Essential Time Management Strategies

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Outline

• Record keeping
• Breaking down big tasks
• Prioritizing
• Work rhythms
• Bringing it together
What kind of time management tool(s) do you use?

- How effective is it?
- What are the drawbacks?
Record keeping

- Make a habit of recording all tasks that need to be done
- Find a format that works and stick to it
- Schedule first steps of big projects early
- Writing down tasks helps with planning and lessens anxiety, lets you reflect on your progress
Activity

• In this session we’ll try one method of designing a weekly schedule

• On your own list all next week’s commitments and estimate the amount of time you will need for each

• Discuss your commitments with another person and add any of your partner’s ideas to your own list if they also apply to you
Breaking it down

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What is it about big tasks that make them big problems?
What is it about small tasks that make them no problem?
The *big tasks* in grad school

- Thesis / Dissertation
- Teaching / Teaching assistant work
- Coursework
- Comprehensives / Candidacies / Prospectus
- Research project / Research assistant work
- Journal articles / Conference papers

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1. Manageable-ize

- Break it up
- Delegate and remove unessential steps
- Plan out milestones and prioritize
- Check off as you go
- Adjust as needed
1. Manageable-ize

Pick two or three *big tasks*

For each task,
- Break it up
- Delegate and remove unessential steps
- Plan out milestones and begin to prioritize
1. Manageable-ize

2. Stop worrying about the future!

3. Use the right tools
3. Use the right tools

- Pen and paper
- Calendar
- Apps

What kind of tools do you see yourself using?
Prioritizing
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE OVERWHELMED WITH WORK

STEP 1: MAKE A LIST OF ALL THE THINGS YOU HAVE TO DO.

STEP 2: CATEGORIZE THEM BASED ON THEIR IMPORTANCE.

STEP 3: REALIZE YOU JUST MADE IT WORSE.

AAH! THEY'RE ALL IMPORTANT!!

Important for my thesis!
Important for my professor!
Important for my funding!
Important for my bills!
Important for my career!
Important for my sanity!

TO DO:

- Write thesis
- Submit
- Code
- Review
- AHA!

Comic from "Piled Higher and Deeper" by Jorge Cham
www.phdcomics.com

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Why prioritize?

• Your stress level diminishes (you don’t endanger other drivers)

• You don’t get insomnia
  • you are more productive

• You can enjoy your break time more

• You eliminate the “decision dilemma”—“What do I do next?”

• For every 1 minute you spend in planning, you will gain 10 in execution
  • 1 minute = 10 minutes. 10 minutes = 1 hour and 40 minutes

• The difference between being REACTIVE and PROACTIVE
  • when you don’t plan, you end up responding to the day’s trivial, time-consuming events as they occur
Methods

• Scaling from 1-10

• ABC Analysis

• Steven Covey’s Four Quadrants
List of Tasks

- grocery shopping
- prepare slides for LTC workshop on Time Management
- prepare midterm exam questions for English 135
- prepare lesson plan for English 135 class
- dance class
- research Virginia Woolf and communication technology for MLA 2016 paper
- write 500 words for MLA paper
- meet with BM to discuss big data methodology for MLA paper
Scaling from 1-10

• Number your list from 1 (very important) to 10 (unimportant)

• Use for a simple to-do-list

• Can be created quickly
Scaling 1-10

- grocery shopping 8
- prepare slides for LTC workshop on Time Management 1
- prepare midterm exam questions for English 135 3
- prepare lesson plan for English 135 class 2
- dance class 6
- research Virginia Woolf and communication technology for MLA 2016 paper 5
- write 500 words for MLA paper 4
- meet with BM to discuss big data methodology for MLA paper 7
ABCDE Method

• A-level tasks (no more than 25% of your time)
  • critical things
  • things that will lead to significant consequences if not done on time — focusing on consequences creates an urgency factor

• B-level tasks
  • everything you have to do to meet your short- and long-term academic and career goals
  • activities that may have a mildly negative consequence if not completed on time

• C-level tasks
  • everything else — busy work, wants (as opposed to needs), nice to haves, and goofing off (95% of what you do online)
  • activities that have no penalty if not completed on time

• D-level tasks
  • Delegate — these are actions that someone else can take on

• E-level tasks
  • Tasks that could be Eliminated if necessary

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ABCDE Method

- grocery shopping \( D \)
- prepare slides for LTC workshop on Time Management \( A \)
- prepare midterm exam questions for English 135 \( B \)
- prepare lesson plan for English 135 class \( A \)
- dance class \( C \)
- research Virginia Woolf and communication technology for MLA 2016 paper \( B \)
- write 500 words for MLA paper \( B \)
- meet with BM to discuss big data methodology for MLA paper \( C/E \)
Steven Covey’s Four Quadrants

• Create a grid that classifies your tasks according to their level of urgency and importance

• Try to ensure important work is done before it becomes urgent
# Steven Covey’s Four Quadrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Urgent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urgent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Not Urgent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td>- slides for workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- lesson plan for English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- research for MLA paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- prepare midterm exam questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Important</strong></td>
<td>- dance class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- grocery shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- practice piano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Material adapted from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* by Steven Covey
Activity: Prioritizing

- Using one of the three methods discussed, prioritize the tasks you’ve listed
ABCDE Method

• A-level tasks (no more than 25% of your time)
  • critical things
  • things that will lead to significant consequences if not done on time — focusing on consequences creates an urgency factor

• B-level tasks
  • everything you have to do to meet your short- and long-term academic and career goals
  • activities that may have a mildly negative consequence if not completed on time

• C-level tasks
  • everything else — busy work, wants (as opposed to needs), nice to haves, and goofing off (95% of what you do online)
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• D-level tasks
  • Delegate — these are actions that someone else can take on

• E-level tasks
  • Tasks that could be Eliminated if necessary
Personal Work Rhythms

- Individual times of higher/lower efficiency (i.e. morning versus evening)

- **Activity**: identify your prime productive period(s), then share with another person and discuss:
  - How is your partner’s work rhythm different from yours? Have you ever considered your natural work rhythm in your scheduling? Has this helped?

- When schedule allows, consider personal rhythm for maximum efficiency

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Taking Breaks

• How do you manage your breaks? What do you like to do?

• Breaks allow your brain to process and synthesize information

• Breaks help you maintain motivation, lessen stress, and boost productivity
Taking Breaks

• Schedule regular breaks, i.e. 10 min. per hour of work, and stick to your schedule

• The longer you’ve been working, the longer the break should be

• Get away from the computer and move

• Good activities: exercise, socializing, switching to other tasks like grocery shopping or house cleaning

Material adapted from University of Guelph, “A Guide to Time Management: Breaks and Rewards

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Activity: Building a Schedule

On your schedule:

• add fixed time commitments (i.e. classes)
• mark your personal high and low productivity times
• insert your tasks, matching high-priority tasks to high productivity times and low priority/easier tasks to low productivity times
• briefly share with another person
Disclaimer!

- We are not robots

- If you choose some of these strategies and use them most of the time, your efficiency will increase
Review

• Record keeping
• Breaking down big tasks
• Prioritizing
• Work rhythms
• Bringing it together
References

