

Susan R. Johnson

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**Time management strategies for academic success**

**thriving**  
a m i d s t c h a o s

[www.thrivingamidstchaos.com](http://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](http://www.thrivingamidstchaos.com))

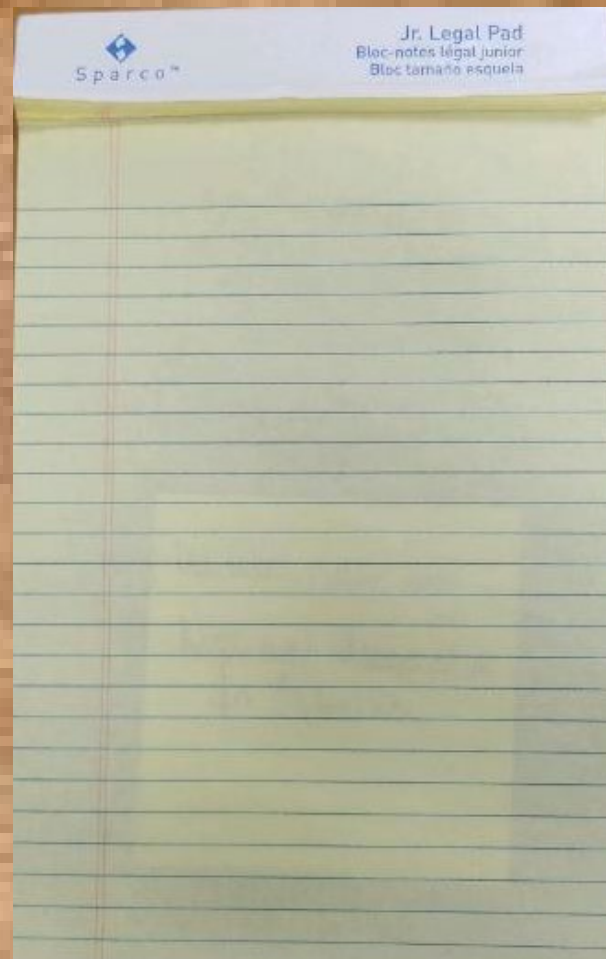
- [Code O: Recovering from overwhelm](#)
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High-priority  
project work.





Jr. Legal Pad  
Bloc-notes legal junior  
Bloc tamaño escuela



# 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

TEACHING

SCHOLARSHIP

ADMIN

PERSONAL

Professional productivity

## 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



Project name

Project name

Project name

Project name

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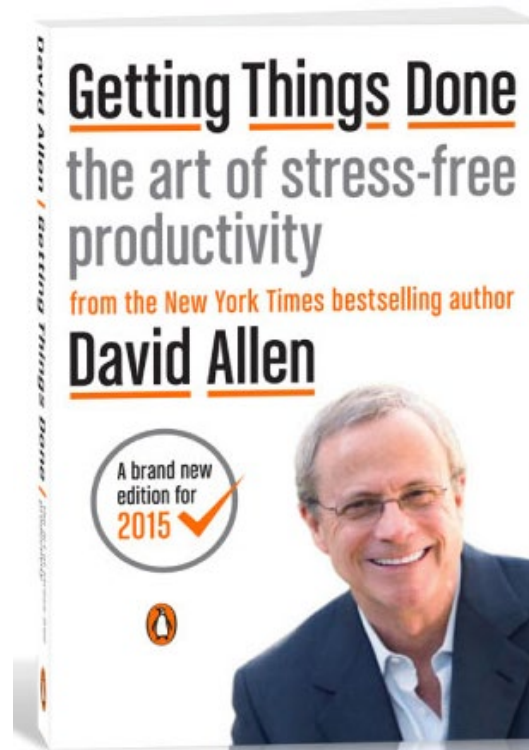
Project name

Project name

# 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**

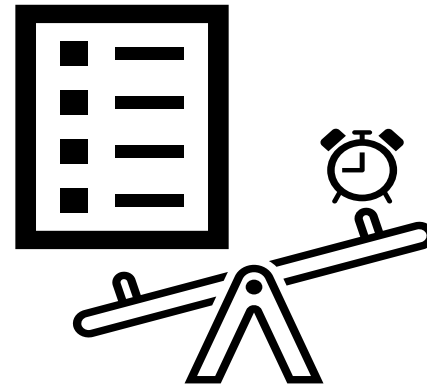
To learn more about project work, as well as an overall system for organizing



