

Using Time Wisely

Gaining Control of Your Priorities
and Choices

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Using Time Wisely

To many of us it seems that despite our best intentions the workday is over before we have finished a single item on our to-do list! During this seminar, we will discuss how to become more productive and more satisfied with our efforts. Participants will learn how to:

- **Apply the Three Tests of Time**
- **Determine how time is currently used.**
- **Become aware of the time over which they have control**
- **Set Priorities**
- **Manage Interruptions**
- **Stop Procrastinating**
- **Finish Projects Efficiently**

Three Tests of Time

- **Test of Necessity:** Make sure whatever it is you do adds value to your work day. Sometimes we do things out of habit even when the original purpose no longer exists. Ask:
 - What happens if this doesn't get done?
 - What happens if it does get done?
- **Test of Appropriateness:** Sometimes we fail to consider that there are others who should do necessary tasks. Some of us continue doing lower level tasks out of habit or fears about delegating. Ask:
 - Who is the best person for the job?
 - Is this a good use of their time?
 - Should someone else be trained for this task?
- **Test of Efficiency:** : Always ask yourself, "Is there a better way?" Can you do something faster or better? Can you arrange your tasks so that there is little downtime?

Time	Activity	Necessary? Appropriate? Efficient?
7:00 am		
7:30 am		
8:00 am		
8:30 am		
9:00 am	<p>When you go on a diet, you are often counseled to record all the food you eat in a log or journal. Likewise, the best way to discover how you actually spend your time is to begin with a time log.</p>	
9:30 am		
10:00 am		
10:30 am		
11:00 am		
11:30 am		
Noon		
12:30 pm		
1:00 pm		
1:30 pm		
2:00 pm		
2:30 pm		
3:00 pm		
3:30 pm		
4:00 pm		
4:30 pm		
5:00 pm		
5:30 pm		
6:00 pm		

The Hidden Time Costs

- ◉ Travel Time
- ◉ Setup Time
- ◉ Feedback and Revising Time
- ◉ Reflection (Simmering) Time
- ◉ Cleanup/Wind-Down Time
- ◉ Refreshment Time

To Do Lists: The Key to Efficiency

Preparing a To-Do List

● Step 1:

- Write down all of the tasks that you need to complete. If they're large tasks, break out the first action step, and write this down with the larger task. (Ideally, tasks or action steps should take no longer than 1-2 hours to complete.)

● Step 2:

- Run through these tasks allocating priorities from A (very important, or very urgent) to F (unimportant, or not at all urgent).
- If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and demote the less important ones. Once you have done this, rewrite the list in priority order.
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Note:

You may find it easier to compile several lists (personal, study, and workplace To-Do Lists, for example). Try different approaches and use the best for your own situation.

Setting Priorities

To do lists aren't as helpful as they could be if every item has the same priority. Setting priorities

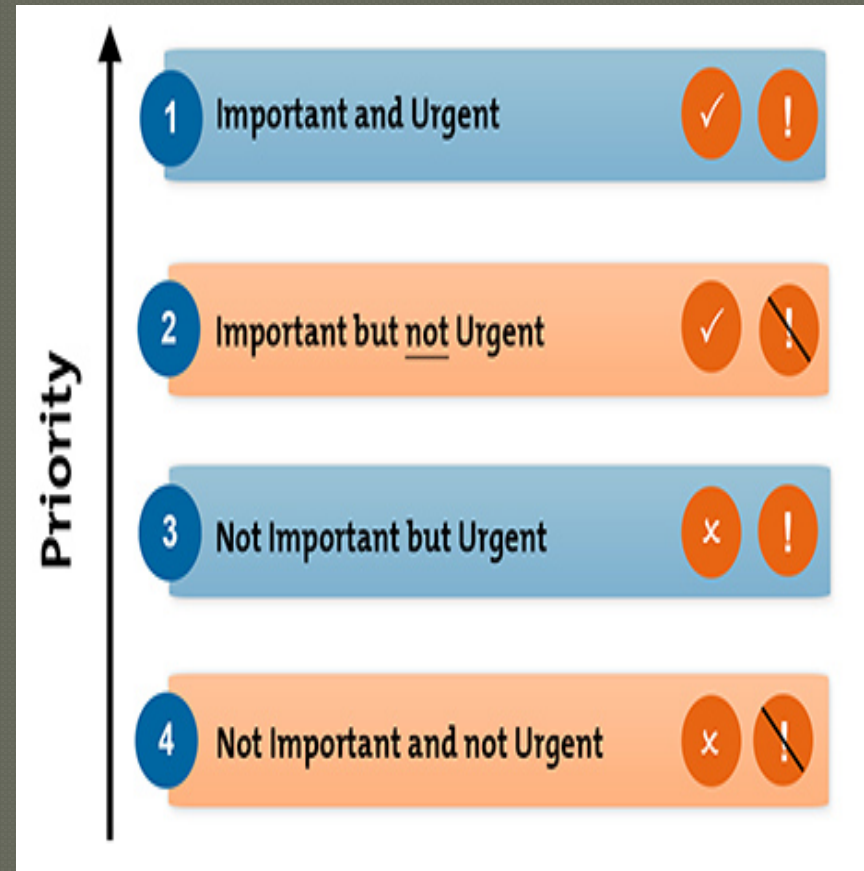
- Helps you to allocate your time where it is most-needed and most wisely spent
- Brings order to chaos. Without it, you'll flounder around, drowning in competing demands.

