

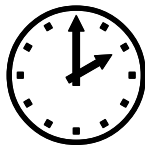
Time Management

What's the secret?

Contrary to many people's beliefs, there is no one skill or technique of time management. Managing your time successfully consists of applying many techniques in the form of building blocks, to reach the same goal. These blocks include:

Prioritising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doing the right things in the right order, using a To Do list
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocating your time where it is needed, using your diary
Delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don't try to do everything yourself
Running meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make them as good a use of time as you can
Project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • longer term planning to complete larger tasks
Assertiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saying No to protect your time
Management style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do you spend time doing, directing or supervising?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY:



If you really want to know where your time goes, try keeping a time log of how long you spend doing what, for a typical day or week; the results may surprise you. However, don't let this become obsessive, or completing the log may take more time than you save!

Diary Management

- Use your diary to plan time for meetings, phone calls, and preparation
- Display your prioritised task list
- Block out time for yourself where appropriate
- Plan the long term first; months before weeks before days
- Keep a To Do list in your diary or separately
- If you use a paper diary, use pen for firm commitments, pencil for likely but unconfirmed items

(See Top Tips on Planning & Prioritising for more detail on this subject).

Telephone use

General

- Observe necessary pleasantries, but limit non-essential social chat

- Stand when using the phone - you will take less time and sound more businesslike

☎ Incoming calls

- Call back if appropriate, if you need to find information for the caller
- Clarify information by asking questions and repeating details
- Make notes, and use a notepad, not scrap paper
- If a caller asks for 'the manager', you may not be the best person to deal with it – have the person who answers the call find out the reason and pass it to the right person to deal with

☎ Outgoing calls

- Plan your call before you start; make notes of what you want to say
- Keep a note of non-urgent calls to make - you may find you can speak to someone once rather than several times by listing topics
- Batch calls together– make as many as you can in one go
- Have routine tasks to do whilst waiting to be connected
- Delegate to your team calls to be made, especially routine calls

✉ Post

- Handle each incoming piece of paper only once - action it, pass it on, file it, or bin it. Mark it each time you handle it, perhaps with a tick in the corner, to give you an idea of how often you look at it. Classify post as:
 - For action - If you can deal with it completely and it will be quick and beneficial, then do so. If not, add it to your task list and set it to one side in priority order to deal with at an appropriate time
 - For information - Scan it and either set it aside to read in detail at an appropriate time, pass it on, file it, or bin it

✍ Writing

- Whereas written correspondence to customers should be of the highest standard to maintain a professional image, internal correspondence if written at all should be as brief as possible:
- Wherever possible, but only within the business, write replies or comments directly onto paperwork and return it to the sender
- Do not pursue perfection for its own sake. The only exceptions are items such as people's names and product numbers, where errors can cause confusion and waste time and effort
- Use bullet points for brevity and clarity

🖨 Desk

- When doing paperwork, keep a clear desk - remove everything unrelated to the task you are working on otherwise you will be distracted and waste time looking for things
- If you are right-handed, keep the 'phone on your left to keep your writing hand free, and vice-versa
- Clear your desk completely each evening to give you a good start next day

‡ Managing Interruptions

Your role may be very reactive, especially when many things require a manager's authorisation to be completed and interruptions become the rule rather than the exception. However, you can reduce these by:

- Encouraging your team to save non-urgent items until their next OTOM, if this is not too far away – but honour commitments to these
- If a person asks for time when you're busy, arrange time for later
- If a person asks for time you can spare, specify how long you have
- Being assertive and saying no, but soften this by giving an alternative
- Remember you can be ruthless with time and gracious with people
- Be aware of your body language – what impression does it convey?

Reading material

- Plan reading time into your day or week
- Try to speed read or scan - it is often sufficient to gain the sense of an article rather than to read it in detail, and it is a lot quicker
- As you scan, use a highlighter on those items you need to find again
- Don't stop to read junk mail just because it might be of interest - once you've established what it is, bin it immediately
- When faced with a long report, read the introduction and conclusion or summary, and only read the content if you need to, skipping the bits that are of no interest to you
- If the report contains printouts or table of figures, read the column and row headings to decide which figures are likely to be of interest to you, and skim or ignore the rest
- If one figure looks abnormal, check only the figures it relates to find the reason, not the whole table
- If you commute by public transport, try using this time to read 'for information' - but not confidential - items
- Take some reading material to scan when you go to meet someone, as if they are delayed, you can then use the time productively

Filing paperwork

You may have part of your filing system dictated to you, or maybe you inherited it. Where you can choose your method, there are many different filing systems you could use, such as alphabetical, numerical, product, subject, etc; the best is the one that works for you. Consider:

- The smaller your filing system, the more useful it is likely to be – items are easier to find and more likely to be relevant
- The best place to file something is where you would first think to look for it
- Your most useful file is the waste bin!
- Keep frequently used documents near to hand
- Label documents clearly to identify what they are and where they belong

Procrastination – 'putting it off'

- Do difficult or unpleasant tasks first to get them out of the way
- If it's quicker to do it than add it to your list, then do it now
- Break the job down into small pieces you can finish quickly
- Start it now – once started the job will seem smaller
- Identify what's good enough to get the result, and don't spend hours checking and redoing to achieve perfection where there is no need
- Give yourself a 'reward' for completing the task
- Get a colleague to follow up and monitor progress with you

For related topics see Top Tips:

- **Assertiveness**
- **Planning**
- **Prioritising Task**
- **Project Management**