# Time and prioritisation

## Library of approaches

We’ve brought together a selection of approaches you can use to help with your time and prioritisation. Identify the aspect of time and prioritisation you’d like to focus on and pick one of the approaches that appeals to you. We don’t expect you to work through them all.

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**What tasks are mine and why?**

Get clear on what is important to you.

What tasks will move you closer to your goals?

Try using the GROW model:

**G**oal – what do you **want** to achieve?

**R**eality – what **is** your current situation?

**O**ptions – what **could** you do?

**W**ay forward – what **will** you do?

Set SMART goals <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/postdoc-resources/act/keeping-up-momentum/>

Further information:

<https://www.amazingif.com/listen/skills-sprint-prioritising/>

[<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/grow-coaching-model>](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/grow-coaching-model)

[<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/personal-tutors-guide/developing-students/coaching/the-grow-model/>](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/personal-tutors-guide/developing-students/coaching/the-grow-model/)

**How long will these tasks take?**

Try one of the following to help you more accurately estimate your task completion time.

* **The insider’s perspective** – use the knowledge you, or a colleague has of the time it took to complete a similar size or complexity task and use this to estimate the time your newly planned task will take.
* **Chunk it up (or the flat-pack approach)** – how many component parts does your task have? How long will each part or ‘chunk’ of the task take to complete? Add these together to give you the overall time the task will take.
* **Rule of thumb** – Estimate how long you think the task will take and multiply it by two.

Further information:

[<https://fullfocus.co/the-science-of-gauging-time/>](https://fullfocus.co/the-science-of-gauging-time/)

**How do I schedule these tasks?**

There are lots of approaches you can use, we suggest trying one of the following;

1. **Eisenhower matrix** – use a matrix to decide on the importance and urgency of your tasks
2. **4Ds** – **Do** small (2 minutes or less) tasks. **Delete** tasks that you can rapidly decide aren’t yours. **Defer** tasks that don’t need to be done today, schedule in when you’ll complete them. **Delegate** tasks which can be done by someone else.
3. **ABCDE** – Rank your tasks into these five groups, A – most important tasks, B – important tasks, C – nice to do tasks, D – delegate these tasks, E – eliminate these tasks. Work on A and B tasks first.

You can also use **task batching** – grouping similar tasks together to progress through them more efficiently. Block time in your schedule for each batch of activities (**time blocking**).

Further information:

[<https://academicsuccess.ucf.edu/sarc/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2020/12/Eisenhower-Matrix-Fillable.pdf>](https://academicsuccess.ucf.edu/sarc/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2020/12/Eisenhower-Matrix-Fillable.pdf)

[<https://www.productplan.com/glossary/4-ds-of-time-management/>](https://www.productplan.com/glossary/4-ds-of-time-management/)

[<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryancollinseurope/2018/06/14/effective-time-management/>](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryancollinseurope/2018/06/14/effective-time-management/)

[<https://clockify.me/time-management-techniques>](https://clockify.me/time-management-techniques)

[<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-is-task-batching>](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-is-task-batching)

[<https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw>](https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw)

[<https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/time-blocking>](https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/time-blocking)

**How will I avoid procrastination and distraction?**

* **Reverse the procrastination trigger** – is there a way you can make a dull task more engaging or fun? Or bring structure to an unstructured task?
* **Work within your resistance level** – find the level where doing the task feels do-able. For example, if thinking of doing the task for 60 minutes is just unthinkable, how would 30 minutes feel?
* **Get started** – Just get started on a task, even if you don’t complete it in one go, you’ll make progress and can come back to it later.
* **Get away from distractions** – Use technology to your advantage by silencing pings and notifications. If you need a boost to your willpower to stop you scrolling particular sites you can download apps that allow you to set time limits.

**Get clear about what your distractions are**. Try keeping a log for a day or a week of what is distracting you when you’re focusing on a task and see what you find.

Further information:

[<https://hbr.org/2017/10/5-research-based-strategies-for-overcoming-procrastination>](https://hbr.org/2017/10/5-research-based-strategies-for-overcoming-procrastination)

[<https://www.dear-data.com/week-44-a-week-of-distractions>](https://www.dear-data.com/week-44-a-week-of-distractions)

<https://www.reviewstudio.com/blog/how-to-manage-internal-distractions-with-a-distractions-list/>

**How do I protect my time?**

**Assess the request against your priorities,** interest/s, time scale versus your current workload and if you are the only (or right) person for the task.

Take care not to over-commit future you. If you’ve not got time to do the task now carefully consider if you’ll really have time to do it at a future point. Don’t make your decision based on fear of not being liked, missing out or not being asked in the future.

**Ways of saying no**

* **The not-now no** – Use this if you genuinely would like to do this task in the future, don’t use this if you don’t want to do it or won’t have time. Phrases you can use are; “Now isn’t a good time for me, I’ll let you know if my schedule frees up” or “I can’t do this month, but next month would be fine if you can reschedule?”
* **The alternative no** – Use this to give details on how you could potentially make it work for you, or offer to help make an introduction to someone who you think could do the task (you don’t have to offer this!). Phrases you can use are: “I can’t come and give that talk in-person, but I could give it virtually?”, or “I’m not the right person for this request, have you considered asking [name of person here]?”
* **The appreciative no** – Use this to politely decline the offer. No-one will be offended that you’re busy, letting them know that you can’t do it with as much notice as you can, will be very much appreciated. Phrases you can use are: “Thank you so much for asking me to do [thing]. I'm not able to do that right now with the schedule that I have” or “This time/date doesn’t work for me, but please keep me in mind for next time.”

Keep a record of when you say no with Gal Zauberman’s **Yes damn/No yay** effect.

