

Time Management

Definition:

Time management refers to the way that an individual organises and plans how long they spend on specific activities. With more demands on our daily working and personal lives, prioritising the challenges we take on and working in a smart way is very important.

These time management tips have been designed to help you plan and prioritise your time more effectively. The information below should be used as a starting point to help you think about which, if implemented, will help you the most in your daily working life.

Time Management Guiding Principles

There are a number of simple guiding principles to follow when prioritising how you will spend your time at work. Listed below are a few of these principles that you can apply to your own situation:

1. Setting SMART Goals

Ensuring you are working to SMART goals that focus on the key needs of the agency, will mean that you are prioritising your time in an effective way and undertaking the key tasks your agency needs you to achieve. Regular scheduling and review of your goals with your manager will ensure that you remain constantly in touch with the priorities of the agency. Check that your goals are **SMART**:

Specific: states in clear terms what outcome, result or behaviour is to be achieved. Does it specify:

- Improved level of quality, quantity or use of resources
- A new/innovative result
- A faster timeline, or
- An improved behavioural outcome?

Measurable: Includes a description of the desired outcome and/or measurable results

- Will you know from information, data or observation when it is achieved?
- Does it specify – What? How much? How well?

Achievable: A realistic expectation, given time and resources

- Are sufficient resources, authority level and required skills in place?
- Does it require a stretch of effort?

Relevant: There is a clear link to the goals of the department, division, the agency and its values.

- Will it matter when it is done?
- Does the objective support relevant goals?
- Does it deal with a key aspect of the job?

Time Bound: There is a time limit or deadline by which the goal must be achieved, and there may be a time frame to track phases of completion in an action plan

- When is the goal to be completed?
- Is there a timetable for milestones or checkpoints?

2. Pareto's Law: The 80/20 Rule

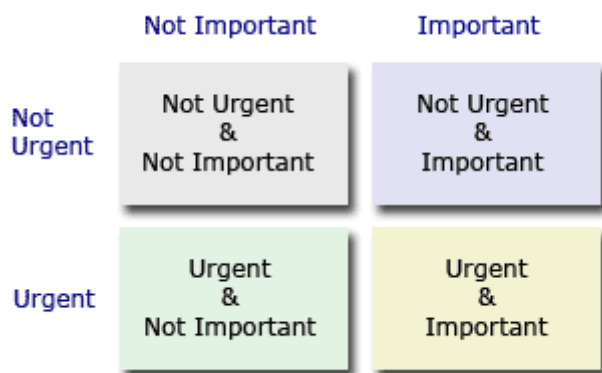
Pareto's Law helps us to prioritise our time more effectively to ensure we focus on doing the right things at the right time. The concept works on the premise that 80% of what we achieve takes 20% of our time and effort. We therefore need to focus on the important 20% of our job and ensure our core activities relate to achieving the agency's objectives.

Taking some time to review how you spend your time in one week could help you to identify aspects of work that you may get involved with that do not provide a real benefit or value to the agency or could be delegated to someone else whose role is more suited to that type of work.

In order to review your time management, consider taking a typical week and recording how you actually spend your time including all those unplanned telephone calls, quick interruptions and tasks you ended up completing that were really not that important or urgent.

3. Using an Urgent and Important Grid

To help us to schedule our priority tasks during the course of our day, week and month, we can use the 'Urgent and Important' Grid to determine if and when we should schedule any particular task. With every task, we need to get into the habit of asking: Is it urgent? Is it important? And schedule it accordingly.



4. Prioritising Systems

When scheduling tasks to be undertaken within a diary or planner, some people find it helpful to prioritise their lists of things to do into different categories. It is important if using these categories that you specify what they mean eg. A, B and C categories for a customer service area might mean:

- Category A directly affects a customer – complete within 12 hours
- Category B - complete within 2 working days
- Category C - complete within 5 working days

Using the Urgent and Important principle above, the categories would probably work as follows:

- Urgent and important tasks will certainly fall into category A
- Urgent and non-important tasks are likely to fall into category B
- Non-urgent and important tasks are likely to fall into category C, although as the important task gets closer to the deadline, you may move this up to category B, particularly if they feature as an integral part of the business objectives
- Non-urgent and not important tasks could be challenged whether they are in fact that critical to be done at all or whether they need to be delegated elsewhere within the agency.

