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Time management strategies for academic success

www.thrivingamidstchaos.com
Agenda

Organizing

• Defining and organizing project work

• Tactical planning: the week and the day

Doing

• General time-use strategies

• Finding time for writing and other project work
My articles written for Academic Physician & Scientist. (Posted at www.thrivingamidstchaos.com)

- **Code O: Recovering from overwhelm**
- The basics of organizing your work and time
- Priorities: How to decide what to do, and when
- **Execution: Getting your work done**
- Getting e-mail under control
- Becoming a productive academic writer
- A plan for professional reading
- Time blocking
- Interruptions
- Delegation
High-priority project work.

Project = A concrete outcome ("deliverable") requiring multiple tasks & time to achieve.
What are YOUR current projects?

Obvious academic projects:
• Write a paper or grant
• Prepare a talk
• Create a new curriculum

Plan... ... a conference, a vacation
Prepare.... for a recertification exam
Learn...... a statistical method
Decide..... whether to respond to an RFP
Fix... ... the problem with my computer
Buy... ... a house, a computer, a car
Keep a master project list!

- Prioritizing
- Stay on track for deadlines
- Making decisions about pruning, deferring to later, saying yes or no to new work
Create a simple plan for each project

• Description of the desired outcome
• Timeframe: due / aiming for?
• List the steps, in order
• Potential obstacles? (Draft IF-THEN plans)
• The very next
  • task
  • time block
To learn more about project work, as well as an overall system for organizing
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- Interruptions
- Delegation
Plan your weeks and days.

With time, we have an absolute limit on what is available to us. When a resource is scarce, we should make decisions that optimize this scarce resource. If something has to give, you want to make sure it’s the right thing.

- Vanderkam, 2015
# Weekly Planning #1

Set work boundaries, schedule “margin”

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SET a STOP TIME

- Exercise
- Bike ride
- Friends birthday party
- Eat out With friends
- Movie
- Night OFF
- Day OFF
To learn the “mosaic” method for managing personal and professional time

A strategy based on her experience having a career while being a mother of three,* and the study of 1,000 daily time logs kept by 143 professional women with at least one child home.

* She now has five!
Weekly planning #2
Review and update your “inventory of work”

• **Calendar(s)**
  • The coming week:
    • Look at each scheduled event:
      • Prep?
      • Logistics?
  • Two additional weeks:
    • Deadlines?
    • Events that need prep?

• **Lists**
  • Review each item on each list
  • Prune, update, and pick priorities for this week
Weekly planning tactic #3: Choose “chunks” of project work to complete: 1 primary, ~2 others

“Work on” paper

⇒ Complete a draft of the discussion

“Work on” birthday party plan

⇒ Complete the guest list and mail invitations
- “Frontload” your most important project work

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The daily plan
Daily planning tactic #1
Make an “MIT” list

Must* be done today
  •
  •
  ...

Aim* to do today
  1..
  2..
  3..

* The deadline is today

* “It will be so great if I get this done today but nothing bad will happen if it don’t.”
Daily planning tactic #2  
Sketch a plan for the day

Scheduled event

Pencil in key tasks

Include transition time

Scheduled event

Jane 6, 2022
06:30 up
0- finish plans for MISP session
0- try & access Mary's account
to fix email signature
12:00 Outlook call
13:00  Preparing slides
and add notes
14:15 Leave for town
15:00 MISP Session
17:00 Drive home
Dinner
Daily planning tactic #3
Keep a “Done” list

11-23-16 Done List

8:45

- Paid for 1st insurance mth
- Went to Tanner
- Set up new bank
- Paid $26 on my insurance
- Paid $2.5 in USA
- Printed new dinner RMAN
- Called Flex from location
- PAID 2015 tax (Greg)
- Depost tiny check
- Paid utility bill for sunset
- Read about marsh protection
- Tried unsuccessfully 3 TIMES to log into PayPal
- Found out how to sign pdf docs on phone
- Made a great call
- Prayed for Sandy
- My bill is PAID
- Created Brad with Project
- Renewed unsettled car 2016
- Cancel web sign for Will update report
- Sent renewal to bank to be
TIME STRATEGIES FOR TASKS
• Multi-tasking?
• Do it now!

– The “2 minute rule”

Strategy: Batching

— “do it now, later”

Kerry Gleeson\The Personal Efficiency Program
Strategy: Use small bits of time
The “ten-minute secret”

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- **Delegation**
A framework for allocating time to high-priority work.

Applies to any project, but especially {writing}
the problem
Common approach

Time (weeks or months)

Time / pages written

DEADLINE
Scenario 1: With a deadline (e.g. grants)

Scenario 2: No deadline (e.g. papers)
Myth

“"I need a large block of uninterrupted time before I can work on this important project...”"
Reality Check

“... if you want to successfully integrate more [writing / project work] into your professional life, you cannot just wait until you find yourself with lots of free time and in the mood to concentrate. You have to actively fight to incorporate this into your schedule.

Cal Newport, 
Deep Work (2016)
A framework
Key Strategy:
Be prepared to work on your projects no matter how much time you have.

Three timeframes:

- 10 minutes or less: BRIEF
- 30-60 minutes: MODERATE
- 2 hours or more: LONG
Moderate:

- A chunk of any project
- A batch of tasks
- Writing?
Robert Boice:  
*Write in regular moderate sessions*  
*30-60 min*
What challenges can you imagine you would have using “moderate” writing sessions?

I need time to get warmed up

Too short to get anything meaningful written – I need hours

The writing would not be good

Responses from group of faculty members
Brief:
• Complete quick tasks
• Start longer tasks
• Writing?
Yes, a small bit of writing!

- Margaret Rumer Godden OBE (10 December 1907 – 8 November 1998) was an English author of more than 60 fiction and non-fiction books.

I have learned to use my ‘ten minutes.’ I once thought it was not worth sitting down for a time as short as that; now I know differently and, if I have ten minutes, I use them, even if they bring only two lines, and it keeps the book alive.”

- Rumer Godden

A House with Four Rooms
Long:
Use these guidelines:
1. Schedule in advance
2. No more than 4 hours
3. And....

The ⏰ 90° rule
• Take a break!
**Time blocking**

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- Have a goal for the block & a simple action to get started.

**Focused Work**
- Plan a starting task for the next session, then stop
What challenges have you had using time blocking?

Interruptions
Inconsistent scheduling
End up working on other tasks -
Can't get started

Responses from group of faculty members
Write down what you are going to do

25 + 5
25 + 5
25 + 5
25 + 15
Repeat as needed

Manage interruptions

Francesco Cirillo
http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/

the Pomodoro technique

Silvia is an academic psychologist, and this book is perhaps the most popular in this genre. This second edition reflects the authors new status as a dad with young children (making his advice about finding time to write more realistic). The book has been updated to apply to a wider variety of disciplines, and has a new chapter devoted to grant and fellowship writing.


Joli Jensen is a communications studies professor with extensive experience teaching writing to graduate students and faculty members. She sends the same message as Siliva - write nearly every day - but covers some additional reasons for resistance and has different views on some issues. She provides welcome detail on writing accountability group options, and how to deal with stalled projects.


- Detailed strategies for planning time to write, with emphasis on time blocking.
- See also, Study Hacks blog: Cal posts about “deep work” and other productivity topics: http://calnewport.com/blog/


- Practical approaches to procrastination originally designed for graduate students have trouble writing their dissertations.
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Focusing on High Priority Work

Email me with your comments, questions, and tips!

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