

PRIORITIZATION

University can often leave many students feeling overwhelmed by the large number of tasks that need to be completed within a given time frame. The inability to effectively manage these different tasks can lead to stress, unhappiness and the inability to complete tasks in time. Along with time management, prioritization can help to manage time effectively and to focus your energy on the more important tasks first.

When planning what to complete in any given day, week or month, it is important to complete items in terms of importance and due dates.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TO DETERMINE PRIORITY

When prioritizing there are two main questions you can ask yourself. These questions will help to put things in perspective and to determine the relative importance of your various tasks.

1) What *needs* to be done?

That is to say, what are all the items, small and big that you need to complete? This can include school work, attending class, housework, and extracurriculars. Remember the difference between want and need!

2) In what order do these items need to be done?

To determine this, ask yourself questions such as:

- What must be done before anything else can be accomplished?
- What is due first?
- What can wait, or what can you skip?
- Which items on your list can be completed within two minutes?
- Can two or more items be grouped or completed at the same time?

HOW TO PRIORITIZE

In order to help answer the above questions, there are many tools you can use. The following methods show ways on how to determine your tasks as well as the order in which you need to focus your time and energy on the tasks.

This is a simple method that can you be used on a day-to-day basis. It can also be adapted to be weekly or monthly.

1. Start by listing everything you need to do. List every task, big and small.
2. Know the difference between what you **NEED** to do and what you **WANT** to do
3. Think about the importance of each of the items you listed.
4. Group similar tasks or anything that can be completed together.
5. Rank the items in order of importance/priority/due date.

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6. Work your way through the tasks in the order you established in step 5. Sometimes, it can also help to complete any small “filler” tasks that be accomplished in under two minutes. This way, you can eliminate these little tasks and focus your energy and time on the larger tasks.

For more specific methods of prioritization, try out any of the following approaches:

URGENT/IMPORTANT METHOD

The urgent/important method allows you assess everything on your to-do list, identifying which are the most important tasks and which can wait.

The first method is known as the **time management matrix**. In this method, you will be classifying tasks based on importance and urgency. This can help you to evaluate and narrow down a multitude of tasks to the most important and most urgent items, allowing you to manage your time more effectively.

Move every item on your to-do list into one of the four quadrants. You can complete tasks in this order:

1. Urgent & important (top left)
2. Urgent & not important (bottom left)
3. Not urgent & important (top right)
4. Not urgent & not important (bottom right)

| | URGENT | NOT URGENT |
|---------------|---|---|
| IMPORTANT | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Important deadlines● Emergencies● Last minute preparation <p><i>Must be completed soon!!</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Personal development● Health and exercise● Eating● Grooming● Preparation and planning <p><i>Must be completed eventually!</i></p> |
| NOT IMPORTANT | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Some emails/phone calls● Interruptions● Popular activities <p><i>Do it now! But it's okay if you don't.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Some phone calls/emails● TV● Time wasters <p><i>Doesn't need to be done at all.</i></p> |

A similar method involves placing your items in an **essential-flexible-optional** chart:

| Essential | Flexible | Optional |
|---|--|---|
| Must be done at a specific time or there will be consequences. | Must be done, but it doesn't matter when. | Don't need to do it (but good to do once in a while). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Class - Work - Eat - Sleep - Study for exam in two days | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laundry - Groceries - Showering - Exercise - Socializing - Study for exam in four weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facebook/social media - TV - Hobbies - Daydreaming |

An even simpler method of prioritizing is the **urgent/less urgent** chart:

| Urgent (Do First) | Less Urgent (Do Later) |
|---|--|
| <i>These are tasks that should be done rather soon; they should come first.</i> | <i>These are tasks that can be done later; they might be due in a few weeks or a few months.</i> |

You can use any prioritization tool in place of or alongside a traditional to-do list. Cross off tasks as you complete them and add more items to the list as you think of them. You can rank listed items with numbers, colours, symbols, or anything else that works for you. The format of your tool is also up to you: use your computer, phone, notebook, journal, or even just an old-fashioned piece of paper!

REFERENCES

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