Some people work effectively with grouping their tasks into H,M and L, i.e. High, Medium and Low priority, and some like to use colour to see at a glance what needs completing with the highest of priority. Similar principles with the Urgent and Important tasks as in the ABC categories apply.

5. “To Do” Lists

To ensure all key tasks are undertaken and not forgotten, develop a “To Do List” which will capture everything you need to do or manage yourself. If you are someone motivated by ticking off tasks you have completed, this type of list may work for you.

You must be careful to ensure that some form of prioritisation is allocated to these tasks so that you achieve the most important or urgent things first. You will also need to

schedule time into your diary to achieve the high priority tasks using one of the systems discussed above.

6. Weekly Planners

To help you plan and control your diary/scheduling system, it is recommended that you have a weekly or monthly planner that enables you to focus on your key priorities.

Only you can best determine which frequency works best for you, as it will depend on the nature of your work, your agency's policies and procedures and your own body clock in terms of the time of day you work at your best. The example weekly planner provided below takes into account some of the guiding principles discussed in the earlier time management tips

Example Weekly Planner:

This example weekly planner is based on the premise of a traditional working week. Please adapt it to suit your typical working week and add your personal time off to make it truly effective for you. Once you have completed an example working week for yourself, you can store the template and re-use each week. Obviously, some of the core activities will remain, so the time factor involved in producing this planner becomes negligible.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8am	Planning weeks workload	Communication update	Communication update	Communication update	Communication update
9am	Prime Time: Reading	Prime Time: Goal 1 1:1 review with manager	Prime Time: Goal 2	Prime Time: Goal 3	Prime Time: Project Report Clear up outstanding issues
10am	Check emails and return phone calls	Long term planning	Communication update	Communication update	Communication update

12pm Lunch	Lunch with colleague	Lunch with friend	Shopping	Lunch with Mentor	Own time
1pm	Attend project meeting	Face-to-face meetings e.g. key clients, customers, colleagues	Face-to-face meetings e.g. key clients, customers, colleagues	Development time e.g. personal learning, networking, training colleague	Preparation and review time e.g. plan next week's schedule, prepare for next week's meetings
3pm	Project Meeting	Communication update	Attend team meeting	Communication update	Communication update
16:30pm					
17:30pm	Gym	Home	Friend's birthday celebration	Swimming	Weekend away

Core Activities - your Weekly Planner will be tailored to your own type of work as well as your work and personal priorities. However, most people's jobs will be made up of some core activities such as:

- Planning day-to-day workload (to-do lists, prioritizing, getting things done)
- Medium to long-term planning (establishing the year's objectives and steps to achieving them, planning projects or complex tasks)
- Implementing and achieving job results (objectives, projects, meetings)
- Working with customers and managing customer relationships
- Communicating with internal colleagues (meetings, emails, written correspondence, reading, phone calls)
- Managing and responding to changes and emergencies
- Managing/delegating others (letting go, handing over, allocating tasks, training others and following up)
- Managing work relationships (boss, team, networking)
- Personal development (acquiring feedback, learning time, appraisal)
- Review and follow up (creative and analytical time, monthly reports, review of projects/objectives, 1 on 1 meetings)
- Promoting healthy living (taking breaks, stress relievers, exercise)

- Travelling (to and from work, meetings, different work locations)

7. Managing Your Diary/Calendar

Whatever system you use, you need to adopt some guiding principles to placing tasks into the system and keep yourself motivated if you are to most effectively utilise the time you have. Here are some useful **time management tips**:

