**Back to School Series: 10 crucial tips for university students**

[](http://productivemuslim.com/tips%20for%20university%20students)

When getting to higher education, one’s life changes, and at the beginning of each year, we tend to feel rather lost and not exactly sure of what to handle first. It doesn’t matter which year of university you are in – with fresh starts, there are always opportunities to shake things up. Since university isn’t only about getting a degree, but learning to be an adult, here are 10 crucial tips to find your way around and take the leap.

**1. GOOD INTENTIONS**

Your faith should be sincere to Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He), and that the deed is intended for His sake. As the Prophet Muhammad ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him)said:

*“The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim”* [*[Tirmidhi]*](http://sunnah.com/urn/1252230)*.*

Keeping this in mind will remind you why you actually go to university. If you have good intentions for your studies, Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)will attach barakah to them.

**2. SLEEP EARLY & WAKE UP EARLY**

Sleep. Make sure you get the hours you need, and set a consistent time to wake up every day to maintain a routine. It is best to sleep for 8 hours between Isha and Fajr prayers. This will keep your energy level up so you can get more out of your studying and classes. Prophet Muhammad ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him)said:

*“Allah made the early hours blessed for my Ummah”* [*[Tirmidhi]*](http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/10#11)*.*

**3. HAVE A FRESH START IN THE MORNING**

Try getting up at least an hour before your lectures. Having breakfast really does help – as does taking a shower – to wake yourself up! Have a balanced breakfast to boost your energy, and if your class is in the afternoon, a balanced light meal beforehand helps as well.

Of course, don’t be late for your lectures, either: it’s much better to arrive five minutes early and have time to prepare, rather than rush in and have to start writing and listening straight away.

**4. JOIN A STUDY GROUP**

Students working together generally learn faster than those working alone. In addition, being a part of a study group helps you gain new perspectives. For instance, you might always understand some approaches the same way, while within a study group, you’ll start noticing that some things can be understood and expressed differently, therefore learned more thoroughly. Also, if you chose your companions carefully, you might learn new, even better, study skills. Look for potential students, both friends and classmates, that you can study and compare notes with.

**5. DON’T HAVE LONGER BREAKS BETWEEN CLASSES**

Having big breaks makes you less productive, which can be controlled while setting up your schedule and choosing subjects. Don’t forget that your schedule should be balanced and according to your capabilities. Where possible, try to have classes in the hours that you are more productive, especially the morning. Avoid having more than 2-hour breaks between classes to keep a consistent pace. Also don’t overload your afternoons after lunch; during this time, your body may feel lethargic and need some rest. If you prefer to study in the afternoons, then I recommend classes after 4pm when your mind and body are more alert.

**6. JOIN ASSOCIATIONS AND CLUBS**

This might seem difficult, but there are so many clubs and associations within a university, that you are likely to find something that suits your interests. This will help you in socializing and getting more familiar with your university and its atmosphere; and, the fuller your days are, the less time you have to feel lonely or to slow down. If you are not sure what to do, visit your university’s associations’ offices and ask for help.

**7. DON’T OVER-COMMIT IN THE FIRST YEAR/SEMESTER**

While getting involved and staying busy is always good, don’t force yourself to add another class, or choose all difficult ones in your 1st semester /year. Overburdening your schedule with many activities and events will only decrease your productivity and make you exhausted. Add more things **if** you have the time for it, but don’t overload your timetable. And remember, *balancing* between studies and your social life will always make you more productive.

**8. GET ORGANIZED!**

As a student, you will no doubt have much paperwork and information coming to you. This is why it’s important to have some system in place so you don’t get overwhelmed, especially with course-related work. Keep in mind that your schedule shouldn’t only have your classes and lectures, but should also include your part-time activities and study time. For instance, while [setting up a schedule](http://productivemuslim.com/7-productive-steps-to-balance-your-study-schedule/)you should include:

* classes
* study/homework time
* extra-curricular and social activities
* work schedule (if applicable)

Study time should be according to the classes you’re taking and the work you have to do. For example, for each 1 hour of class, make 30-45 (or more) minutes to revise and study. Everything will depend on you and your capacity.

