

Prioritizing and Planning

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about methods and strategies for time management, how to factor in your effectiveness at certain times of day, and the value of doing other things besides schoolwork.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Prioritization

Prioritizing your work means deciding what is most important and what needs to get done first. When you prioritize, the most important tasks that must be completed soon are at the top of your list. These are known as your top priorities.

You may have other important tasks that are less urgent. These are also priorities, but they should be completed after your top priorities. Things that have little or no importance to you should be eliminated from your list of tasks to complete when you are busy. Prioritization is a best practice to help you manage time because it enables you to create a plan for moving ahead with the things that matter most.



TERM TO KNOW

Prioritizing

The act of listing the tasks you must complete in order by their level of importance and urgency.

1a. Prioritization Matrix

A helpful way to organize your work by priority is to compose a prioritization matrix. This is a kind of chart that allows you to sort your tasks by their degree of urgency and importance.

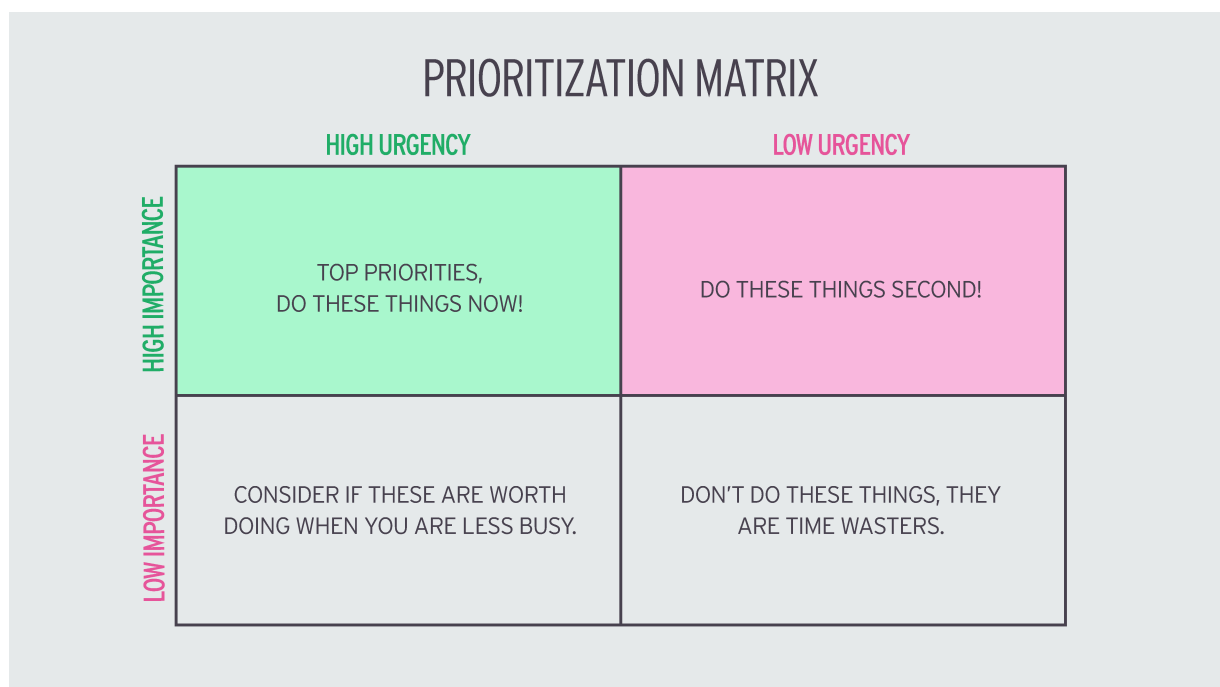
➞ **EXAMPLE** Any work you have due in the next few days is urgent, but an assignment worth 25% of your grade is more important than an ungraded assignment. Of course, you're going to complete both assignments, but you want to give more time to the more important one.

Conversely, browsing for shoes on the internet is neither urgent nor important (at least in terms of accomplishing your goals at school). Things like getting more exercise or studying for a test that is months away are important, but not urgent—that is, you don't need to be doing them now.



TRY IT

This is what a prioritization matrix would look like:



Here are some sample tasks and activities:

- Create Sociology presentation (Due March 10; 15% of grade).
- Eat healthier.
- Study for biology exam (April 25; 30% of grade).
- Coordinate dinner plans for tonight.
- Plan a trip for summer vacation.
- Read for English class (Due March 9th; ungraded).
- Respond to Mom's email.
- Check out the new filters on Snapchat.
- Brainstorm a topic for the philosophy paper (Due April 17; 20% of grade).

If you were filling in this matrix on March 3rd, where would you put each item?

1b. Creating a To-Do List

You might find the idea of making a to-do list intimidating because all the work that lies ahead of you will pile up right in front of your eyes, and the sheer scope of it all has the potential to stress you out. But, just imagine how much more stressful it would be if you put this off and wait until due dates are rapidly approaching to attend to your workload.

Being organized and prepared for the road ahead will improve your mental health in the long term.

A helpful tip for writing a to-do list is to be specific and break down an assignment into component parts that represent tasks that are doable in one or a couple of sittings.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If your to-do list says "Write Paper," this is not very instructive in terms of what specifically you need to do. Instead, perhaps the list says "Brainstorm Topics for Paper" and then "Outline Paper," etc. This is a more effective way to organize and estimate your time.

1c. Using a Calendar

After you've listed and prioritized your work, the next step in your plan is to determine when you are going to set aside time for individual tasks and plug them into a calendar.

Organizing your time in this manner gives shape and focus to the days, weeks, and months ahead of you. If you have the discipline to stick to and execute your plan, you'll put yourself in a position to succeed in both the short and long term.

At the same time, the ability to adapt and be flexible is also important—if you find your schedule has become an obstacle to your success, reconsider and adjust your plan as necessary.

2. Your Effectiveness and the Time of Day

In addition to deciding what you're going to set out to accomplish on a given day, you need to decide when on the day you're going to work.

It's important to give some thought to whether you work best at a certain time or under certain conditions—some students may be more efficient in the morning and others in the afternoon or evening. There is no universally ideal time to do your schoolwork; once again, the key is to determine what works best for you.

IN CONTEXT

You have set aside time for your schoolwork in the evening right before bed, but the last couple of nights you've actually fallen asleep right at your desk about halfway through your scheduled time. You have to scramble in the morning to finish what you started the night before.

What should you do? Late-night coffee or energy drinks to stay awake might not be the best solution. Consider restructuring your workday so that you can do your work at a time when you have the energy to tackle it.

3. Making Time for Family and Personal Care

Every student has a life—with its own concerns and responsibilities—outside of school. Taking care of the whole of your life by properly balancing your life at school with your life at work or at home is absolutely crucial to a student's success.

If you can manage your time efficiently, you can ensure you have enough time to give to each part of your life that matters. What's more, leading a happy and healthy life outside of school is going to positively affect the energy level and mood with which you approach your schoolwork.



SUMMARY

During **prioritization**, your highest priorities should be the ones that are most important and urgent. A **prioritization matrix** can be helpful with this process. **Creating a to-do list** can help you break down tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks. Adding your tasks to a **calendar** will help you stay on

track with the tasks you need to complete each day. Keep the calendar updated as plans change. You may be most **effective at certain times of the day** so it is important to understand when you are at your best. **Make time in your priorities for taking care of yourself.**



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