiently is to allocate yourself specific time slots for research. This could include having dedicated days for research, as recommended by the majority of faculty members.

To understand how you are spending your time and if you are dedicating your time efficiently you can track your daily tasks and activities. This could provide a useful insight, which can be used to inform how to plan your time efficiently in the future.

Nelson in *Time Management for Teachers* discusses a way to analyse your time usage over a full week, which is to:

**“Make a list of the range of activities that you do in a typical week and then allocate the number of hours you think you spend on each in a typical seven-day week. Start with the list given and add activities that are missing... From the results of a simple exercise like this you can get some insight into where you think your time is going and, even at this stage, you can start considering ways of managing it better.”**

“Block out time for research in the diary”

“Make sure that you give yourself a research day each week”

“Having regular time out with office hours to conduct research”

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## Collaborate with Students and Colleagues

Collaborate with other colleagues and students to reduce your workload. It is important to work with someone who motivates you and who you can ask for advice.

Gournelos, Hammonds and Wilson say that:

**“Reading other scholars is one way to keep yourself from getting overwhelmed. But so is talking to people, including your friends, your family, your professor, your colleagues, your boss, and of course, your friendly neighborhood librarian.”**

This quote taken from the book, *Doing Academic Research*, shows the importance of collaboration and just how beneficial it can be to you and those you collaborate with. One suggestion from the survey we conducted was to involve students in your research as much as possible.

In *Reshaping Teaching in Higher Education*, Breen, Brew, Jenkins, & Lindsay tell us that:

**“Involving students in inquiry—in research—is a way of improving their learning, motivating them more. After all, what motivates large numbers of academics is engaging in the excitement of research. Bringing research and teaching together is a way of enhancing the motivation of both academics and students.”**

“Work with someone who motivates you!”

“Delegate low-level teaching tasks to peers when appropriate”

“Take advice from others”

## Seek Support

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An important part of ensuring you create balance with your teaching and research is being able to ask for help when you need it! This includes having the confidence to be honest with management about what your needs are.

Although asking for help can seem like a delicate situation, or it could be something that you need to learn or work on, it can be a powerful tool to help get the job done faster or better and can benefit all those involved.

On the topic of support, Kate Woodthorpe discusses the importance of it in her book, *Survive or Thrive in Academia*:

**“There may also be specific support open to you with regard to research, such as writing retreats, proposal planning, funding guides; or for teaching, for example in how to achieve professional accreditation, to supervise doctoral students, or to teach large lecture classes.”**

“Utilise UG and PG paid research assistants in data collection, data processing and literature review work via unitemps”

“Get support for marking”

“Meet with colleagues to ‘report back’ on progress”

## Focus on your Passions

You should have a deep understanding and be passionate about your chosen teaching and research topic. The more interested you are in something the less it will feel like work! If you are able to focus on something that gives you a feeling of growth, then that in turn will provide growth. Focusing on something that you are not inspired by and resent will not push you to learn new skills or continue improving yourself, which will create a struggle in terms of finding a balance.

In their book, *Doing Academic Research*, Gournelos, Hammonds and Wilson say:

**“Start a project because you’re fascinated by it, and then figure out how to make it possible to do in whatever timeframe you have been given.”**

“Teach what you know and love”

“Ensure that you develop a deep understanding of the subject matter context”

“Ensure you’re extremely interested in your research”

## Prioritise

Prioritise your workload! This is something that you will hear all the time, but that’s because it’s important. Knowing how to prioritise will affect your success at being able to balance both teaching and research. If you can, turn off or ignore your emails whilst you’re performing research and say no to pointless meetings!

Ensure you are assessing the value of the tasks you are performing and look at what is important versus what is urgent. Although you will want to stay focused on the task, you should keep in mind to be flexible too as this will help you to continually prioritise as needed. Another important part is making sure you know when to make cuts to your to-do list, you may not be able to get everything on your list done, so having the confidence to cut items is key.

As Nelson says in *Time Management for Teachers*:

**“in planning your use of time and allocating tasks to times, you need to remember the difference between urgent tasks and important ones. Urgent tasks need doing quickly but don’t necessarily take a long time to complete. Important tasks often take some concentrated effort to complete and do require time. Some tasks of course will be urgent and important and they require a lot of time now. Others will be neither urgent nor important, in which case you should be asking yourself why you are doing them at all.”**

“Try not to check emails when it’s a research time”

“Do not waste your time on meetings, empty talks and the like”

“Deal with the important rather than the urgent”

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## Have a Work/Life Balance

Having a good work/life balance will in turn help you to create balance within your work and your teaching and research tasks. A key part of having a work/life balance is taking responsibility for it and ensuring your managers know where your priorities lie in terms of your lifestyle and having the confidence to say when your workload becomes too much.

Make sure that you take your leave, take proper breaks and don't just plough on, it is important for your mental health to have time off.

In Haddock-Millar and Tom's book, *Coaching and Mentoring for Work-Life Balance*, they stress the importance of this top tip:

**"Finding the right balance, an acceptable balance which will inevitably change as our lives and the world around us changes, requires purposeful and continuous attention."**

“Make sure you take your leave and don't just plough on”

“Join a trade union and resist pressure from above that impinges on the quality of work or work/life balance”

“Work smart, not long”

## Allocate Different Spaces for Teaching and Research

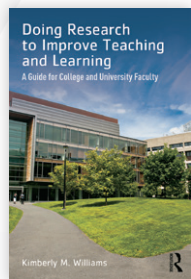
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A point that came up with the survey respondents' numerous times was ensuring you have a different workspace for your teaching and research. This can enable you to get into the correct headspace for each task and create that division which can help you to strike a balance. Once you enter your research base you will be able to prioritise and work specifically on the task at hand, without distraction. It was also recommended by the faculty members surveyed to be out of the office and away from your teaching space when performing your research if possible.

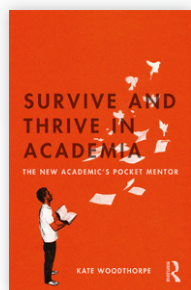
“Have different spaces to carry the different tasks out”

“Research away from your teaching office”

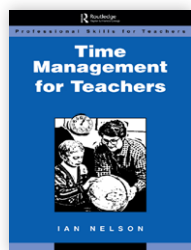
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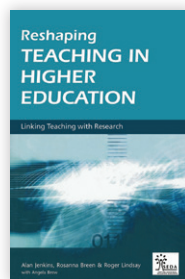
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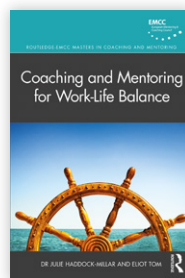
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