**9. AVOID BAD INFLUENCES**

At college or university, there will always be students who will have completely different perspectives about life, whether it is in terms of study habits, money/spending, relationships, or spirituality. Avoid hanging anyone with negative outlooks on these things too much, or you may find yourself getting involved in their expensive, destructive, or otherwise [dissimilar lifestyles](http://productivemuslim.com/battling-the-nafs-base-desires-in-the-university-environment/). Always recall the saying of the Prophet ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him):

*“A person is upon the religion of his close friend, so beware whom you befriend”* [*[At-Tirmithi]*](http://sunnah.com/urn/676820)*.*

**10. APPRECIATE YOUR TIME AT UNIVERSITY**

It’s a unique experience that most people can only really go through once, so make the most of it. Some people focus so much on the fun side of things that they come away with a poor degree. Likewise, some people are so into their work, they neglect to make friends and gain other experiences. If you manage your time, you’ll be productive and be able to work hard and enjoy your time.

It is very common to think that you should be able to manage on your own and give the appearance that all is well. However, experience tells us that it is best to seek help. Hopefully, these 10 tips will be helpful for a fresh start that will allow you to have a balanced time for a productive use, insha Allah.

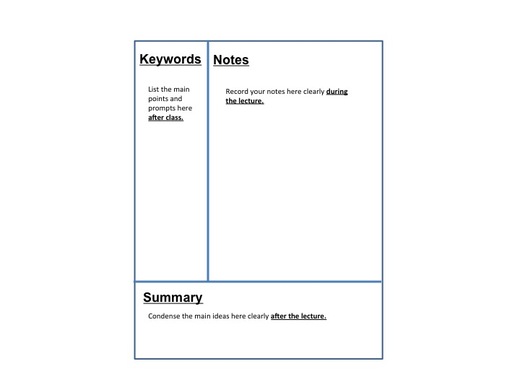
**About the Author:**

***Yusra Ibrahim*** *is a second year student in Business Administration, majoring in Management science. She is a vice president in a global leadership organization that aims to develop youth potential so as to make an impact on society. She’s also a member of a female Islamic youth club that spreads Islamic awareness.*

**How to Make the Best of Lectures at School**



As Muslims, we must be proficient in whatever we do: be it our worship, our career, or our academic lives. The Muslims in the so-called ‘Dark Ages’ excelled not only in Islamic sciences, but advanced sciences of medicine, astronomy, and mathematics. The host of contributions in that golden age could not have been possible without their self-discipline in both their ‘*Ibaadah*(worship) and in their academic routines. Both in our quests for Islamic knowledge and that of the worldly sciences, we must make the most of the resources available to us.  The time spent during school lectures is the best time to glean and retain information – so how can we make the most of this time? Read on!

* **Pray**– First, pray sincerely to Allah to grant you knowledge. Here are two du’as that you can incorporate into your routine:
  + On waking up in the morning, read the following du’a: *Allaahumma ‘innee ‘as’aluka ‘ilman naafi’an, wa rizqan tayyiban, wa ‘amalan mutaqabbalan.* O Allah, I ask You for knowledge that is of benefit, a good provision, and deeds that will be accepted . [[i]](http://productivemuslim.com/how-to-make-the-best-of-lectures-at-school/#_edn1)
  + Read the following du’a from the Qu’ran (Surah Taha, verse 114): *Rabbi Ziddni ‘Ilmaa.* My Lord, increase me in knowledge.
* **Be Involved** – During the lecture, try to be as actively involved as possible. Ask questions if you don’t understand something, or offer your opinion on any of the points mentioned. This will help you retain and understand material much better than if you just listen passively!
* **Focus** – Don’t be afraid to sit in the front row – it helps you avoid distraction. Needless to say, your cellphone must also be safely tucked away so that you don’t get tempted to text someone (or to Google the lecture material)!
* **Plan and prepare** – Go over notes from the last class before the next lecture. If you can arrive 10 minutes before your class begins, this is the best time to scan your previous notes. It is also good to get an idea of the lecture material ahead of the lecture by getting copies of the syllabus or course outline. If possible, get previous exam papers from the same lecturer so that you know which points to focus on during class.
* **Eat well** – Have a healthy snack before the lecture. This is vital as numerous studies show the relationship between a good breakfasts and attention levels at school.
* **Make great notes** – There are more than a few ways to make better notes; and your notes are the best aid to retaining information.
  + Make your notes colorful and interesting. Carry colored pens and highlighters with you so you can quickly emphasize the important points during the lecture. Use colored index tabs or sticky notes to neatly organize your notes.
  + Write *clearly*. Although this might seem unnecessary, I cannot emphasize the importance of this. There have been times when I have not understood formulae or concepts because my handwriting simply was not legible enough!
  + Try learning shorthand so that you can write quicker in class and spend more time listening. The most common methods of shorthand are Gregg’s, Pitman and Teeline. Learning shorthand will be worth your time and will be useful in any career you choose in the future.
  + I have recently discovered the Cornell method, which is a highly effective way to condense and organize your notes. This process was developed in the 50s by Walter Pauk of Cornell University, and it will help you enormously when it is time to study for your exams! See a sample of the Cornell method below: You can read more about this method [here](http://lifehacker.com/202418/geek-to-live--take-study+worthy-lecture-notes). This method is not only useful for recording lectures, but can also help synthesizing the most important points during business meetings!

