Time Management

Tips and Strategies for Prioritizing Your Time

URBAN COLLEGE
of Boston

What is burnout and how do I prevent it?

"***Burnout*** is a state of emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress." - Psychology Today.

Note: Burnout is *not* a diagnosed medical condition, but rather an occupational phenomenon.

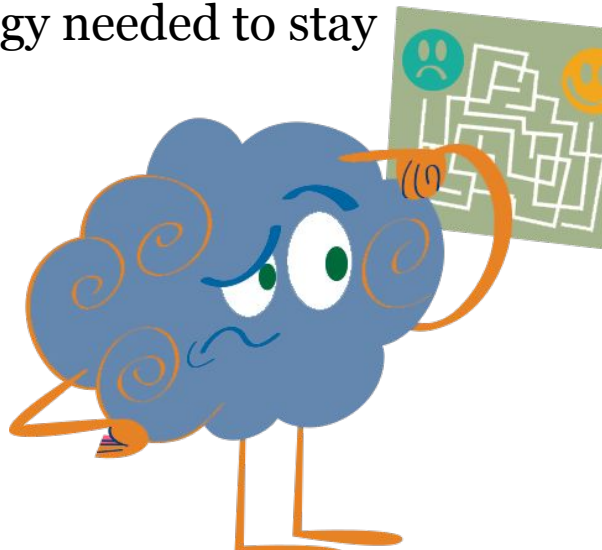
What is burnout and how do I prevent it?

Burnout can be caused by:

- Lack of control → unable to influence decisions that affect your day-to-day life
- Work-life imbalance → work takes up so much of your time that you have no time to spend with friends and family
- Heavy workload/long working hours → constant energy needed to stay focused, contributes to a lack of work-life balance

Signs of burnout:

- Illness
- Poor sleep habits
- Trouble concentrating



What is burnout and how do I prevent it?

While commonly associated with work life, burnout is not exclusive to work. It can also be found in one's personal life (relationships, parenting, etc.)

It's important to be aware of any signs of burnout because burnout can impact your physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being! Once aware, you can think of solutions to reduce burnout (drawing + maintaining boundaries, regular self-care, etc.)

Time management strategies can help to prevent burnout from happening/reduce feelings of burnout!

Why is time management so important?

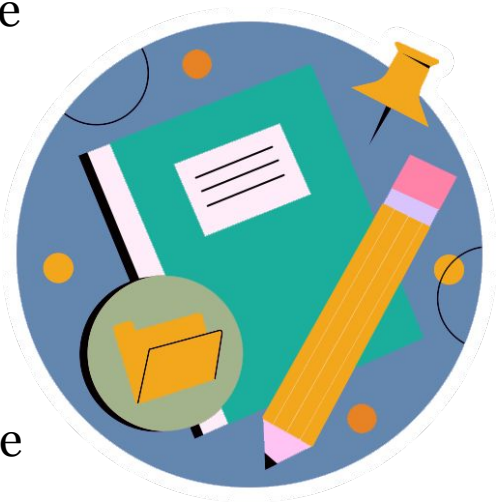
Juggling multiple things at once can be very overwhelming – whether it be balancing a job and a class, multiple classes, or working full-time with a family to take care of while taking classes.

Time management is important because it helps us balance our schedules, leaving us time to carve out time for ourselves and minimizing any overwhelming feelings.

This tip sheet will provide some tips and strategies for time management and prioritization of work!

1) Review class content as you progress through the semester

Reviewing class content as you progress through the semester helps with memory retention. The amount of information you've retained shrinks the longer you go without reviewing the material.



This makes studying for exams less overwhelming and more productive. Instead of "cramming" all of the information you've learned throughout the semester to review in one sitting, continue to review the learned material as you move through the semester.

2) Plan: Make a to-do list

One effective way to manage your time is to make a plan that works *for you,* either daily or weekly.

Some things to think about for daily planning:

- What do you have the time and energy for that day? Base the number of tasks, and the difficulty of said tasks based on your availability and your energy levels.