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# 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.**

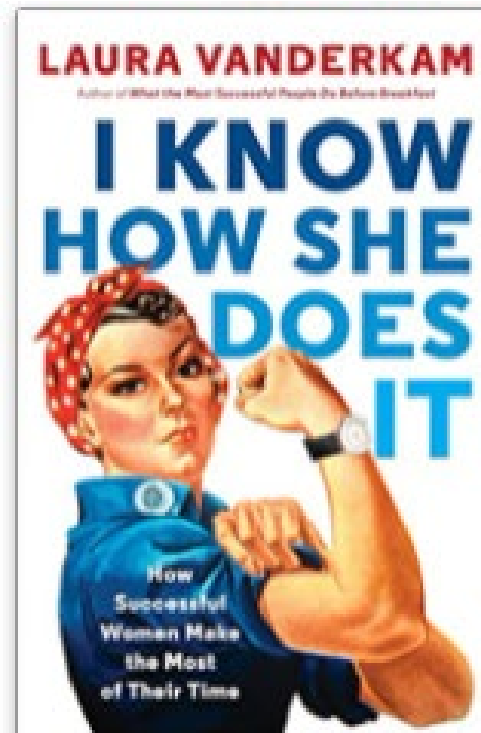
Weekly review & plan



# 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**

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
6:00							
7:00							
8:00	█	█	█				
9:00	█						
10:00	█						
11:00		█					
12:00		█					
1:00	█						
2:00	█	█					
3:00							
4:00							
5:00	█						
6:00	█						
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							

# The daily plan

# Daily planning tactic #1

## Make an “MIT” list

---

**Must\*** be done today

- .
- .
- ...

**Aim\*** to do today

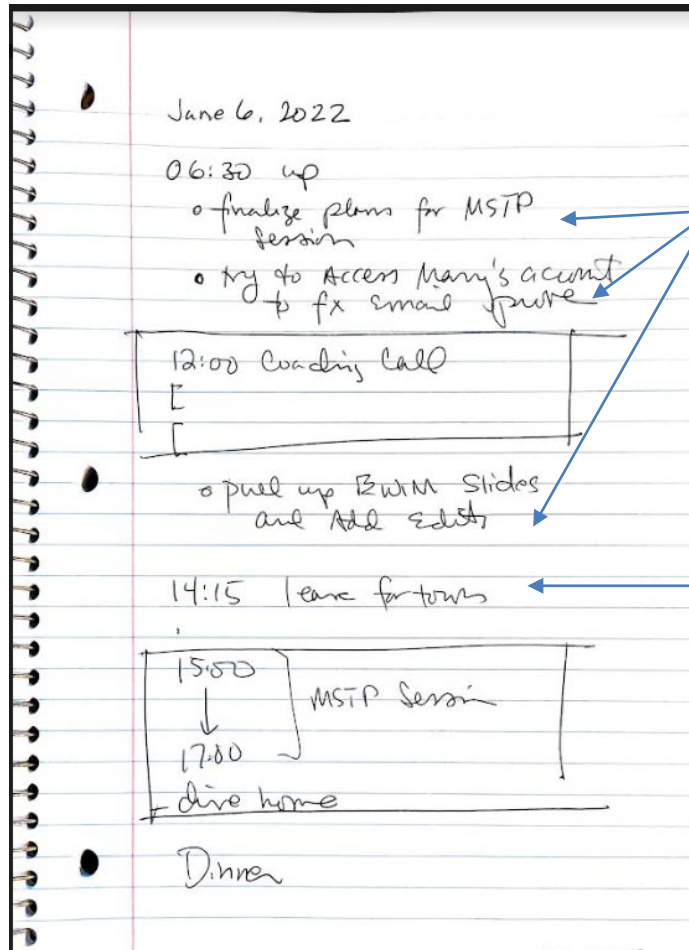
- 1..
- 2..
- 3..