Simple Prioritization

- At a simple level, you can prioritize based on **time constraints**, on the **potential benefit** of the task you're facing, or on the **pressure** you're under **to complete** a job.
- Prioritization based **on project value** is probably the most commonly-used and rational basis for prioritization. Whether this is based on a subjective guess at value or a sophisticated financial evaluation, it **often gives the most efficient results**.
- **Time constraints are important when other people are depending on you** to complete a task, and particularly when this task is on the critical path of an important project.

Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Technique

- **Important** activities have an outcome that leads to us achieving our goals, whether these are professional or personal.
- **Urgent** activities demand immediate attention, and are usually associated with achieving someone else's goals. They are often the ones we concentrate on and they demand attention because the consequences of not dealing with them are immediate.



Prioritizing Your List

Not Urgent and Not Important

These activities are a distraction. Eliminate them.

Important and Urgent

- a. Activities you could not have foreseen
- b. Activities you left to the last minute.

Important but not Urgent

Activities that help you achieve your personal/professional goals and complete important work.

Urgent but NOT Important

Activities that prevent you from achieving your goals. Do your best to **reschedule** or **delegate** these tasks.

Prioritization Tools

The Urgent/Important Matrix:

This matrix allows you to visualize whether tasks are urgent or important. Frequently, seemingly urgent tasks actually aren't that important. Often, really important activities (like working towards your life goals) just aren't that urgent. This approach helps you cut through this.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•crises•pressing problems•deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•preparation•prevention•values clarification•planning•relationship building•true recreation•empowerment
NOT IMPORTANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•interruptions, some phone calls•some mail, some reports•some meetings•many proximate, pressing matters•many popular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•trivia, busy work•some phone calls•time wasters•"escape" activities•irrelevant mail•excessive TV

Minimize Distractions

- **Email**
 - Schedule “email” times
 - Check and respond during your low productivity times
 - Schedule email to be delivered manually or at set intervals
- **Disorganization**
 - Clean up so you can concentrate
- **Instant Messaging**
 - Consider setting specific times for availability. When you don’t want contacted, turn it off or set your status to “busy”
- **Internet**
 - Read the news before the start of the day
 - Close your browser
 - Use browsing as a reward for concentrated activity
- **Other People**
 - Close your door
 - Use headphones
 - Have a heart-to-heart talk with your distracting coworker (s)

Manage Interruptions

- Everyday interruptions at work can be a key barrier to managing your time effectively .
- Think back to your last workday. How many interruptions occurred? Interruptions may have been phone calls, emails, hallway conversations, colleagues stopping by your office, or anything else that unexpectedly demanded your attention and, in doing so, distracted you from the task at-hand.
- Because your day only has so many hours in it, a handful of small interruptions can rob you of the time you need to achieve your goals and be successful in your work and life.
- Interruptions break your focus so that you have to spend time re-engaging with the thought processes needed to successfully complete complex work.
- The key to controlling interruptions is to know what they are and whether they are necessary, and **to plan for them in your daily schedule.**

What to Do About Interruptions

1. Keep An Interrupters Log

- Record every interruption you experience for a week, and mark down the person interrupting you; the date and time it occurs; what the interruption is; whether it was valid; and whether it was urgent (or whether someone could have waited until a better time.)

2. Analyze and Conquer Interruptions

1. Look at whether the interruption is **valid** or not. Could someone have avoided interrupting you by waiting for a routine meeting? Or was it something they should have asked you about at all?
2. Next, look at how **urgent** the interruptions were, and whether they could have been pre-empted. You can pre-empt many interruptions by holding routine meetings with people: If they're confident that they'll have access to you at a defined point in the near future, they'll learn to save up non-urgent issues until this meeting.
3. **Some interruptions are both urgent and valid.** You need to be interrupted, and you need to deal with the situation. From your Interrupters Log, you'll see how much time is taken up by these urgent, valid interruptions. **Block this time into your schedule as "contingency time"**, and only take on as much other work as you can fit into the remaining time

3 . Put Your Phone to Work for You (Not Against You)

- If you are on a deadline or your focus needs to be intense (and not interrupted), use your voice mail to screen calls, or have an assistant deal with messages for you. This way, you can deal with calls by priority, and at times that suit you. In fact, this telephone time can be planned into your schedule, and so become a normal part of your working day.