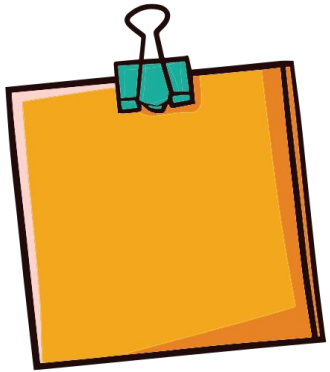
Some things to think about for weekly planning:

- Be mindful that your energy levels will fluctuate daily, so try to allow room for flexibility whenever possible.
    - E.g., plan to read 2 chapters a day for a week, and allow yourself to make changes based on your energy levels throughout the week.

3) Stay organized: Keep track of your tasks/assignments

When things start to pile up in your personal and/or academic life, it is important to keep track of the tasks you have to complete.

Some physical ways to keep track of tasks/assignments:



- Planners
- To-Do lists
- Post-It notes

Some digital ways to keep track of tasks/assignments:

- Checking Brightspace/Google Classroom for any updates on assignments every day!
- Setting alarms/reminders on your phone

4) Prioritize: Determine what's urgent and what's important

Urgent tasks:

- Require immediate attention
- There are clear consequences if you don't complete these tasks by the deadline
- The longer you delay the task, the more stress you'll experience.

Examples: a project that makes up a large % of your final grade with a closely approaching deadline, a household emergency, etc.

Important tasks:

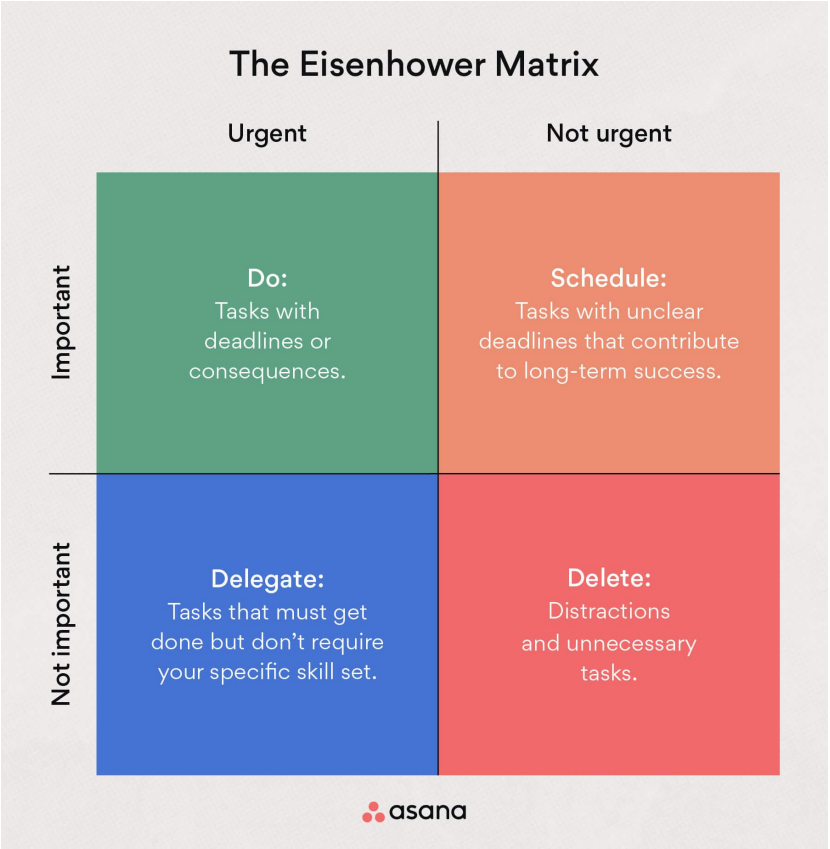
- Task is important in helping you achieve a long-term goal
- Require planning so you can use your resources efficiently

Examples: a project with a distant deadline that requires extensive planning, household chores, self-care, etc.

