

Project Management

Planning projects

A project is different to a normal task in three major areas; the size and scope of it, the length of time it takes, and the number of different steps that you or other people may be carrying out at the same time. If you are managing the project you should be spending time co-ordinating these things, not doing all the work – that's what your project team is for.

Planning the time is similar to planning out a normal task, or a day's tasks. When planning your month, week, or day in your diary, allocate a chunk of time for project work. This may be a regular weekly slot, or a half day when you can anticipate being able to work on tasks other than routine. It doesn't matter at this stage that you don't know exactly what you will be doing on your project, it is sufficient to block out time and not let other tasks creep in.

There may be other dates imposed on you which will determine when your part of the project can start or will have to finish. You can also plan out in outline the various stages of the project at this point, and in what order they need completing.

If for example you are working on a plan to move or reorganise the office, you can:

- **Produce an outline** of what the finished result will look like
- **Have it approved** and incorporate any amendments
- **Gather information** on the subject, e.g. number of people to be housed, accepted spaces for people/desks
- **Produce the document**, plan, figures, - this may be in several parts
- **Make a conclusion** and / or recommendation
- **Submit it for approval**
- **Make any amendments** and re-submit

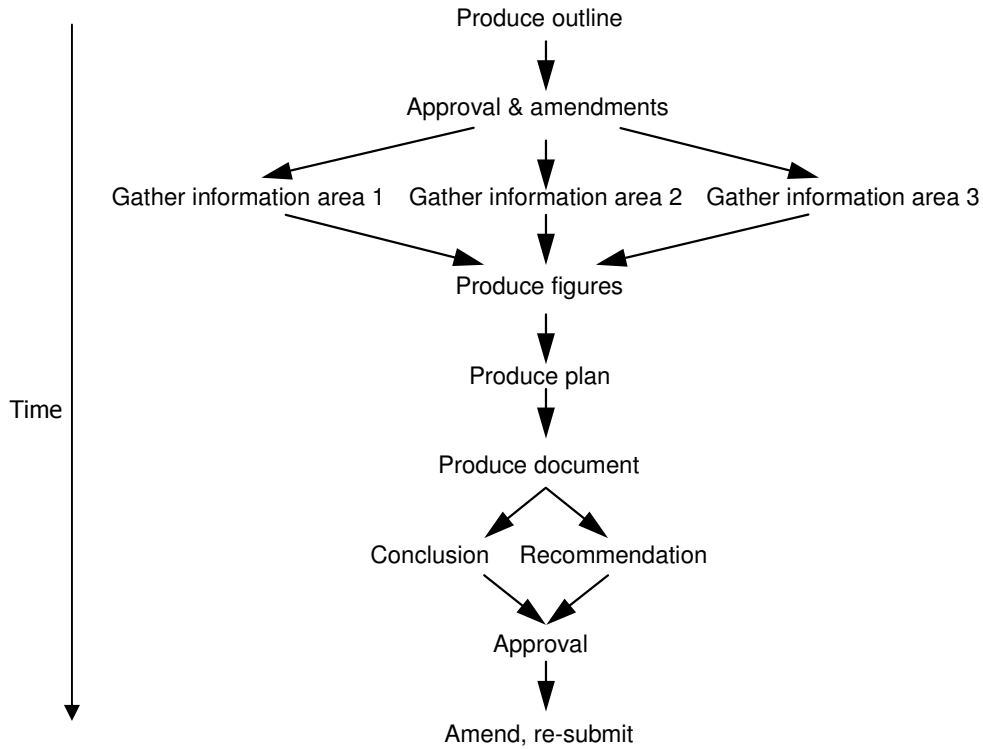
You will have a date when the project needs to be finished, and a fair idea of the length of time each stage will take. You should then be able to work out how much time in total needs to be allocated, and a date by when each stage needs to be completed. Now you can work out a 'critical path', i.e. which stage needs to be done before which other, and also what stages can be completed at the same time.

Project management techniques

If your project depends on getting information or assistance from other people, plan in also where their commitments may affect or delay you, such as holidays. Both the diagrams below may help you identify such problems, for example a stage which causes a bottleneck, where a hold up could cause a delay for the whole project, or a need to re-think the time scales early on in order to complete on time. Examples are shown using the stages in the project listed above.

Critical path analysis

This involves listing the stages in order and linking them by arrows, in the order they need to be completed.



Gantt Chart

This may be useful to remind you of what stages are going on at the same time, and will help to keep a check on progress. List the stages in order, and blocking out the time each will take, against a time scale at the top of the diagram. Include any other obstacles to completion in this.

Week No	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Produce outline										
Approval & amendments										
Gather information										
Produce figures										
Produce plan										
Produce document										
Conclusion										
Recommendation										
Approval										
Amend, re-submit										

For related topics see Top Tips:

- **Analytical Thinking**
- **Planning**
- **Prioritising Tasks**