What To Do About Interruptions

4. Catch Your Breath

- When interrupted, it's easy to get caught up in the "rush" of the person who is interrupting, for they undoubtedly feel their request is urgent.
- First, consider the situation. Catch your breath and clear your head. A small delay goes a long way in assessing the situation accurately and reacting appropriately.

5. Learn to Say "No"

- It's often acceptable to say "no" to requests or tasks if you are busy when someone else can handle it, if it is not an important task, or if it can be done later.
- Say "no" in a courteous and sincere way, followed by a short explanation is the best course of action to take: "I am working against a very tight deadline on an important project right now so, I am sorry, but I can not jump in and help".

6. "Available" and "Unavailable" Time

- Let people know when you are available. and when you are not. Make sure that people know that during your "unavailable time", they should only interrupt you if they have to.
- You and your co-workers can also agree on a signal that everyone in the office can use when unavailable, like turning the nameplate on the door around, or simply closing the door. This alleviates interruptions and can avoid hurt feelings.

What To Do About Interruptions

7. "Invitation Only" Time

- Schedule regular check-in times for the individuals you talk to most often. Ask these people to keep a running list of things that they need to discuss, so you can cover all the points at one time. And, force yourself to do the same.
- An open-door policy is good, but limit the number of people you invite to your work area. For instance, if you're scheduling a meeting, offer to meet your co-worker in his or her office or a conference room. This way, you can excuse yourself after you accomplish your purpose.

8. Uncontrollable Interruptions

- There are interruptions that, no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot control.
- Most people are happy to schedule a more convenient time, but when this does not work, quickly set the parameters by saying something like, "I only have five minutes to talk about this right now," and stick to it.
- Do not ask the interrupter to sit down and do not engage in small talk. Encourage the interrupter to get right to the point and if a solution cannot be reached before the allotted time runs out, set a time for getting back to them and, again, stick to it.

Sudden Opportunities

- When your work compels you to be something of a crisis manager, prepare yourself to get “would like to do tasks” done when you find you have a sudden opportunity.
- For example- you could find yourself with 5 free minutes, a $\frac{1}{2}$ hour or even an hour.
- Develop a sudden opportunity list so that you are prepared seize and use this opportunity productively.
 - 5 minutes or less- make a quick phone call, read an article, back up some files.
 - 30 minutes or less-Read a report, update your expense reports, clear out a drawer, go for a walk . . .

Procrastination

You procrastinate when you put off things that you should be focusing on right now, usually in favor of doing something that is more enjoyable or that you're more comfortable doing.

Step 1: Recognize That You're Procrastinating If you're honest with yourself, you probably know when you're procrastinating

Step 2: Work Out WHY You're Procrastinating

- Why you procrastinate can depend on both you and the task. But it's important to understand which of the two is relevant in a given situation, so that you can select the best approach for overcoming your reluctance to get going.
- Do you find a particular job **unpleasant**, and try to avoid it because of that?
- Are you **disorganized**?
- Are you **overwhelmed by the task**.
- Do you feel that everything must be done **perfectly**?

Procrastination

Step 3: Adopt Anti-Procrastination Strategies

If you're procrastinating because you're disorganized, here's how to **get organized!**

- Keep a To-Do list so that you can't "conveniently" forget about unpleasant or overwhelming tasks.
- Prioritize your to-do list
- Become a master of scheduling and project planning, so that you know when to start those all-important projects.
- Set yourself time-bound goals: that way, you'll have no time for procrastination!
- Focus on one task at a time.

If you're putting off starting a project because you find it **overwhelming**,

- Break the project into a set of smaller, more manageable tasks.
- Start with some quick, small tasks if you can, even if these aren't the logical first actions.

If you're procrastinating because you find the task **unpleasant**:

- Many procrastinators overestimate the unpleasantness of a task. You may find that it's not as bad as you thought!
- Hold the unpleasant consequences of **not** doing the work at the front of your mind.
- Reward yourself for doing the task.

Getting To The Finish Line












- When faced with managing a complex project, it can all seem overwhelming. You might be wondering:
 - Exactly what do I need to do to achieve this?
 - How do I ensure that I really have covered everything?
 - Would anyone else know what to do if I were unexpectedly off sick for a few days?

Learning and using basic project management tools will save time and stress while ensuring success. We will discuss two tools: decision matrices and milestone charts.

Milestone Chart

A milestone chart graphically displays the relationship of steps in any project.

