Time management strategies for academic success
Agenda

**Organize**

- Defining and organizing your work

**Plan**

- Tactical planning: the week and the day

**Do**

- Finding time for writing and other project work
Keep track of your “to-dos”
The “here, there, anywhere” task management system
ONE MASTER TASK LIST

The “only here” system
Master task list

Master List

Features

• All the tasks you intend to do
• Never-ending: tasks get added and taken off as appropriate;
• Does not need to be in any specific order

Time-specific prioritized lists

the tasks I have selected to complete today, or this week, or this month
Problems with task lists:

• The task is too vague: “Florida guy”

→ Instead: “find business card of guy from the Florida conf, then email my question re: his talk.”
Problems with task lists:

• **You include things that you have not yet decided to do**…
Ideas for later

Master task list

Work that you intend to do

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Ideas for later

Work you might do, someday

Storage options:

- Reminder
- Calendar
- List / File / Folder
Problems with task lists:

- The “task” is too big: “create budget”

**Project:** a “to-do” that requires *multiple* tasks and more than one day to complete.
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!

- Meeting deadlines
- Prioritizing
- Making decisions about pruning, deferring to later, saying yes or no to new work
Every project needs a task..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>The next task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Write paper “X” (submit ~early April)</td>
<td>☐ Schedule 1 hour block to draft M&amp;M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Complete Dissertation (~fall 22)</td>
<td>☐ Do lit search on “single cell DNA methylation”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A framework for finding project work time.

{writing}

Applies to any project, but especially
Scenario 1: With a deadline

Scenario 2: Without a deadline
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:

- **BRIEF**
  - 10 minutes or less
- **MODERATE**
  - 30-60 minutes
- **LONG**
  - 2 hours or more
Robert Boice:

Write in regular moderate sessions

30-60 min
As a single mother on the tenure track, I wrote much of my second book in **20-minute increments** defined by the length of *Dora the Explorer* episodes. I kept an **outline of topic sentences** for each chapter, and if lucky, I could write exactly one paragraph as my daughter delighted in the animated adventure…. . All time was precious; even those skimpy morsels that Brigid Schulte* calls "time confetti."

*Kristen R. Ghodsee is a professor of gender, sexuality, and women’s studies at Bowdoin College.*
Key Strategy:
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Three timeframes:

- **BRIEF**
  - 10 minutes or less

- **MODERATE**
  - 30-60 minutes

- **LONG**
  - 2 hours or more
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.

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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*
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
# Time blocking

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th>
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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
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
Plan your weeks and days.
Weekly Planning #1
Set work boundaries, schedule “margin”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
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<td>2100</td>
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<td>Day OFF</td>
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</table>

SET a STOP TIME

- Friends birthday party
- Bike ride
- Eat out with friends
- Movie
- Night OFF

Day OFF
A basic weekly review & plan
STEP 1: Get a piece of paper

Review & Plan for Week of May 21
STEP 2:
Gather your “inventory of work”

**Project List**

- Create a lecture for Aug 2
- Draft Ann Fam Med paper
- Analyze data for diabetes study
- Hire research assistant
- Plan res research day

**Tasks** (wherever they may be!)

- Call John 381-5555 re: meeting
draft introduction to budget report
- Buy Staple remover for office
- Talk to Emma re: workshop
- Print 25 copies of handout
- Google “climb Mount Everest”
- Tughe on file drawer
- Read article on strategic planning
STEP 3: Calendar review: Review each scheduled event & ask “Any advance prep needed?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic</td>
<td>Clinic</td>
<td>Student lecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee meeting</td>
<td>Research group meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinic</td>
<td>Clinic</td>
<td>Grand rounds</td>
<td>Zoom call</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calendar notes

- Wed meeting: Get zoom link, review agenda
STEP 4a: Project list review:
Pick 1-3 to focus on this week

- Create a lecture for Aug 2
- Draft Ann Fam Med paper ★★★
- Analyze data for diabetes study
- Hire research assistant ★
- Plan res research day ★
STEP 4b: Plan a “chunk” of work for each selected project

“Work on …”

(e.g., “Work on Am Fam Med Paper”)

➡ Complete a draft of the discussion for Ann Fam Med paper

Project plans

Draft Ann Fam Med paper ★★
- TB: complete draft of discussion:
  - Action: schedule 1-hour time block to get started

Hire research assistant ★
- Action: Email dept admin to ask for job description template

Plan res research day ★
- Action: Call Ebony Jones re: doing the keynote
STEP 5: Tasks review

Task List

- Call John 351-555 to meet
- Draft introduction to budget report
- Buy staple remover for office
- Talk to Emma re: workshop
- Print 25 copies of handout
- Go to "climb Mount Everest" quiz
- File dashboard head articles on strategic planning

Calendar notes
- Wed meeting: Get zoom link, review agenda

Project notes
- Add 1-hour time block to start draft of discussion
- Draft an email to residents to get keynote topics
- Ask dept admin for draft res asst job description

Task notes: most important

Options:
- record here
- highlight on the list
- resort the list if in an app
Make a daily plan.

Do it the day before.  Approximately 10 to 15 min.
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.”
Sketch a time allocation plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06:30</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:35</td>
<td>Finish plans for MSIP session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:00</td>
<td>Try to access Man’s account to fix email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Cooking call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>Physical meeting slides and shell scripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:15</td>
<td>Leave for trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>MSIP session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:00</td>
<td>Drive home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Pencil in key tasks**
- **Scheduled event**
- **Include transition time**
My articles written for *Academic Physician & Scientist*. *(Posted at [www.thrivingamidstchaos.com](http://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**
To learn more about developing an academic writing practice & time blocking & procrastination

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 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.

• 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/](http://calnewport.com/blog/)

• Practical approaches to procrastination originally designed for graduate students have trouble writing their dissertations.
Email me with your comments, questions, and tips!

www.thrivingamidstchaos.com