Source: Team Asana (2021, Oct 22). *The Eisenhower Matrix: How to prioritize your to-do list*. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix

Prioritize: Stephen Covey's 4 quadrant to-do list (aka: Eisenhower Matrix)

- The 4-quadrant to-do list prioritizes tasks by urgency and importance
- Tasks divided into 4 quadrants based on what: to do first, to schedule, to delegate, and to delete.
- Goal is to make a long-list of tasks feel less overwhelming.

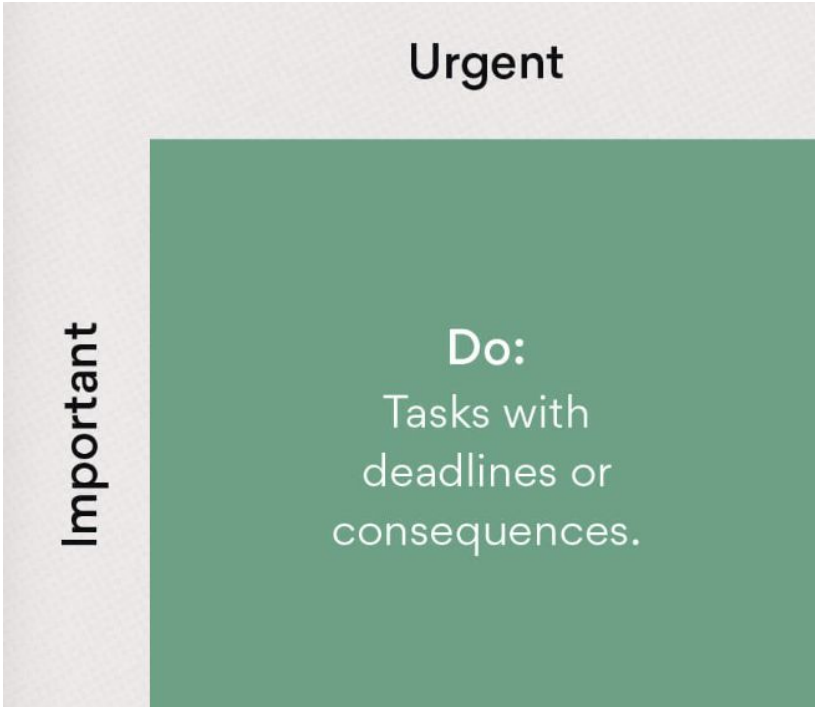


Prioritize: Urgent and important tasks

Any tasks that are both urgent *and* important should go in this quadrant.

These tasks have clear consequences, affect your long-term goals, and have clear consequences if they are not completed by a specific deadline.

Example: writing an essay due in a couple of days that's worth a large % of your final grade, work shift, etc.



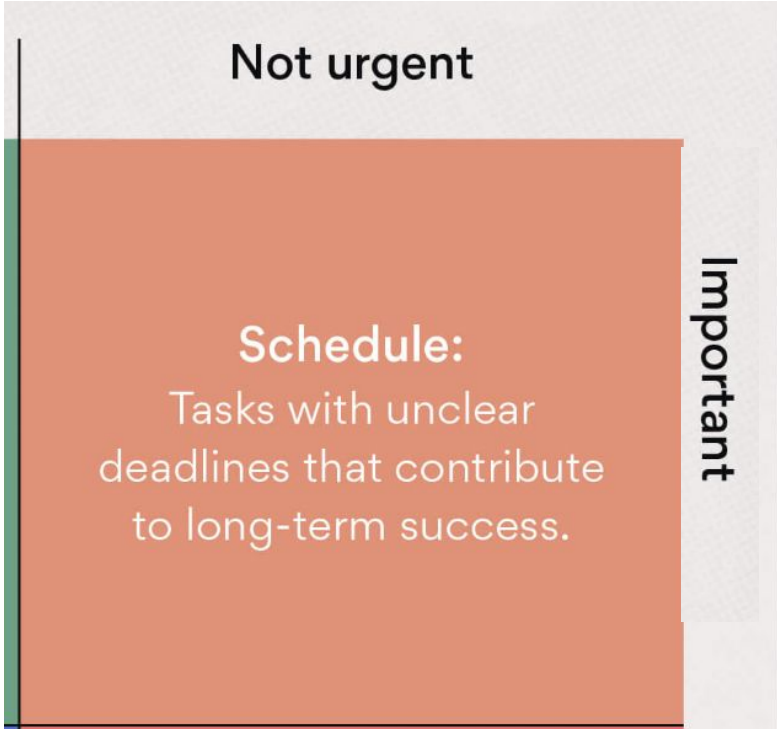
Source: Team Asana (2021, Oct 22). *The Eisenhower Matrix: How to prioritize your to-do list*. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix

Prioritize: Not urgent, but still important

Any tasks that are not urgent but still important will be put in this box.

These tasks do not need to be done right away, but they will still affect your long term goals.

Examples: exercising, self-care, family time, updating your resume, studying for an exam in a week and a half etc.



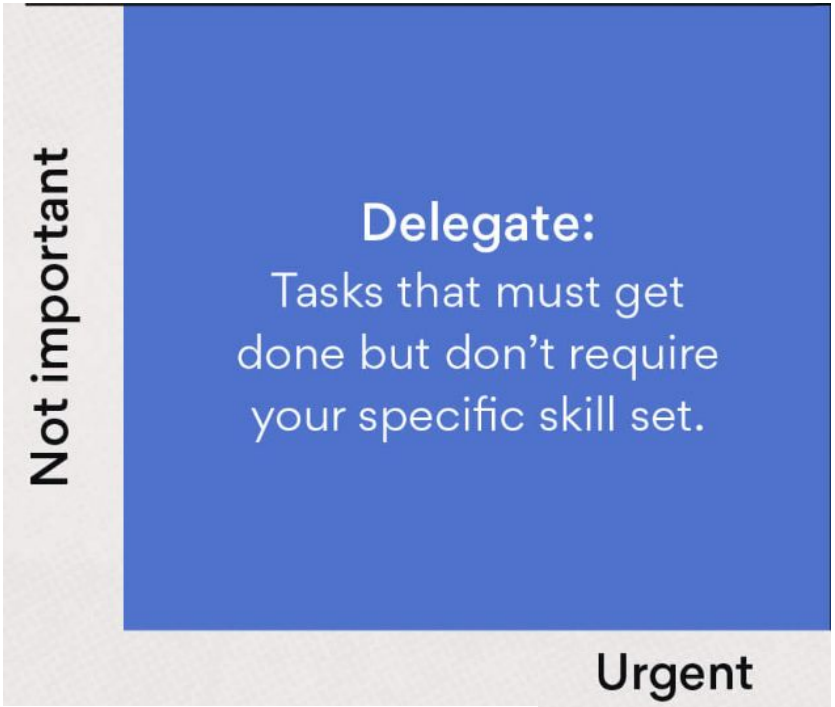
Source: Team Asana (2021, Oct 22). *The Eisenhower Matrix: How to prioritize your to-do list*. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix

Prioritize: Not important, but still urgent

Any tasks that are urgent but not important will be placed in this quadrant.

These tasks must be completed now, but they don't affect your long term goals.

Examples: sorting emails, laundry, errands, etc.