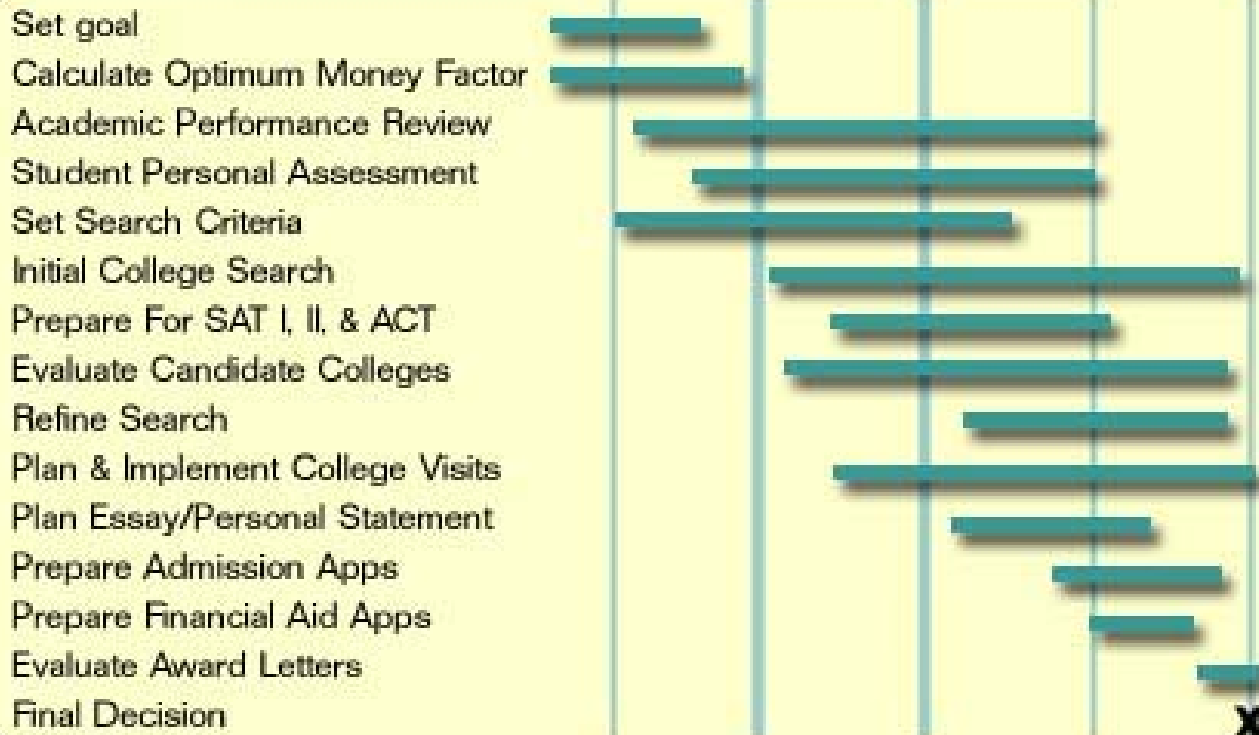
1. Estimate the time required to complete each step
2. List the steps in order down the left side of the chart with dates shown along the bottom (or the top) of the chart
3. Draw a line across the chart for each step starting at the planned beginning date and ending on the completion date of that step

	Q1		Q2			Q3	
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Identify Customers							
Survey 50 Customers							
Interpret Requirements							
Study Competition							
Documentation of features							
Brainstorm concepts							
Design & Code							
Testing / QA						 	
Documentation of product							
Global Release							

H.S. Junior

H.S. Senior

A S O N D J F M A M J J A S O N D J F M A M J J A S O N D



X

Case Study: A Day at the Office

- Jack arrived at the office at 7:20 am. He was early because he wanted to clear the backlog of work piling up on his desk.
- He started by going through his emails. Quickly he realized that he couldn't deal with one message until a coworker arrived. He decided to print off another message that had application to something he was working on. As he continued to read his email, he became engrossed in an article someone had sent him. He was startled when he discovered that the rest of the staff was arriving and it was 8:00 am.
- He abandoned the email and began working on what was on his desk. Almost as soon as he started, Bill and Claire came by and invited him to join them for coffee. Jack decided he could spare 10 minutes. Soon they were all analyzing last night's game and before he realized it- 30 minutes had passed.
- As Jack got back to his desk, his boss called. Could Jack sit in for him at the 9:00 meeting? Jack decided there wasn't enough time to get into the work on his desk, so he pushed it aside and vowed to start immediately after lunch.
- The afternoon wasn't any better. A few visitors, a few phone calls and the day was over. Nothing had been accomplished on work that was due tomorrow. Jack stuffed work into a bag to take home as usual.

Analyze the Use of Time:

- ◉ Did Jack make good use of his prime time?
- ◉ Was he working on his highest priority task?
- ◉ Did he seem able to say no?
- ◉ Did he practice task completion?
- ◉ Does he seem to understand his problem?
- ◉ How would you suggest he change his ways?