**\* 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



Pencil in key tasks

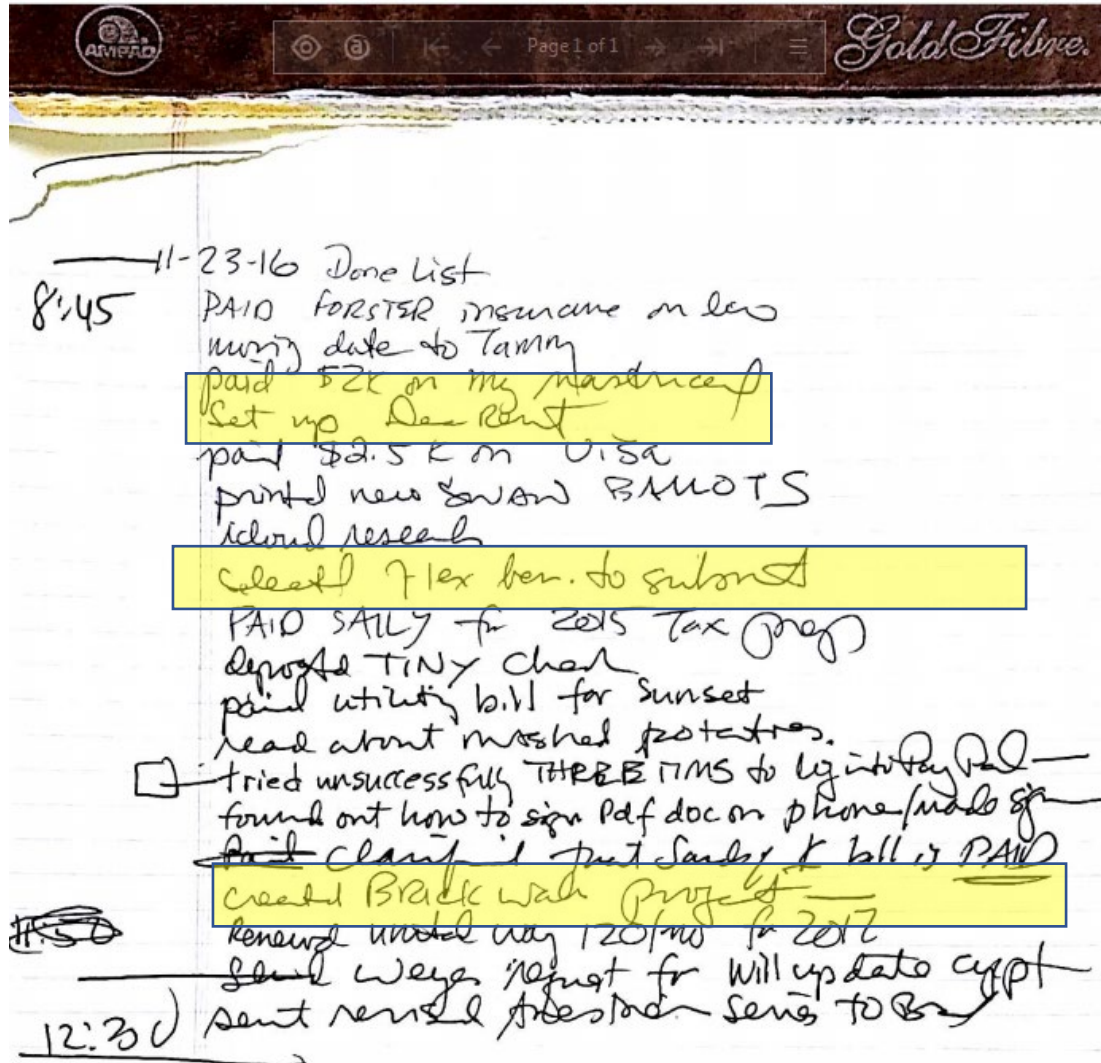
Scheduled event

Include transition time

Scheduled event

# Daily planning tactic #3

## Keep a "Done" list





# **TIME STRATEGIES FOR TASKS**

- **Multi-tasking?**



- **Do it now!**

- **The “2 minute rule”**

David Allen (2015) *Getting Things Done, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*