Practice the tips above and let us know which of these help you the most. We would also love you to share your own tips that you have tried and tested so that we can all benefit, inshaAllah!

[[i]](http://productivemuslim.com/how-to-make-the-best-of-lectures-at-school/#_ednref1) Reference (From the Fortress of the Muslim, <http://www.islamawareness.net/Dua/Fortress/027.html>) Ibn As-Sunni, no. 54, Ibn Majah no. 925. Its chain of transmission is good (Hasan), Ibn Al-Qayyim 2/375. ***About the Author:***Sister ***Amina Qasim*** holds a BEng in Chemical Engineering and a Masters in Management. ([www.muslimtribune.org](http://www.muslimtribune.org)).

**Moving Away from Home: Coping with Challenges and Staying Productive**

*[](http://productivemuslim.com/moving-away-from-home-coping-with-challenges-and-staying-productive)*

*There comes a point in our lives when we wake up in an unfamiliar room and realise that the pages of our life’s book have led us to the next chapter. Moving out of home: be it for college, or to a hostel for entrance prep or because of marriage – anything that will require you to make big changes in your lifestyle.*

And more often than not, it’s very difficult to adjust. A new place brings new challenges, and quite possibly new frustrations, and the fact that you’re leaving behind all of your memories often does little to brighten your mood.

It may be that the hot water boiler is never working, the weather doesn’t cooperate with you, or the mosquitoes see you as an all-you-can-eat blood buffet. The drastic change can take a toll on you, emotionally as well as mentally, and the vulnerability gives shaytan an easy access to messing with your mind. *It’s times like these we need to give ourselves a spiritual makeover*, because as they say, what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger

, physically as well as mentally.

**In this article, we’ll attempt to cover every aspect of rehabilitation and try to provide practical solutions for the difficulties to our mind, body and soul:**from how to manage jetlag to how you can strengthen your faith.

This way, we’re maximising our productivity, and In sha Allah will find strength in the fact that with Allah’s Help, we can beat the shaytan. Easily!

**1) Do it for Your Mind**

**a) The Goal**

Many a time, the weight of your situation can lay a heavy burden on you, so much so that you may not want to go ahead. It’s understandable. You may feel alone, you may feel like the end is not in sight, but **constantly remind yourself that everything you’re doing is for a reason.** Stick post-it notes, change your phone’s background picture. Be it medical school or acing the exams, *keep the goal in mind to keep the motivation flowing.*

**b) You CAN Handle It**

You’re strong, stronger than you can ever imagine. Don’t tell yourself otherwise, and don’t let others put you down. Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)says in surah Baqarah:

*“Allah never burdens a person with more than he can bear.”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 2, Verse 286](http://www.quran.com/2/286)]

Other people many not have been able to handle all the changes you have to put up with, but *you* can. Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He) *knows* you can, and He’s testing you. **Feel strength in the fact that the Lord of the Universe knows you’re strong enough to manage a few minor bumps in the road.**

**c) It’s Okay**

**It’s okay to feel overwhelmed.** It’s okay to feel sad. It’s okay to feel alone. **It just means you’re human.**But don’t let your fears and uncertainties overcome you and keep you from working towards your aim, shrug it off and take a deep breath and plunge yourself head first, give it your all and leave the rest with Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He). Even if it may seem bleak, help is near.

*“So verily, with every hardship, there is relief.”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 94, Verse 5](http://www.quran.com/94/5)]

**d) Where There’s a Will**

There’s a way. It’s the law of the universe, *if you really set your mind to do something and you want it badly enough, you WILL get it In sha Allah.* But you have to [work for it](http://productivemuslim.com/tips-for-university-students/?utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking). **If you love it, then the work won’t seem so hard on you.**Motivate yourself, strengthen your resolve, and go for it. Even if the fans stopped working and it’s 40 degrees outside, sigh if you have to but know that it’s all for a good cause. It’s almost over, hang in there.

