

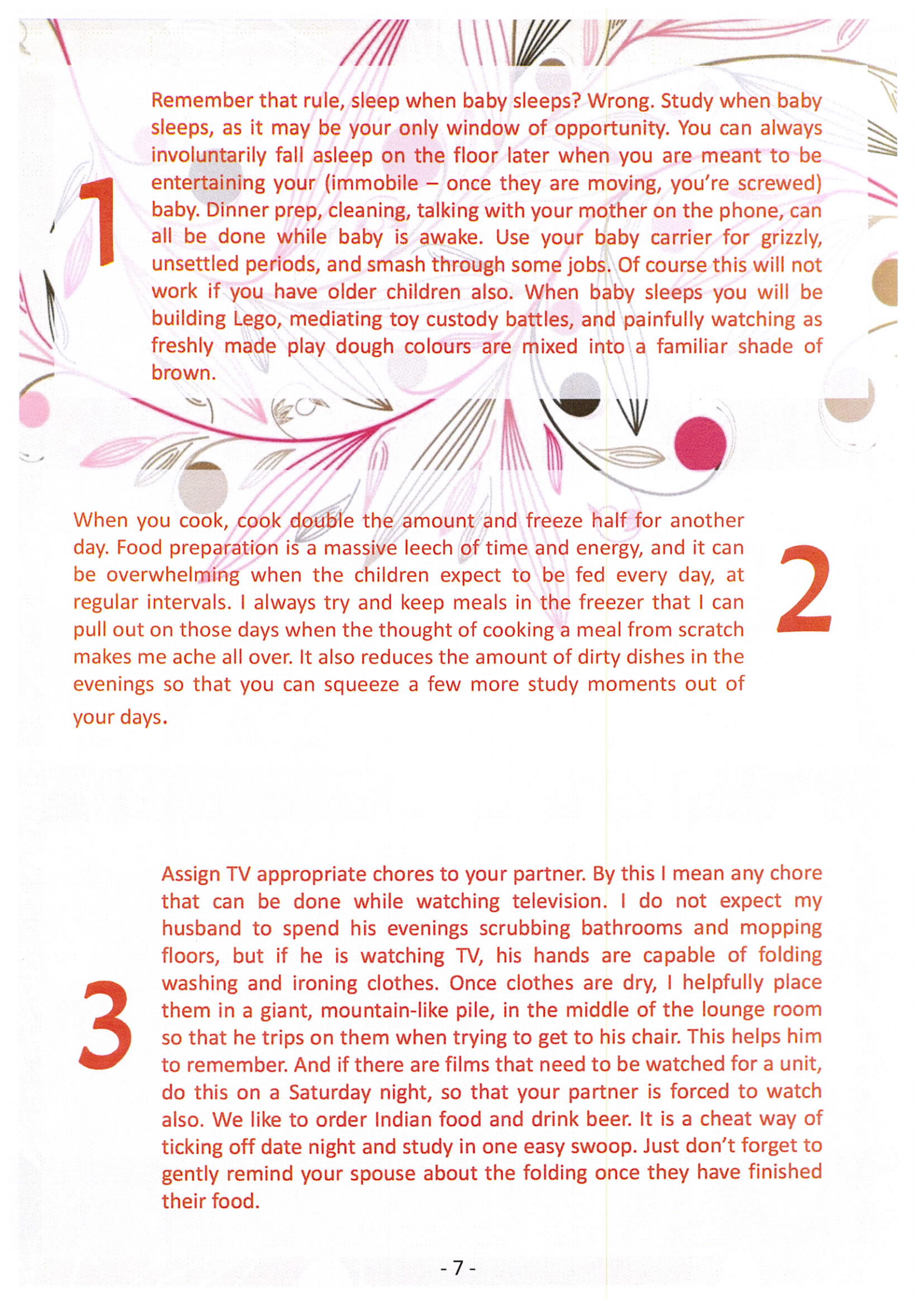
# The Art of Studying with Children

*By Tanya Bird*



I have three boys aged five and under. People often ask me how I have the time and energy to study while keeping the asylum operational (ok, I added that last bit). The truth is I don't. I snatch time when the opportunities arise and I maintain a high sugar diet which enables me to function in short bursts. I believe that we are all capable of finding time for things that are important to us. It is not always easy, but it can be done. I knew when I stepped away from my job, to raise a small army of boys, that it was the perfect opportunity for me to implement a career change. I knew I needed a wider skill set, and I knew the only way I could manage it was from home.

I will admit that when my pre-study self pictured my future-study self, I had images of the children playing happily by feet while I flipped the pages of my latest text book. I imagined lazy evenings tapping away on my laptop, while hubby watched TV at my side and the little ones slept. Now I realise that my pre-study self was deluded. Firstly, children don't sleep. Well not at convenient times anyway. They also don't play happily when your attention is diverted elsewhere. They will literally tear pages from your textbook and press buttons on your laptop that you did not know existed, until you refocus on them. But don't be completely scared off (some fear is healthy) by these realisations. If you have young children but want your degree, it is achievable with some thoughtful planning and clever tactics. Here are my top ten tips for studying at home with little people.