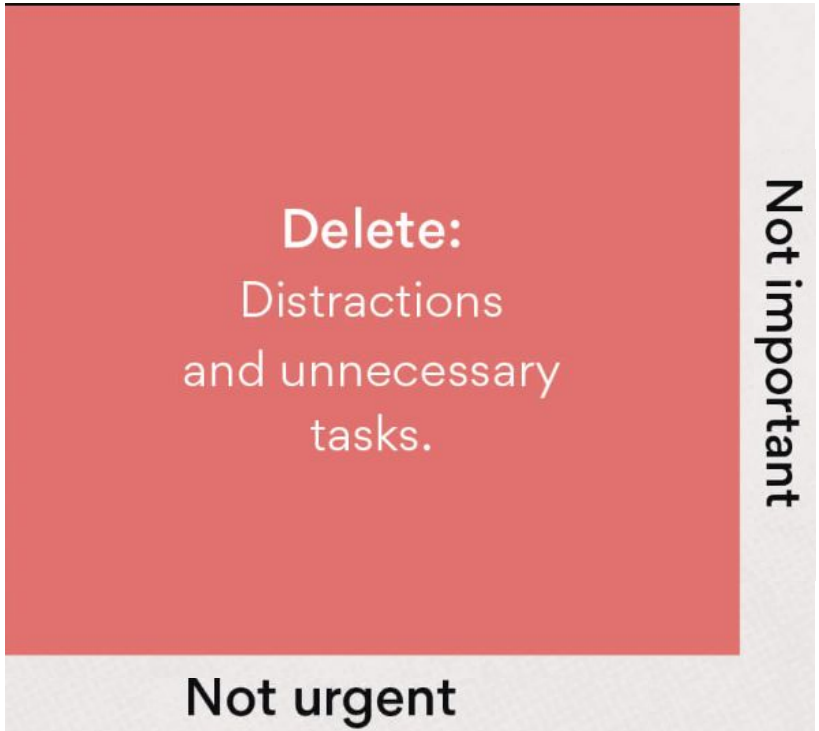
Source: Team Asana (2021, Oct 22). *The Eisenhower Matrix: How to prioritize your to-do list*. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix

Prioritize: Neither important or urgent tasks

Any tasks that are neither important or urgent go in this quadrant.

These tasks are distractions that are getting in the way of you completing your long-term goals.

Examples: binge-watching tv shows, scrolling through social media, etc.



Source: Team Asana (2021, Oct 22). *The Eisenhower Matrix: How to prioritize your to-do list*. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/eisenhower-matrix

5) Deadlines

Deadlines can be key in increasing productivity – especially if you are a person who does better with a set due date.

One strategy that can be useful in situations where you need to get something done without a hard deadline is by making up a fake deadline!

- e.g., “I’m giving myself one week to read 4 chapters for class.”

6) “SMART” goals

You are more likely to achieve a goal when it is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**imely (“**S-M-A-R-T** goal”). Specific goals help to hold you accountable and create habits. (Tip: Write your goal down somewhere! (sticky note, planner, etc.))

- **Specific:** What do you want to accomplish? Why? When? Are other people needed to complete your objective?
- **Measurable:** How will you know when you’ve achieved your goal? How often/how much will you perform the activity?
- **Achievable:** Reality check! Is this within your scope of ability? What other obligations do you have on your plate?
- **Relevant:** Why are you setting this goal?
- **Timely:** There needs to be an end date!!

“SMART” goals

Not a “SMART” goal:

Finish my homework for my class.

- Vague: What homework? What class?
- No end-date. When does the homework need to be completed?
- Why is it important to finish your homework?
- How much homework? How will you know when you’ve met your goal?

“SMART” goal:

I will finish writing and submit my 3-page essay for my English 101 class by the end of next week (August 19th, 2022), in order to improve my writing skills, pass my class, and keep me on track for graduation.

- Deadline: August 19th, 2022, or the end of next week.
- Specific task to complete: Essay for an English 101 class
- This goal is relevant because it keeps me on track to achieve my long-term goals – to graduate, and improve my writing skills. Both of these goals will help me in my future career.
- I will know that I finished my goal when I have an organized and proofread 3-page essay and have submitted it to my instructor.

