

Creating Effective Schedules

Schedules, task lists, to-do lists, and goals. We tend to write these things down – into our phones or on scraps of paper – but there may be more effective ways to use scheduling as a tool for time management. Below is a list of tips and some scheduling exercises that you can try out to manage your tasks more to your liking.

1. **Create a designated scheduling agenda.** This can either be a physical agenda, a digital document, an app, a whiteboard, or even a series of papers taped to your desk. Make a point of updating this agenda daily and always keeping it in the same place. Try out different variations for your agenda until you find the one that works best for you. Some people prefer digital calendars while others prefer having a notebook.
2. **Make goals small and specific.** If you write down “work on project,” how can you determine what you need to accomplish and how long it will take? Do this interpretive work while making your schedule by getting specific with your goals. Maybe you want to finish writing your conclusion. You can narrow this down even more if you’d like: complete two paragraphs of my five paragraph conclusion for my literature project.
 - a. **Assign times and places to your tasks.** After specifying a particular task, you can begin to determine how long the task will take. It may be difficult to figure out how long it will take you to write two paragraphs, but the process of assigning times to tasks takes practice. As you pay closer attention to how long certain tasks take, you will begin to refine your schedules to bracket out the proper amount of time you need to complete tasks. You can also assign ideal places and times of day for tasks, such as in the morning at your desk or in the afternoon at the local library.
3. **Build flexibility into your schedule.** This one also takes practice. Work requires rest to be sustainable, and so you have to expect that it’s not always easy to stick to your schedule 100%. There may be times when you’re sick, tired, or just don’t have your head in the game to finish a task to completion. Allow yourself to rest and move your assigned task to your schedule for the following day or later. As you find pockets of time where you allow yourself to relax or tend to other life things that come up, you will start to build flexibility into your schedules.
4. **Forget ranking to-do lists by priority, and instead focus on making reasonable schedules.** We’re mostly taught to do things in an order of priority. First, finish that big paper before you move on to everything else. However, this is often not the most effective or sustainable way to get things done. Sometimes we need to chip away at larger tasks while also making sure smaller, but equally important, tasks are completed. Below is an exercise for making an effective schedule:

Schedule Exercise

1. Open up a digital document or blank sheet of paper.

2. Write down **everything** you need to do this week. Include the personal (call Dad) as well as the practical (read article for bio class).
3. After this, **cut the list in half**. Maybe some of these things are not as crucial or not as feasible as other things.
4. **Cut the list in half one more time!** Ideally, you should be left with a list of three to four things.
5. The goal is for this exercise to result in a reasonable schedule for the week. It's virtually impossible to get *everything* you need to get done, for a variety of reasons. At this point, **assign times and places for your tasks**. How long will it take you to complete that reading assignment? Where would you ideally like to complete it (a quiet library or perhaps on the bus to your soccer game)? What time of day do you like to read (morning or maybe in your bed at night)?
6. **Start following your schedule!** As noted above, expect that it might not be possible to stick to your schedule 100% of the time. Things may come up. Alter your schedule and your scheduling process over time as you learn more about the ideal conditions for you to manage your tasks.

Learn more about how to stick to your schedule with strategies like the Pomodoro method, learning work/rest balance, and managing distractions. These skills handouts are also available on the Bard College website's Learning Strategies page