**e) Distractions at Bay**

It may be tempting to spend half an hour of your rest time scrolling through Facebook. But you’re here to make a point, so don’t let them distract you.**One tip is to**[**leave TV and Internet**](http://productivemuslim.com/youtube-culture-and-productivity-part-1/?utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking)**options for after you finish studying, that way there’s less stress.** *But keep in mind, don’t sacrifice your sleep.* Take it easy, and you’ll have the best of both worlds.

**2) Do it for Your Body**

**a) Plan Ahead**

If you’re under the effects of jetlag, you’ll be feeling a little off kittle at first. It’s alright, give yourself a few days, but once you get your body on track, give it a good schedule so that its circadian rhythm can work beautifully. **I’d advise you to plan your work around your prayers as much as possible.** *Make sure you have a rough*[*guideline for each day*](http://productivemuslim.com/execute-your-to-do-list/?utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking)so you don’t waste time thinking about what to do next.

**b) Eat Well**

No stress here, eat your main meals at around the same time every day, eat lots of colourful veggies and fruits, drink water like your life depends on it. A new place can have your body feeling odd, so make sure you’re giving it a lot of goodness, so that it can [get a good kick start](http://productivemuslim.com/interview-nourish-your-way-to-a-productive-lifestyle/?utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking). Enjoy yourself.

**c)  Sleep!**

I’m not sure if we can manage eight hours every night, but I do recommend getting 6-7 hours of shut eye most nights of the week. It may seem hard to manage, but when you’re planning out your day, you’ll have enough time to get your Zzz’s In sha Allah. Jetlag may have you nocturnal for a few days, so ease into it. **It’s best if you could sleep early and wake up a little before Fajr, so you can pray Tahajjud too, make your morning adhkar, and study after that.**Try to do it, it takes a few days but it’ll work marvelously.

**d) Stay Fit**

There’re different ways to look at this: you may not prefer to lift dumbbells or go for a jog if the weather isn’t nice to you. The important thing is to stay strong and keep your body healthy – sound minds need sound bodies. *Taking the stairs, a few push-ups now and then, jump rope, or even a quick run if you’re up for it, can ease the stress and make you stronger and help you accomplish your tasks.* Ease into it; listen to your body’s signals.

**3. Do it for Your Soul**

**a) Prayer**

Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)says in the Qur’an:

*“Successful indeed are the believers. Those that offer their prayer with all earnestness and full obedience.”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 23, Verses 1-2](http://www.quran.com/23)]

**Sometimes all we really need is a silent heart-to-heart with our Lord.** Prayer is the one thing that can hold your head above the water when it feels like everything is pushing you down. Never neglect your prayers,  ever. In the initial few days, you may suffer from jetlag, but do your best to make your prayers on time. When it’s time to pray, go. Excuse yourself and go. *When you’re connected with the Lord of the Universe, the Universe is going to work out.* I cannot stress this enough, perfect your prayer before everything else.

**b) Patience**

I know you know that patience is key, but I’m telling you again anyway. **Patience is *key* to reaching your goal, because without it, giving up becomes easy.** But trust me, it’s easier said than done, I understand that. Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)understands that too.

“*Seek Allah’s help with patient perseverance and prayer. It is indeed hard except for those who are humble.”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 2, Verse 45](http://www.quran.com/2/45)]

See, He subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)knows that being patient at a time when you’d rather pull your hair by its roots is hard, but when you really want something, you work for it. **If you want Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)’s Help, you work on His terms: patience and prayer.** *And that’s a snap, because if you do, productivity is a natural consequence.*

**c) Back to Your Roots**

Remember the migration of the first Muslims, how they left their homes and memories behind in Makkah and made towards an unfamiliar land? They walked through the desert, under the unyielding heat of the Arabian sun, their clothes in tatters and their hearts torn. They reached Madinah exhausted and lonely. Despite their Ansari brothers’ warm welcome, surely they must have missed their homeland – the soil on which they grew up, the taste of the zam zam, their families and friends… *yet they accepted it all.*

They came from a rich land; a land known all over Arabia for its power and resources, for its hospitality, for its economy and its pilgrimage. **Madinah was a far cry from what they were used to:** it was small and not well-known, agriculture did not flourish, and there was always a feud between the two tribes and rarely any peace. Yet, they accepted it all.