**1** Remember that rule, sleep when baby sleeps? Wrong. Study when baby sleeps, as it may be your only window of opportunity. You can always involuntarily fall asleep on the floor later when you are meant to be entertaining your (immobile – once they are moving, you're screwed) baby. Dinner prep, cleaning, talking with your mother on the phone, can all be done while baby is awake. Use your baby carrier for grizzly, unsettled periods, and smash through some jobs. Of course this will not work if you have older children also. When baby sleeps you will be building Lego, mediating toy custody battles, and painfully watching as freshly made play dough colours are mixed into a familiar shade of brown.

When you cook, cook double the amount and freeze half for another day. Food preparation is a massive leech of time and energy, and it can be overwhelming when the children expect to be fed every day, at regular intervals. I always try and keep meals in the freezer that I can pull out on those days when the thought of cooking a meal from scratch makes me ache all over. It also reduces the amount of dirty dishes in the evenings so that you can squeeze a few more study moments out of your days.

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**3** Assign TV appropriate chores to your partner. By this I mean any chore that can be done while watching television. I do not expect my husband to spend his evenings scrubbing bathrooms and mopping floors, but if he is watching TV, his hands are capable of folding washing and ironing clothes. Once clothes are dry, I helpfully place them in a giant, mountain-like pile, in the middle of the lounge room so that he trips on them when trying to get to his chair. This helps him to remember. And if there are films that need to be watched for a unit, do this on a Saturday night, so that your partner is forced to watch also. We like to order Indian food and drink beer. It is a cheat way of ticking off date night and study in one easy swoop. Just don't forget to gently remind your spouse about the folding once they have finished their food.



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Delete Facebook off your phone and iPad for the semester period. This may seem extreme, but those rare moments in the day that you have to check in with the outside world can really add up. Instead, load your Unit readers onto your devices so that every time you open your phone, your reading pops up and triggers a guilt response. It is amazing how much you can actually get through with this one tactic. And this brings me to my next point.

If you are a breastfeeding mum, anchored to a chair, imagining all of the things you could be doing if you had use of your arms, don't despair. This is the perfect opportunity for some sneaky phone action. Don't go too big with the device if you want to read from it. You need something that you can hold one handed, with easy thumb swiping capabilities, and that won't attract the attention of older children who will suddenly decide that they must play Angry bird Transformers on that specific device. If you have the luxury of listening to recorded lectures from a larger device such as a laptop, then ensure it is placed on the head side of baby, because it will get kicked off its perch.

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Get older kids to help you with food preparation and selective chores. It is a great way to spend time with the kids while ticking off some jobs. It's all in the sell. Give them tasks that seem fun. Washing windows sounds boring until you offer up spray bottles filled with water. Just be clear about which windows they are allowed to spray so that you don't end up washing each window five times. Also, accept that you will all require a complete change of clothes at the end. Pick jobs that will wear them out and reward them with some quiet TV time while baby sleeps. This is a study opportunity.

If you can afford it, get a cleaner to come weekly or fortnightly depending on your circumstances. Don't feel guilty for spending this money because you will still be required to do an excessive amount of cleaning in between their visits. You will still sweep the floors and pressure hose the highchair after each meal. You will still do forty loads of dishes each day and wipe benches until your fingers bleed. But what it does offer is a guaranteed, thorough clean of the house on a regular basis. This can be a lifesaver on weeks when assessments are due or if you have unexpected guests that should know better. You also get to enjoy that clean house feeling for the eleven minutes before the children take to it with sticky hands and leaky Christmas stamps that they miraculously find for such occasions.

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Begin assessments immediately. Kids have a talent for getting sick the week that assessments are due. Essay due tomorrow? Cue the explosive gastro symptoms which last all night and ease just as the other children are rising in the morning, filled with the energy of a brand new day. Email your lecturer at the beginning of the semester and ask if there is anything further you need to know for the essay other than what is outlined in the unit guide. You don't want to waste time on an incorrect approach. Decide on your essay question in week one, and then take note of anything relevant in the assigned readings each week. This frees up time later on for your additional research.

Use Moodle to ask seemingly embarrassing questions. Lecturers often suggest that if you are struggling to understand a particular concept, or if a reading is particularly challenging, that you re-read it. I applaud you for completing it once. Few parents have the luxury of a second read. But if you have the time, by all means, read it as many times as you need. However if you are time poor, seek answers that will enable you to keep moving forward.

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And finally, do not fall behind. There are no catch up opportunities with young children. Don't naively think that you will have more time next week, because that might just be the week you are up all night with sick children, then suddenly you are two weeks behind. Speaking from experience, the more behind you fall the less motivated you become.

I hope these tips are helpful and encourage those with young children to recognise their own, unique study opportunities. And I hope those without children are not put off ever having them. Good luck in Semester 2!



*Tanya Bird is a Professional Communications student and mum to three young boys. She is currently working on her first novel and aspires to be a freelance writer between school bells.*

*If you enjoyed Tanya's article as much as we (The editorial team) did, do not hesitate to drop her an email and let her know! Tanya Bird - [tanyabird11@gmail.com](mailto:tanyabird11@gmail.com)*