

Balancing Work and School

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Balancing a job and schoolwork (among other priorities) can be quite challenging. In this article, we'll talk about what you can do if your work schedule is interfering with your ability to make progress towards your degree. We know every situation is different, but we've gathered some tips that may be helpful.

Step 1: Manage your workload

Are you working long hours or taking work home with you? Start by thinking about what you can do to make sure that you're being as productive as possible during your regular work hours. Some of the tools you use at Rivet School like priority systems and productivity trackers might help. If this doesn't work or your workload is just too much, you should speak to your supervisor.

Step 2: Talk to your supervisor

Hopefully your supervisor already knows that you're earning a degree outside of work. Ideally, you've had a conversation with them about your career goals and how earning a degree fits into that plan. Regardless, your supervisor should understand that you're investing in your professional development. They should want to support you because you bring your new knowledge and skills to your work. Even if the situation isn't ideal, you should feel empowered to talk to your supervisor about the challenges you're facing.

Before the meeting:

- **Try to understand the root cause of the problem (not the symptoms).** While you probably won't be able to solve the root of the problem, it will help to show that you understand it. For example, having to work evenings grading assignments might be a symptom of not having enough prep time during the day.
- **Schedule a one-on-one meeting with your supervisor.** It's important to carve out time dedicated to having this conversation. If you have regular meetings with your supervisor, add this to your next agenda with the amount of time they can expect to spend discussing this topic. If you don't have regular meetings, consider asking your supervisor to start them. It could be a good way to develop your relationship and give you the space to ask for advice.

During the meeting:

- **Assume positive intent.** Your supervisor may not respond the way you want them to, but you can avoid going down a negative path if you assume that they're coming from a good place. For example, your supervisor might suggest grading during dismissal without knowing you use that time to communicate with families.
- **Treat the conversation as if you're trying to learn and help.** Don't assume you understand everything going into the conversation. If you're open, you may learn something new that could help you in the future.

During the meeting:

- **Be gentle but firm.** You are your best advocate. Your tone can be soft, but your words should be strong. Instead of "This is important to me," try saying "Resolving this issue is very important to my success." Here is an example of what you can say if your supervisor doesn't understand the level of stress you're facing:

"I understand and appreciate that the current situation is stressful for everyone and may be temporary. I'm enrolled in college right now and I have a goal of graduating by a specific time. As I learn and grow, I can contribute more to this organization. I've given this situation careful thought and I'm bringing it up with you because I can't simply wait it out. I would like your support and advice about what we can do now to make sure that I can continue to grow and contribute to this organization."

- **Show that you're on the same team, trying to achieve a common goal.** Use language that connects your own success to the success of your organization. For example, you might say "I want to bring the things I'm learning to this team so that I can contribute even more to this organization." Here is an example of what you can say to start the meeting off:

"Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. First of all, I want to say that I am grateful for the opportunities I get through my role and the contributions we make as an organization. I wanted to bring up a challenge that I'm experiencing which could have an impact on our entire team.

As you know, I'm pursuing my bachelor's degree outside of my working hours. I hope to apply what I'm learning to help make this organization even more successful. Studying while working requires careful time management, and I've planned my studying so that I can remain 100% committed to my job. Recently, things have become more challenging."

- **Show appreciation for the positive parts of your job.** The more you show that you value your job, the more your supervisor will see your value to the organization.
- **Try to offer solutions.** If possible, come up with a few ideas of how things could change to improve your work schedule. You might want to present your ideas as experiments to try. Consider saying "Could we consider..." or "We could experiment with..."
- **End the meeting with a clear outcome.** Make sure to end the conversation on the same page by restating what you got out of the meeting and what your next steps are.

After the meeting:

- Thank your supervisor in an email
- Follow up with them on the outcomes you've agreed on

Step 3: If you're struggling, reach out for support

If you want to speak with someone within your organization, reach out to your HR department or the person who is in charge of HR. If there isn't a point person for this, consider reaching out to your supervisor's supervisor.

If you want to speak with someone outside of your organization, talk to your Rivet School College Coach or connect with a trained counselor at [Empower Work](#) for **free** and confidential support around workplace issues.

Remember that you are valuable to your organization. They don't want you to quit, otherwise they'd have to find someone else to replace you during a time where it's very difficult to hire.