7) Reward v.s. Compensation

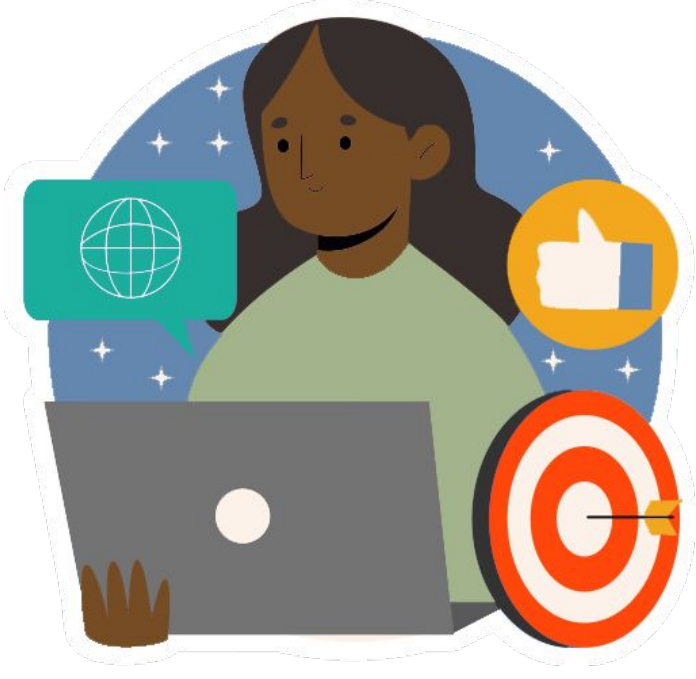
Do your “fun” tasks last as a reward! This will promote effective prioritization, and build healthy habits.

Doing these “fun” tasks before doing your important and urgent tasks (Stephen Covey’s 4-quadrant to-do list) can lead to procrastination. Plus, you’d be stressing about the important tasks that have to be done while you should be enjoying your relaxation!

8) Reframing: Chunking

Reframing work can help make a large amount of tasks seem more manageable. Reframing your tasks may also help in reestablishing a sense of control. Some tricks:

- Break up big tasks into smaller, more digestible tasks. Trick your brain into thinking that what you are doing *isn't* super scary and long/difficult.
    - Big tasks can be anxiety-inducing and paralyzing. Break up the big task into "baby" tasks to make completing the original task a little easier to think about. (e.g. I need to clean my entire house! What goes into cleaning your house? Maybe first tackle the kitchen, and then the bathroom, etc.)



Reframing: Order

It might be helpful to think about the order in which you want to complete your tasks. What works better for you?

1) Completing the smaller, easier tasks first to feel accomplished and to boost your confidence to tackle the bigger, uglier task?
    a) Can reduce feelings of paralysis
2) Or tackling the bigger, uglier task first to feel relieved?
    a) Can reduce stress

Time management tools

Sticky notes: Useful for when you're focusing on a task and your mind goes elsewhere (e.g., "oh! I should do this before I forget"). Instead of losing your focus, write down the thought on a sticky note as a reminder, so you can come back to it when you're done with the task at hand.

Pomodoro method: A time management technique that has 25 minutes of "on" time to focus on a task, and 5 minutes of "off" time where you have a break from your task. This technique is helpful in preventing procrastination and hyperfocusing, both of which can lead to burn-out. Learn more about Pomodoro here.

Time management tools

Forest app (Downside: $): A time management/focus app. Whenever you want to focus, plant a virtual tree in the app! If you use your phone during "focus" time, the virtual tree dies. Every time you successfully complete a focus session, you earn virtual coins. Once you've planted enough virtual trees and earned enough virtual coins, you can plant a real-life tree and help the planet! You can also create a focus session with friends – if anyone in the session uses their phone, the tree dies.

Learn more (and decide if it's worth the money) here.

Reminders:

You don't become more efficient to become a super-worker. *You become an efficient worker to have a work-life balance and spend time with your loved ones!*

You can always change your plan, but you can only change your plan if you already *have* a plan.
Plans ≠ Being locked in

Self-care, self-care, self-care!! Reducing burnout is so important if you want to stick to a plan to catch up. Remember to conserve your energy, and replenish your energy every day. Get as much sleep as you can every night, and remember to refuel your body regularly. Schedule your down-time if you have to!

Remember:

If you want more support with time management, or find yourself struggling on a particular assignment, feel free to schedule an appointment with a tutor in the LRC.

We’re here to help!

Credits:

All stickers were downloaded from Flat Icon.

Created by:

Erika Decklar
Senior Learning Support Associate (SLSA)

Stevie Billow
Learning Resource Center Coordinator (LRCC)

URBAN COLLEGE
of Boston