# Strategy: Batching

– “do it now, later”

Kerry Gleeson *The Personal  
Efficiency Program*



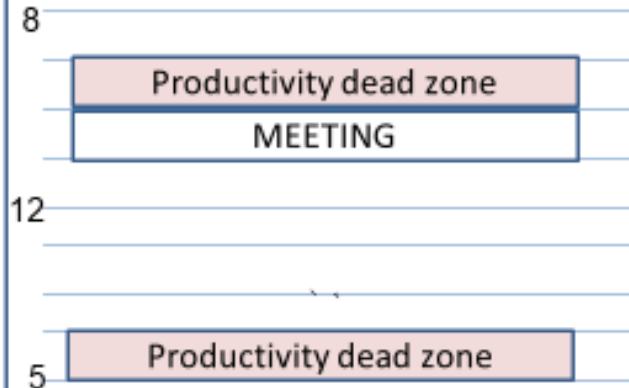
# Strategy: Use small bits of time

The “ten-minute secret”

- Stephanie Winston (2004). *Organized For Success*.

When an Hour Feels Shorter: Future Boundary Tasks Alter Consumption by Contracting Time

Tonietto et al (2019). *J Consumer Res.* V45 p 1985 <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucy043>



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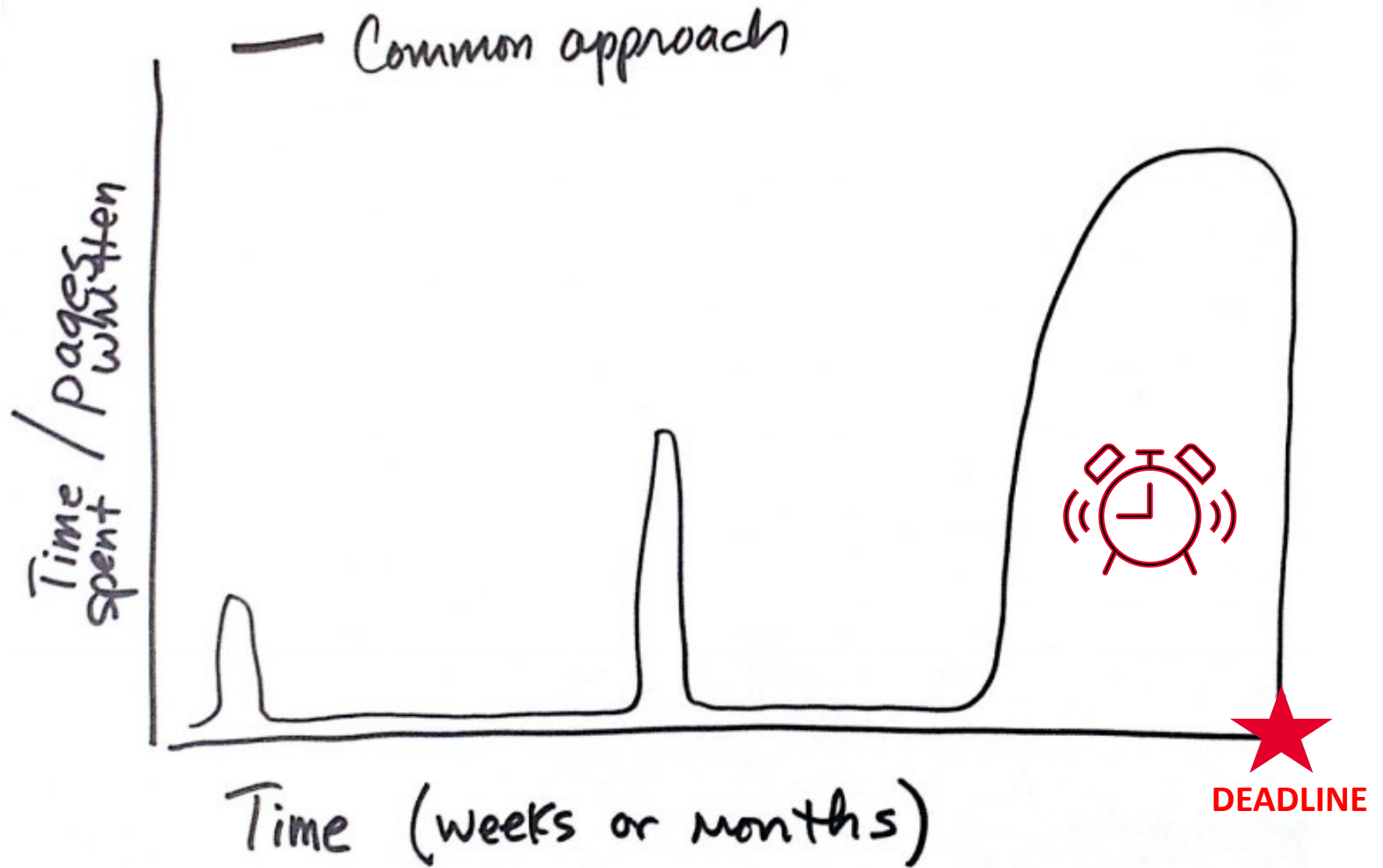
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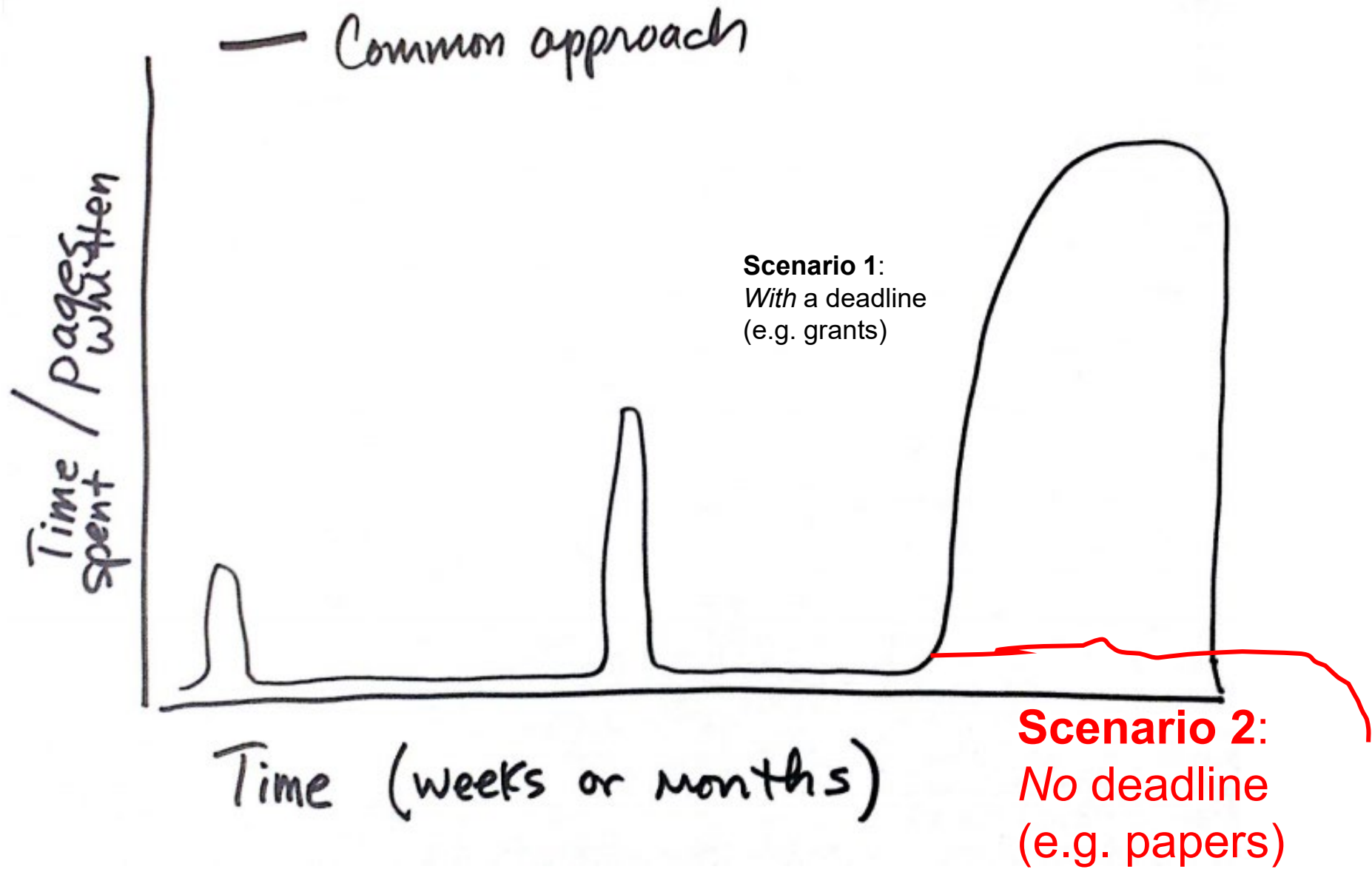
**A framework  
for allocating  
time to high-  
priority work.**