We live in the modern world, but feelings and hardships still are the same as they were 1400 years ago. If the Muhajireen could accept it all, maybe we could do our best to do the same. They were human too, just because they had the Prophet ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him)with them, doesn’t give us an excuse to let ourselves go. **Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)was there for them, and He’s also there for us. Don’t ever forget that.**

**d)  Qur’an Time**

*“Behold in the Remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.”* [[Qur’an: Chapter 13, Verse 28](http://www.quran.com/13/28)]

If prayer is you speaking to your Lord, then this is your Lord speaking to you. **Even if it’s only for fifteen minutes every day, make time for the Qur’an.** Choose a time of day and stick with it. After Fajr, in the evening after class, it’s your choice. But don’t ever neglect it. Read surah Taha and surah Qasas if you want to know how Musa 'alayhi'l-salām (peace be upon him)handled his hardships, or surah Yusuf to know about Yusuf 'alayhi'l-salām (peace be upon him). *Enjoy yourself, relax yourself, and just read. Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)wants you to listen to Him.*

**e) Dua**

**These are like the ultimate weapons against shaytan and his minions!** Make time for your morning and evening adhkar, even if it’s just ten minutes, do it. Who knows, you may [make a dua](http://productivemuslim.com/4-duaa-apps-barakah-into-your-life/?utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking) at the time of day when Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)answers all duas. Remembering Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)is the silent strength of a Muslim, remember how Prophet Musa 'alayhi'l-salām (peace be upon him)felt all alone in Madyan, and he called upon his Lord.

*“So he (Musa) watered (their animals) for them, then he turned to a shade and said, ‘My Lord, I am in need of whatever good you send down to me.’”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 28, Verse 24](http://quran.com/28/24)]

Or how he had to come up against the Pharoah:

“*O my Lord! open my chest for me and Make my task easy for me and Make loose the knot from my tongue*

*So that they understand my speech.”*[[Qur’an: Chapter 20, Verses 25-28](http://quran.com/20/25-28)]

**See, he was scared too, so he asked Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He)to help him. Turn to Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He), He’s there for you.**

**f) Human but Muslim**

Moving out can mean putting yourself smack dab in the centre of temptation. There’re two ways to look at it: You’re Muslim but you’re human, OR: **you’re human but you’re Muslim.**

*The latter is the successful one*. It may be extremely hot and everybody else is pitying the Muslim sister because she’s completely covered – socks and everything. But the sister knows that Hellfire is hotter than any summer on Earth, so she does it for the sake of Allah subḥānahu wa ta'āla (glorified and exalted be He). Don’t succumb to temptation of any kind, be strong. *You’re a Muslim, hold your head high.*

*I hope my tips on dealing with your new environment/situation have helped you feel and work better. I’d love to know your strategies on coping with the changes of moving away from home: do leave a comment below!*

**About the Author:**

**Faiza Jafar** is a student who hopes to enter medical school In sha Alla. She is also an Islamic youth leader in her country. Her writing tends towards youth empowerment and dealing with common problems of productivity. She is an aspiring author and seeks to inspire people to believe in themselves and work towards their dreams.