Tips for scheduling tasks

- **Allocate “Prime Time” in your schedule**
Reserve blocks in your schedule for activities that require your top concentration. This could be an hour to two hours each day, dependent upon your job role. During this time, make it clear to others that you are not to be disturbed (if possible – with some roles, this is not possible).
- **Plan activities requiring high concentration levels**
Schedule particular times for those activities that require a high level of concentration.
- **Prioritise achievement of core job activities**
Focus on the core activities that help the agency deliver its key goals through your job objectives and key projects.
- **Prioritise difficult tasks**
Discern between the routine and the difficult tasks and give the latter priority on your ‘to do’ lists or weekly schedule.
- **Allow sufficient time for the tasks you schedule**
Unfamiliar tasks will often take longer than we originally thought, so it is better to schedule sufficient time and allow for unforeseen contingencies, than to find you are not finishing other important tasks.
- **Ensure frequent accessibility and communication**
Ensure frequent accessibility and communication through email, phone, etc so that you can achieve what you need to through others, and ensure your key contacts can normally communicate with you on a daily basis. This will reduce poor decision-making and wasting of time and personal effectiveness.
- **Plan time in for managing and responding to change, the unexpected and emergencies**
Change inevitably happens and emergencies do arise. Planning some time in your diary for these means that you can be far more effective in responding to these changes.
- **Schedule planning time for the following week and important meetings/activities in advance**
Ensure that you always have sufficient planning time during the course of the week and allow time for planning at either the beginning of the day or end of the day (for the next day).
- **Avoid back-to-back meetings**
If meetings are scheduled next to one another, it is unlikely that you will be sufficient fresh, focused and planned for the second or third meeting of the day without a sufficient break. It also means you are unable to address any emergencies easily or manage last minutes changes effectively.

- **Schedule similar tasks together**
Completing similar tasks together can save you time, as you do not have to repeat finding the same resources or information to help you each time
- **Use technology to help you**
Consider the most effective method of communication with others. Can an audio or videoconference save you time conveying the same message face-to-face?
- **Consider if the task could be delegated**
If the task can be delegated, do it early on, delegate the whole job, provide a clear brief, establish a start time and agree a review time.

Tips for keeping yourself motivated to achieve the tasks

- **Work for a set period**
Force yourself to spend a set period of time before you allow yourself a break.
- **Take frequent breaks**
Take frequent short breaks to avoid fatigue. Don't let yourself be distracted into another activity during the breaks, and be firm about their timing and duration.
- **Record successful results**
Note the frequency with which tasks turn out to be less fearsome than expected. Use this knowledge as a reference to help overcome future anxieties.
- **Give yourself a reward**
Reward yourself for removing difficult tasks from the list.
- **Break down the task**
Divide large tasks into bite-sized chunks in order to make it easier to get started on a project.
- **Start with the easiest stage**
When you have broken down a project, start in at whatever stage is easiest to get the task under-way.
- **Set clear goals**
Set yourself clear goals for every work session and for the day (no more than three per day).
- **Set personal deadlines**
Set your own deadlines for tasks if they are not externally imposed.
- **Avoid distractions**
Ensure that your immediate environment is conducive to concentration. It should be as free as possible of external distractions and interruptions.
- **Prioritise your workload**
Every day, decide on the most pressing matter, then work through the most urgent task first, followed by the less important tasks. This will help alleviate any feelings of being overwhelmed and, of course, make you more efficient.
- **Use peak concentration times**
Recognise that there will be certain times of the day when your levels of concentration are higher. These will vary from person to person – all our body rhythms are different. There may also be times of the working week when your ability to concentrate is lower. For example, accumulated fatigue may mean that Friday afternoons are low concentration times.
- **Use colour in your scheduling system**
People often find the use of a colour scheme to highlight different types of tasks and

information more interesting or the eye than black and inspire them to complete the day.

For further information, contact swpd.ocpe@nt.gov.au