**Applies to any project, but especially**

**{writing}**

the problem





# 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:

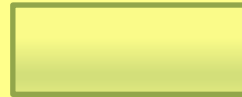
Be prepared to work on your projects no matter how much time you have.

Three timeframes:



10 minutes or less

**BRIEF**



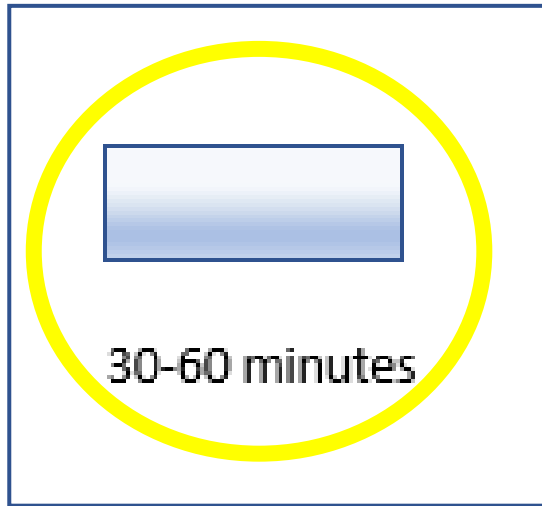
30-60 minutes

**MODERATE**



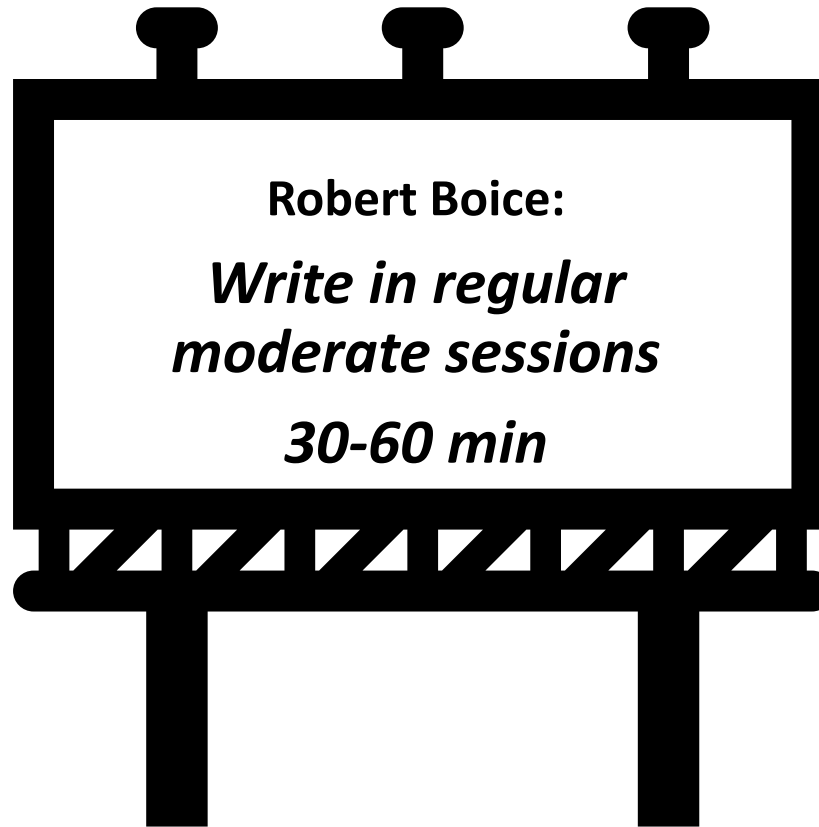
2 hours or more

**LONG**



## **Moderate:**

- A chunk of any project
- A batch of tasks
- Writing?