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| [**10 Key Elements of a Successful Project**](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=EgMmMlI3G21X10we7IamWw)  *So you have a bright and wonderful idea; you’re going to change the world, or perhaps start a bit smaller. But how do you see your idea through to success, as opposed to letting it dwindle away as an ephemeral vision in your mind, or giving up altogether half way through?*  We have all been there. We have been inspired to, say, learn the Arabic language, start a fundraiser, write a book, start a business, complete a dissertation or even plan and execute a huge family dinner! And we’re all looking for the best way to go about it.  **So if you’ve been meaning to get started on a new project, below are 10 fundamental elements that you can implement** to see any of your projects through to positive results and success, In sha Allah:  **1. Trust in Allah**  Our Creator always takes the top spot. Once you have chosen to embark on a certain path, place your trust in Allah that he will see you through. Believe in yourself firmly with this principle of tawakkul (total reliance on God while doing your part, of course).  Allah says in the holy Qur’an:  *“If Allah should aid you, no one can overcome you; but if He should forsake you, who is there that can aid you after Him? And upon Allah let the believers rely.”* [[Qu'ran: Chapter 3, Verse 160](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=nqHqadMLt.X_PuQha16TGA" \t "_blank)].  *“And you do not will except that Allah Wills. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise.”* [[Qu'ran: Chapter 76, Verse 30](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=xTUqMCgJKfSCXd4eYIVUcQ" \t "_blank)].  **2. Purify Your Intentions**  Guard your motivations behind an act. Remember that there is no harm or benefit except with Allah’s permission, so prevent yourself from falling into vain pursuits and ostentation.  **Stop and really** [**ponder over your intentions**](http://productivemuslim.com/refine-your-intentions-for-productivity/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz#utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking) **behind taking on a project**, particularly a devotional act such as memorising Qur’an, seeking Islamic knowledge or raising funds for charity. Are you sure you are not doing it for praise from others, or for any other worldly gain?  If your intentions are pure, your reward is certainly with Allah . *If you seek reward from others, that is the only reward you will get.* Unfortunately, seeking reward from others leads to disappointment and low self-esteem. Furthermore, if you do not reach your goals, you will not fear the criticism of others if your pursuit was purely for the sake of Allah to begin with.  **What may be considered a non-devotional pursuit, such as starting a business or hosting an event, may also earn you rewards just by having the right intentions.** Perhaps you intend to seek Allah’s pleasure by benefiting the community, or earning to spend on your family and give in charity.  A hadith narrated by ‘Umar bin al Khattab attests to that fact. He narrates that the Messenger of Allah said:  *“The deeds are considered by the intentions, and* ***a person will get the reward according to his intention****. So whoever emigrated for Allah and His Messenger, his emigration will be for Allah and His Messenger; and whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration would be for what he emigrated for”* [[Al-Bukhari and Muslim](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=C_CzTZgfNIpdwgHHiw7MjA)].  **Real life application:** When founding Sweet Apple Publishers, I had a very strong and clear vision of representing Muslim children and families in a positive light in children’s books. My primary intention was to teach good values to children of all backgrounds and to provide insight into Muslim families to the wider world in a very warm and fun way.  My other intention was related to my earnings. At the time, I was doing sufficiently well working as a secondary school science teacher and was not in need of money but rather wished to give a lot in charity, intending to do work for the community. I also loved the idea of doing this in secret.  However, I continue to struggle in terms of intentions, especially the charity aspect! I often come across causes that I feel very passionate about and wish to raise funds for. I also happen to have many great ideas on how to raise money for that cause, linked to my business. But any situation where I am donating part or all of the profits to a charity and announcing it publicly forces me to stop and check my intentions. On the one hand, I would be able to raise much more if I announced it and got public involvement, but on the other hand I would be gaining publicity doing so, which may blur my intentions. I never want to be in a position where I am questioning whether I am marketing the business or simply increasing the amount I can possibly donate? I really battle with this, and more often than not prefer to do as much as I can in secret with a clear conscience.  **3. Do Your Research**  Delving into something blindly is never a good idea. ***Know* what you’re getting yourself into. So, research is pivotal to managing any project successfully.**  This applies to projects large and small; such as market research for a business idea or researching pathways or institutes in terms of course structure, timing, fees, location etc., when aiming to gain knowledge in an area of interest.  *With sufficient research you will save yourself valuable time and money; and you will gain a wealth of information, ideas and a realistic framework for your project, In sha Allah.*  **Real life application:** Speaking from experience, I myself did not spend enough time in the research phase when I published my first book. My time was devoted to my family as a single mother and to my job as a teacher. Furthermore, I was so excited about getting my story into the hands of those little people, that I rushed it.  For the last year or so, I have stopped teaching and focused more on publishing. I have learnt so much and have had the opportunity to research exhaustively. I love the fact that I learn new things every day through what I do, and now am in a position to look back and recognise that I did not research enough at first.  **4. Embark on Passionate Pursuits**  Completing your project successfully will require dedication, commitment and drive, especially when things seem hopeless. Your chances of success are greatly enhanced if you are pursuing an authentic passion. Often the rigour with which we begin a project diminishes until we lose interest, but only if we were not passionate enough about that particular endeavour to begin with.  **Moreover, the likelihood of doing something with ihsan (excellence) increases if we are passionate about it.**  There is a hadith on the authority of Abu Ya’laa Shaddad bin Aws . He narrates that the Messenger of Allah said:  *“Verily Allah has prescribed ihsan in all things…”* [[Sahih Muslim](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=gBLa_Dl6HACAMXcurw0Ntw" \t "_blank)].  Often, a combination of passions brings about great results. You might combine your passion for IT and teaching Qur’an to create apps to benefit Muslim children, for instance. Or perhaps combine your passion for baking with that of charity work to offer to bake cakes to sell at fundraisers.  **Real life application:** Personally, I combined my passion for writing and children to do what I do today. As a little girl, I wrote all the time and was praised for my poetry, which I have kept to this day. The entrepreneurial journey is not an easy one, though it may seem very cool and romantic from the outside. There are extremely tough times, decisions and obstacles. If I did not feel so very passionately about the dearth of the types of books Sweet Apple published, I may have packed up shop already!  **5. Set Achievable Goals**  You may have heard this one before! [Goal-setting](http://productivemuslim.com/the-why-and-how-of-goal-setting/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz#utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking) is used widely: in schools and businesses, by top athletes and weight-loss programmes.  Goals are important because they keep you focused on your specific objectives. Goals can motivate you to achieve as you track your progress. They help you push yourself harder if need be or help you feel confident that you are progressing well.  **So what is an *achievable goal*?** For instance, do not be determined to climb Mount Snowdon to the summit for charity next week if you get puffed out just walking down the road. Instead, you could set yourself an achievable goal of, say, walking for 30 minutes every day for three weeks.  Alongside this goal, which you have a great chance of achieving, set a more aggressive goal: for example, climbing the mountain to the summit. You may have a lesser chance of completing it but it will increase your performance.  Goals can be set for any task you undertake.  **Real life application:** I now use goal-setting in all aspects of my life. From my Arabic studies and memorisation of Qur’an, to business-related issues. I have learnt how important this is and how it gears me towards my objectives.  In contrast, back when I published the first book, I did not use the above guidelines to set goals. Instead, I had a very ambitious and at-the-time unattainable notion of going mainstream and international straight away. Both, Alhamdulillah, have now been achieved.  **6. Be Different and Stick to it**  There is never only one way to do something. Give yourself a positive edge by taking on your task differently to the norm. Think outside the box!  Don’t shy away from personalising your project to suit your personality, your ambitions, goals or learning style. You don’t have to work with existing ideas or formats for doing things. Invent your own! It’s more fun, trust me.  **Real life application:** This is the way I like to do things. Alhamdulillah, I think it shows in the books we publish, which have been called ‘revolutionary’ by reviewers. This also applies to the way I think about everything related to publishing and marketing, including the way we sell our books. Even as a teacher, I tried different ways to communicate information, and it worked!  **7. Constantly Seek Assistance from Allah**  You might get to the point where you are ready to give up, thinking that it is too hard. Maybe somebody made a punitive remark or perhaps something didn’t turn out the way you had hoped. Stop and seek assistance from Allah .  **The following hadith is so empowering it will lift any heart and put you back on track:**  Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet said:  *“Allah the Almighty said: I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assemble better than it. And if he draws near to Me an arm’s length, I draw near to him a fathom’s length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed”* [[Al Buhkari, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn-Majah](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=nNt5iIO3wFKiGKVsj9vD5g)].  **A great dua to make during tough times is: *“****O Allah! There is nothing easy except what You make easy, and You make the difficult easy if it be Your Will.”*  I shared the above because I make this dua frequently throughout the day, and it brings me peace and reassurance. It reminds me that nothing I do, none of my efforts, are of any good if Allah does not will for what I am trying to achieve to translate into reality.  **8. Build Personal Relationships**  **Most projects will depend on or be influenced by the people involved, other than yourself. It is essential to** [**build good relationships**](http://productivemuslim.com/building-productive-relationships/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz#utm_source=ProM-Website&utm_medium=ProM-Website&utm_campaign=Website-Interlinking) **with these people, to benefit from each others’ expertise and experiences.** Good personal relationships can make or break your project. You will find that if you are sincere, people will go to great lengths to help you achieve your goals.  In an era of ever increasing digitisation of culture and communication, a personal touch can go a long way. Take time out to network with people, and communicate with people face-to-face, or at least by picking up the phone and starting conversations, then just listen and learn…  **Real life application:** A year ago, I set out on an Arabic journey, and Ma sha Allah, I made strong bonds with people at the institute I studied at. These relationships not only helped me achieve and surpass my goals, but frequently enrich me in other ways, including the running of my business! *I always take a genuine interest in people and this is perceived and in turn mirrored towards me, at a personal and professional level, Alhamdulillah.*  **9. Ask for Help**  Do not be afraid to ask for help. Admit that you are not a superhuman with the knowledge, strength and skills to take on any task single-handedly.  Asking for help indicates your willingness to learn and shows that you value people around you. **Asking for help whether you feel you need it or not will safeguard you against arrogance and inspire a sense of humility which is pleasing to Allah .**  Iyad ibn Himar reported that, while the Prophet was delivering an address he said:  *“Allah revealed to me that we should be humble amongst ourselves and none should show pride upon the others…”* [[Sahih Muslim](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=C.c_rKx115gExM0p1EdAPw" \t "_blank)].  **Real life application:** You will find that with the help of friends and family you are able to meet and surpass your goals. I am not afraid to admit that I do seek out friends in those hopelessly despondent moments. Sometimes help comes from a professional angle and at other times in the form of a reassuring hug. Needless to say, when it comes to areas out of my expertise I employ the right person for the job, or turn to people who, out of good will, wish to help me.  **10. Take Breaks!**  Go on, you deserve it!  Depending on the length of your project, you need to tear yourself away from it for some hours or days. Perhaps most suitably at the *I-want-to-give-up* stage!  **Do not live and breathe the project 24 hours a day.** Continue with your routine exercise, spend time with your family and take time out for your favourite activities. *Often, great ideas come to us at a time when we are totally focused on something else.* We may even get an opportunity to apply what was learnt as we take time off, which is a great form of consolidation.  **Real life application:** As I mentioned, directing a company as a single mother is not the easiest of tasks! I ensure I give myself enough time to breathe daily, even when my fingers are itching to continue working! I work out, read, or play boardgames with the kids. More importantly, I give myself something to look forward to every couple of months, such as day trips with my friends, or (less frequently) travelling.  You will find that not only will you be more productive when you refocus on your task after taking time to refresh, but you will also feel less stressed, more creative, have improved mental acuity and make better decisions.  *So there you have it! These are the 10 key elements that have seen my many projects through to success Alhamdulillah! I hope they serve you just the same. I’d love to hear your personal tips and hacks for successful projects, so go ahead and share them through a comment below.*  **About the Author:**  **Zanib Mian** is the Founding Director of Sweet Apple Publishers. She believes Muslim children of every ethnicity should see themselves in fun, fantastic and most importantly—well made books—that teach good morals and values. She is currently developing a programme to empower women to start their own small businesses from home. [www.sweetapplebooks.com](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz&b=WbETar85ju9z3A.01k2HCQ)  **P.S. Found this article useful? Share the khair!** I'd suggest emailing this article [**10 Key Elements of a Successful Project**](http://productivemuslim.com/10-key-elements-of-a-successful-project/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz)to at least 1 person (relative, friend or colleague) who you think could benefit from it. **Better yet, ask them to signup at** [**http://ProductiveMuslim.com/Newsletter**](http://ProductiveMuslim.com/Newsletter?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3euq7Np3FYSbnEz) and get Abu Productive's exclusive newsletter (sent only via email) with a productivity tip of the week sent every blessed Friday. :)  https://ci3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/w7Zlgg8I31eAaEsAICma--7wvIDtZ-T_NVSW6tzqp5kYAE0_4uBJeZZCqsh_kvvGP_chjxzz6yHzriGfX3DZa2MkCEqxTcpUO5u7dpJOqQu1mkzP=s0-d-e1-ft#http://feeds.feedburner.com/%7Er/ProductiveMuslim/%7E4/w4mPURDsf_o | | |
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Assalamu'alaikum Islaamic,

