



Make every minute count.



# Building an Audit-Ready Time Study Program

Ten-Minute Learning Series, Vol. 5

## About the Ten-Minute Learning Series

We know your time is valuable. Our Ten-Minute Learning Series is designed to help you learn more about time studies and how to make them impactful in your organization. Each article is packed with information that you can read quickly. With a small investment of time, we aim to enhance your understanding of administering and improving time studies.

If you have a topic that would be interesting for us to cover, please let us know at [resources@timestudy.com](mailto:resources@timestudy.com).

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### About Time Study Inc.

Time Study is the first platform designed from the ground up to focus on the critical process of administering time studies in healthcare organizations. Our user-friendly software transforms time studies into an efficient, accurate, and insightful process. Health service organizations can prepare accurate financial reports in a fraction of the time while getting new insights that drive productivity and best practices. Meanwhile, practitioners can track in real-time for much greater accuracy and compliance.

Top hospitals around the country use Time Study to make the hospital work more efficiently and give staff a more rewarding experience on the job to guide them towards best practices that ultimately deliver better care to the patients.

To learn more, visit [timestudy.com](http://timestudy.com).

# Building an Audit-Ready Time Study Program


Now is the time to evaluate how well your organization's time study program is performing. This checklist will let you take a quick snapshot of what you are doing well and where you can improve.

Time studies are an integral part of a healthcare organization's financial picture. They track how healthcare staff allocate their time by measuring time allocation during<sup>1</sup>certain intervals. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), state health agencies, and payors (insurance companies) use them as supporting information for reimbursement, grant compliance, contract management, operational efficiency, and other applications.

The most common use is for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, which can profoundly impact an organization's financial performance. If done poorly, a system can unwittingly sacrifice millions (even tens of millions) of dollars.

The keys to success are building a culture of accountability and having a sound, repeatable process for administering time studies.

Read on for a checklist to learn how ready your time study program is to undergo the scrutiny of an audit.



*"Responsibility equals accountability equals ownership. And a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organization can have."*

— Pat Summitt

## 1. WIN BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP

A strong program requires support from the top to ensure it is a priority. This starts with educating the CFO and other executives about the material impact of a time study. With a weak program, the financial, operational and reputational risks are real.

Ways to earn the attention of the executive team includes:

- Providing an ROI analysis that shows the financial impacts as well efficiency gains from having a high-performance time study program.
- Educate the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer about the impacts of their teams' participation.
- A strong program minimizes the effort required by clinical staff so that they can focus on their "top-of-license" tasks which will lower the risk of staff burnout.
- Develop budgetary and benchmarking statistics that will show the progressive impact of the time study program.



## 2. COMMUNICATE THE 'WHY' OF TIME STUDIES

Helping the time study reporters understand the gravity and importance of time studies markedly drives up participation rates. Healthcare professionals have extreme demands on their time, so educating them about what is expected and how their engagement will have significant upside for the organization with little effort on their part.

Ideas to promote participation include:

- Preparing an explanatory document, such as an FAQ about time studies that describes their purpose and how they impact the organization's financial picture.
- Include time studies in onboarding and training activities, with periodic refreshers and updates.
- Share benchmarks with staff about how their performance is improving.
- Communicate these messages through leadership, such as the CMO and CNO.

## 3. INCENTIVIZE PARTICIPATION IN TIME STUDIES

Participation in time studies is critical to their success and to showing their veracity in an audit. While education and training is one part of the process, instituting some ways to promote participation is an essential ingredient.

Some ideas that some systems have used include:

- Making time study participation part of performance reviews.
- For contract employees, compel them to submit complete studies as part of their agreements.
- Show a public dashboard that shows what the participation rate is overall at any given time, and celebrate participations with 100-percent submission rates. Conversely, the entire staff can be displayed so that the high performers are acknowledged but that low performers are also shown.

## 4. KEEP COMMUNICATION CONCISE AND ACTIONABLE

Given the frenetic pace of work inside any healthcare facility, attention spans are incredibly short, even moreso for administrative tasks such as time studies. Making every communication succinct and directive is essential.

A few tips for making every communication have maximum impact include:

- Keep it short with directive subject lines and a short message. A good rule of thumb is to limit the body to a “tweetable” length of no more than 100 words, which is 2-3 sentences.
- Be explicit about what the recipient must do and provide a precise, unambiguous deadline.
- If the recipient needs more information, include a single contact person to whom they can escalate questions.