Robert Boice:

*Write in regular  
moderate sessions*

*30-60 min*

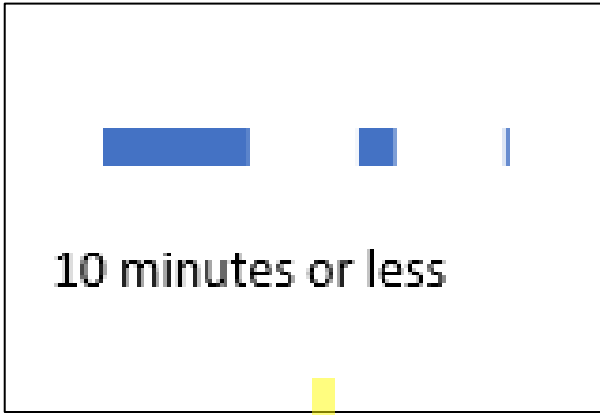
What challenges can you imagine you would have using “moderate” writing sessions?

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?**





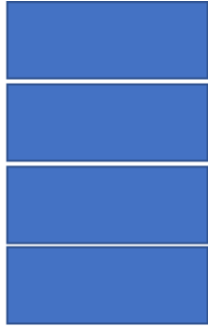
I have learned to use my 'ten minutes.' I once thought it was not worth sitting down for a time as short as that; now I know differently and, if I have ten minutes, I use them, even if they bring only two lines, and it keeps the book alive."

- RUMER GODDEN

*A House with Four Rooms*

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.



Big blocks: 2 hours or more

## Long:

Use these guidelines:

1. Schedule in advance
2. No more than 4 hours
3. And....

## The 🕒 90' rule

- Take a break!

# Time blocking

Mon	
8	
12	
5	
8	

○ **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

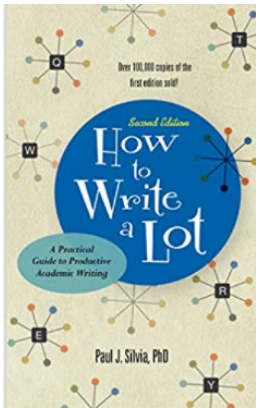
**Francesco Cirillo**

<http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/>

the Pomodoro technique

\* Check your play store for a Pomodoro phone app

# To learn more about developing an academic writing practice & time blocking & procrastination

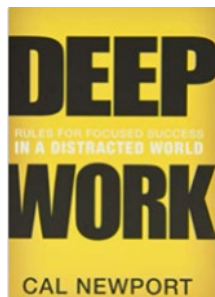
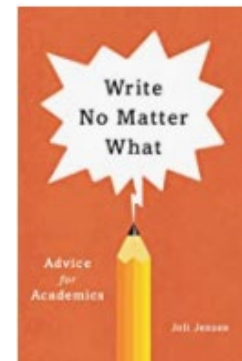


Paul J. Silvia (2018, **second edition**). *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing*.

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 (2017). *Write No Matter What: Advice for Academics*, The University of Chicago Press

Joli Jensen is a communications studies professor) with extensive experience teaching writing to graduate students and faculty members. She sends the same message as Silvia - 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**.

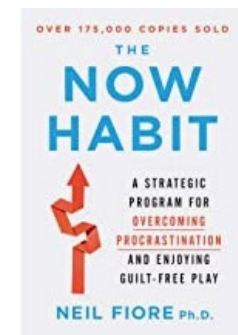


Cal Newport (2016). *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, 2016

- 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/>

Neil Fiore (2007). *The Now Habit*, 2007

- Practical approaches to procrastination originally designed for graduate students have trouble writing their dissertations.



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**Focusing on High Priority Work**

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and tips!**

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