You've probably heard of "S.M.A.R.T goal planning" technique before:

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Attainable

R - Realistic

T - Timely

Now, here's a tip of how I put my own spin on this to make it SMART**ER**.

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Attainable

R - Realistic

T - Timely

**E - End/Akhirah in mind**

**R - (W)Rite down progressive daily tasks**

Here are three tools you can use to plan SMARTER goals for 2014.

1. Fill out the Ultimate ProductiveMuslim Goal Planner - a targeted one page worksheet to ensure you have smart goals that are connected to your akhira ([Download for free here](http://productivemuslim.com/the-ultimate-productivemuslim-goal-planner/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3W9GwDE_HoSbnEz))
2. **Get the recording of our training,** **"**[**How to Develop Beneficial Life Goals**](http://productivemuslim.com/productivity-classes-lifehacks/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3W9GwDE_HoSbnEz)**"**, with extra productivity tools and spiritual techniques on overcoming excuses ([Take advantage of limited time 50% discount on this class and more](http://productivemuslim.com/productivity-classes-lifehacks/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3W9GwDE_HoSbnEz))
3. Break down your goals into progressive daily tasks and write it down. Try writing down and planning your daily tasks with our [Siratt Lifebooks 2014 Diary Planner](http://productivemuslim.com/the-ultimate-productivemuslim-goal-planner/?awt_l=EHVDU&awt_m=3W9GwDE_HoSbnEz), specifically designed to apply ProductiveMuslim concepts and techniques each day of your life ([Get your own sleek lifebook here, available in 8 exciting colours](http://clicks.aweber.com/y/ct/?l=EHVDU&m=3W9GwDE_HoSbnEz&b=CXr6ZrAEVz2FPsZi6lBwkA))

In sha Allah, these tools can help you achieve even smarter goals next year.

Sincerely,Abu Productive