1. Mark in your calendar when the task you declined was due or would have taken place.
2. Protect this time in your calendar with tasks you have prioritised.
3. When you get to that time/date reflect on how appreciative you are that you said no and kept this time for your prioritised tasks.

Alternatively, you can say **yes with conditions** (adapted from <https://www.amazingif.com/listen/how-to-say-yes-no-and-dont-know/>))

* The **yes if** – use this if you want to do the task and it aligns with your priorities but in order to do it you need to have a task removed or delegated, you need to collaborate, or you need an additional resource in order to agree. Phrases you can use are: “Yes I can do that if [this task] is taken off me/paused”, “Yes I can do that if we also invite [other specialist person] to contribute”, “Yes I can do that next month if that would work?” or “Yes I can do that if you pay for the travel”

Further information:

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-nicely-say-no>

<https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-politely-say-no>

[<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-intuitive-scientist/202501/saying-no-is-the-true-measure-of-commitment-to-your-goals>](https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-intuitive-scientist/202501/saying-no-is-the-true-measure-of-commitment-to-your-goals)

<https://hbr.org/2013/02/nine-practices-to-help-you-say>

<https://hbr.org/2015/12/how-to-say-no-to-taking-on-more-work>

[<https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw>](https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw)

[<https://healthyheels.org/2012/01/27/the-yes-damn-effect/>](https://healthyheels.org/2012/01/27/the-yes-damn-effect/)

**How can I see that I’m making progress with these tasks?**

**Create your quarterly ‘win-watch’**

* What is important to you, that you want to focus on over the next three months?
* Write these down (keep it to a few items maximum) and use these to help you prioritize tasks/activities
* At the end of the three months review the progress you’ve made on these items, what have your wins been?
* Repeat by creating your win-watch list for the next three months, using it to help you prioritise and reviewing at the end of the time period.

(From [<https://www.amazingif.com/listen/skills-sprint-prioritising/>](https://www.amazingif.com/listen/skills-sprint-prioritising/))

**Write a to-done list**

* Set aside a few minutes at the end of your day and jot down a list of everything you’ve achieved.
* Don’t agonize too much over it and don’t forget to celebrate the small wins!
* At the end of the week and end of the month review your lists to see if you can spot any patterns. Are there any tasks you find easier and which ones need more effort?

Further information:

[<https://blog.idonethis.com/the-power-of-the-done-list/>](https://blog.idonethis.com/the-power-of-the-done-list/)

**How can I motivate myself to do these tasks?**

**Eat the frog first**

* **Identify the frog** – what is the biggest, most difficult, most important task you need to get done today?
* **Eat the frog** – Do this task first thing, don’t give yourself a chance to delay
* **Repeat this daily**

**Write a to-not-do list**

* **Set your goal** – this could be ‘To not work past 5 pm’
* **Identify your distractions** - this could be things like messaging services, doom-scrolling and so on
* **Make a short, specific, actionable to-not-do list** – for example;
  + Do not;

(1) Engage with WhatsApp notifications in my time-blocked hours

(2) Respond to work messages when I’ve set my status to ‘busy’ or ‘do not disturb’

(3) Accept meetings during my task-batched time

(4) Accept meeting requests that have no agenda set

* Review and revise your list as needed
* Avoid using the list as a way to criticise yourself

**Pomodoro technique**

1. Decide on the task to be done
2. Set the pomodoro timer (typically for 25 minutes)
3. Work on the task
4. End work when the timer rings and take a short break (typically 5–10 minutes)
5. Go back to step 2 and repeat until you complete four pomodori
6. After four pomodori are done, take a long break (typically 20 to 30 minutes) instead of a short break.

**Motivate yourself with self-compassion**

Chastising yourself harshly does not increase your motivation to complete tasks. Showing yourself compassion instead can benefit your performance.

* **Talk to yourself as a friend would** – “It’s ok we all make mistakes”
* **Have positive self-talk at the ready** – “I can do it!”, “You’re getting there”
* **Repeat self-affirmations** – “I am at peace with my life as it is right now”
* **Practice unconditional positive regard** – towards yourself and others (check out Tara Brach’s [RAIN](https://www.tarabrach.com/rain/) approach)

Further information:

[<https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/eat-the-frog>](https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/eat-the-frog)

[<https://mindjournals.com/blogs/read/how-to-make-a-not-to-do-list>](https://mindjournals.com/blogs/read/how-to-make-a-not-to-do-list)

[<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique>](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/live-in-concert/202401/note-to-self-compassion-not-criticism>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-power-of-self-compassion/201103/let-go-of-self-criticism-and-discover-self-compassion>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/motivation>

<https://hbr.org/2021/05/stop-being-so-hard-on-yourself>

[<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/automatic-you/202404/studies-show-self-compassion-is-the-motivator-youre-missing>](https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/automatic-you/202404/studies-show-self-compassion-is-the-motivator-youre-missing)

[<https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw>](https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/five-tips-to-be-happier-at-work-dr-laurie-at-sxsw)

[<https://www.tarabrach.com/rain/>](https://www.tarabrach.com/rain/)

**Video resources**

We have a selection of resources covering time management on the portal <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/>

Alternatively, you can access the videos from here;

**Finding the time: Exploring what’s getting in the way of your career development** <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=finding-the-time-exploring-whats-getting-in-the-way-of-your-career-development>

**Making progress with your Prosper career development**

<https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=making-progress-with-your-prosper-career-development>

**Five-day time and energy challenge**

* Day one <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=time-and-energy-challenge-day-1>
* Day two <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=time-and-energy-challenge-day-2>
* Day three <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=time-and-energy-challenge-day-3>
* Day four <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=time-and-energy-challenge-day-4>
* Day five <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/learning-development-clusters/time-management/?playlist-load=time-management&playlist-resource-load=time-and-energy-challenge-day-5>