



## Keep on Playing...

I'm part of a soccer team. And every year at exam time or report time or assignment time, people prioritise their study over soccer. Mainly training, but sometimes games too. When this message comes late (i.e., 5 pm, when training is at 7 pm) that's annoying. But as a player, I think you're doing yourself a disservice. So, here are 4 reasons why you should keep playing sport, music, or whatever else it is you do as well as work or study:

1. **Get better organised.** Soccer training is 4 hours out of 60 or more that you have available for study or work. If nothing else, being better organised will be useful for life beyond your schooling. Employers LOVE organised staff (see <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/skills-employers-look-for>). Practice that from now. For most students, most of the time, due dates for things like exams, assignments, reports, and thesis are known months in advance. Make a schedule that sees you make regular progress, rather than having a binge mentality.
2. **Continue doing physical activity.** Studies show it improves short term and long term memory. So, think of acute exercise as being a study aid (see more here [https://scholar.google.com.au/scholar?q=memory+and+exercise&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0&as\\_vis=1&oi=scholar#d=gs\\_qabs&u=%23p%3DIJNCMKF2O4MJ](https://scholar.google.com.au/scholar?q=memory+and+exercise&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar#d=gs_qabs&u=%23p%3DIJNCMKF2O4MJ)). To be honest, and this is not an original thought, but if exercise were a pill, we'd all be taking it for study. What's more it is free! Or at least a sunk cost.
3. **Maintain a balanced life.** Wrapping yourself up in one thing - soccer, study, or work - is not healthy. Nor is bingeing on any one thing. Diverse interests improve your mental health. (see <https://bmcp psychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-020-2458-z>). And if you need more "evidence" think of it this way. When one part of your life is going poorly (e.g., PhD); (and I say when because it will happen), and that is all you are doing, then your whole life is poor. Whereas, if you have and maintain diverse interests, having one part go poor means it is only a proportion is bad (e.g., 25% if you have 3 other interests). Thus, its impact will be reduced, and you'll be better able to deal with it. That is, diversity makes being resilient easier
4. **Boundary setting** is important for good life balance. Maintaining your range of interests helps you practice balance from now. Once you're at work, your boss or clients will always ask for more time. Being able to push back and know everything will be okay, will be an essential skill for a happy life. (see <https://www.theresiliencecentre.com.au/boundaries-why-are-they-important/>) As students, you are conditioned to prioritise study. Indeed, we condition you to take work home – it's called homework. Then as workers, all of the advice is to "maintain a balance"; "don't take work home with you". We train one thing, and then expect another. So, given it is almost impossible to avoid homework during school, the earlier you can set and keep boundaries beyond school, the better your life will be.

So, keep on playing, or writing, or painting or practicing. Stop working! Stop studying!

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*Dr Richard Huysmans is the author of [Connect the Docs: A Guide to getting industry partners for academics](#). He is passionate about PhD training and students getting the most out of an experience often designed with the supervisor in mind. Richard has helped more than 200 PhD students, early career, researchers, and established academics build their careers. His clients appreciate his cut-through approach. He knows the sector and how make the most of a PhD.*

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