## 5. ARCHITECT A COMPREHENSIVE PROCESS FROM THE START

Start with the end in mind. When setting up a time study program, whether a cold start or preparing to upgrade an organization's process, take a step back and build it to a standard that would bear the scrutiny of even the most comprehensive audit. These start with the "business rules" that provide the roadmap to ensure data integrity at every stage of the process.

The foundations of this time study process would include:

- **Time Reporting Workflow** – Creating a road map of who's time is studied and how often in order to meet the reporting requirements, including expectations around timeliness and attestations.
- **Administrative Oversight**– Selecting the owners of the process and ensuring they have access and ownership of the data, while restricting access to others.
- **IT Security** – Ensure that data is protected and systems have robust protocols.
- **Manage Data Validation**—Document requirements for validating and approving data. For example, make it so only the submitter can approve a time study report.
- **Communication Plans** – How will team members be trained and how often to send refreshers.
- **Reporting and Insights** – Standardizing the delivery of reports and insights on time studies.

## 6. INCREASE PARTICIPATION RATES, TIMELINESS AND DETAIL

The quality of time studies is only as good as the collected information. That means all staff members participate on request, the top qualitative metric. However, secondary aspects relate to how timely their submissions are entered and with what level of detail. Audits can zero in on any of these aspects. Put yourself in an auditor's place and imagine if you noticed that all submissions were weeks or months after the fact and the reported time was in large blocks that lacked specificity.

Tips to increase the quality of time studies and lower the friction of reporting include:

- Make surveys intuitive and accessible to submit by enabling team members to use laptops and mobile devices already used by team members.
- Connect time studies to existing systems such as calendars and EHRs to leverage existing data, i.e., pre-populate information where applicable.
- Compel reporters to enter data in (or near) real-time to avoid recall bias.
- Find the balance so that time studies have sufficient detail without being overly complicated, which can be confusing and discourage participants.
- Include accessible and understandable activity descriptions of time so staff knows what time goes without ambiguity.

## 7. USE SYSTEMATIC REMINDERS TO KEEP REPORTERS ON TASK

Administrative tasks such as time studies tend to be deprioritized, which is understandable given the frenetic pace at which healthcare professionals work nowadays. Sending regular reminders helps keep the time studies top of mind and encourages participants to stay on top of them.

- Automated reminders are the best choice so that a staff member is not burdened with "nagging" staff.



- Create a reminder cadence to alert time study participants when a study period is approaching, reminders to submit each day, and email and text reminders when time studies are overdue.
- If a participant is not submitting in a timely manner, escalate to an administrator or their manager/director once a pre-determined time limit passes.
- Enable time study administrators to monitor compliance in real time so they provide timely support to chronic procrastinators.



## 8. CAPTURE A DETAILED AUDIT TRAIL

The key to having a successful audit is being able to show your work. One can never have enough detail. Using software systems offer a quick and efficient way to build that model without adding additional burdens to staff.

Following are key components to building a defensible audi trail:

- **Attestations** – Ensure that the reporter acknowledges the accuracy of the submission.
- **Identity Security** – Use Single Sign-On (SSO) and Two-Factor Authentication (TFA) to demonstrate that the person logging in is authenticated.
- **Logs** – Track all interactions with records to show precisely who has interacted with data, when, and how often.
- **Data Retention** – Create policies to keep data for sufficient periods but also have regular culling that is recorded.

## 9. MAKE PROCESS EFFICIENCY A PRIORITY

Time study programs need to deliver results, but not at all costs. Building an efficient and complete program needs to be balanced against the effort required to administer it on a large scale.

- Delegate support functions to staff closer to the reporters rather than to a centralized resource, which will provide more timely assistance and frequent engagement. Also, ensure that the ratio of staff to support is manageable.
- Performance dashboards allow administrators to see compliance in real-time and escalate any issues on time.
- Streamline workflows for resolving actionable tasks such as reviewing submissions, monitoring participation rates, requesting information, and other tasks.
- When data is collected in a digital system, preparing reports or audit responses can take only a few minutes rather than when a manual process is involved, which can consume weeks' worth of effort.

## 10. LEVERAGE TIME STUDIES TO DISCOVER NEW BUSINESS INSIGHTS

Time studies can provide powerful information to improve a healthcare system's performance. By elevating the role of time studies, an organization can have a larger impact in multiple ways.

- Financial - Increase reimbursement, decrease revenue leakage, and discover cost efficiencies.
- Operational - Improve operational efficiency, and reduce waste and overhead.
- Workforce - Increase employee satisfaction and increase top-of-license time.
- Enterprise - Time study data as a strategic asset, improve data quality and interoperability, and reduce duplication of work.



# TIME : STUDY

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