

Essential Skills

Time Management & Prioritisation

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Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

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During this session we will...

- identify information needed before deciding on a priority;
- organise a straightforward professional workload;
- distinguish between urgent and important tasks;
- recognise that tasks often take longer than expected;
- identify interruptions and distractions that can affect a plan;
- use professional language to clarify or renegotiate priorities;
- identify one time-management behaviour to practise.

Managing myself at work

- Central question:

When I have several things to do, how do I decide what to do first?

Good time management is not doing everything quickly.

It is deciding what matters, planning realistically and communicating when priorities are unclear or unmanageable.



Scenario discussion

You arrive at work at 9:00. These things are waiting for you. You have 8 hours. What would you do first?

A client has left a message saying there is an urgent problem.

A colleague asks if you can help them with something.



Your manager wants some information by 2pm.

You have 18 unread emails.

You have a report due next Friday.

Mandatory online training must be completed next week.

Individually, put the six tasks in the order you would deal with them. Then compare in pairs.

Debrief

Whole-class discussion:

- What made something seem urgent?
- Does a deadline automatically make something most important?
- What information are we missing?
- Would you ever need to ask somebody before deciding?

Priority depends on context. Sometimes the professional thing to do is not to immediately act, but to get more information.

Deciding on priorities

What makes something a priority?

When deciding what to do first, ask:

- is it **URGENT**? (needs attention soon)
- is it **IMPORTANT**? (the outcome matters)
- What information do you need?

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	Important report due tomorrow	Professional qualification renewal due in 3 months
LESS/NOT IMPORTANT	Someone wants an immediate answer to a minor issue	Checking non-essential notifications

Deciding on priorities

Let's watch this
2-min video
about managing
tasks with
[Eisenhower
method](#)



Sorting activity

A colleague invites you to an optional meeting.

You notice information in a document may be incorrect.

You have 18 unread emails waiting for you.

You have a project task due on Friday.

Administration work must be completed by the end of the week.

Your manager wants some information by 2pm today.

A colleague asks for help with a task they are finding difficult.

A customer has left a message saying there is an urgent problem. You do not yet know how serious it is.

Read the task cards listed below.
In pairs sort these into the relevant categories.

**URGENT &
LESS
IMPORTANT**

**URGENT &
IMPORTANT**

**NOT URGENT
& IMPORTANT**

**NOT URGENT
& NOT
IMPORTANT**

Debrief

Whole class check: which two were hardest to place?

Sometimes it depends. You might decide that you simply need more information.

For example: **Message marked urgent**

You need to know:

- urgent for whom?
- what is actually the problem?
- what happens if dealing with it is delayed?
- can anyone else deal with it?
- does another task depend on getting it sorted?



Professional prioritisation often begins with asking good questions.

How Long Will It Really Take?

Why do our plans sometimes fail even when we know what the priorities are?

Possible issues:

- interruptions
- tasks take longer
- unexpected problems
- procrastination
- people ask for things
- unrealistic plans



We often underestimate how long work will take.

Quick estimation activity

How long would you allow for each?

- reply properly to five important emails
- prepare slides for a 10-minute presentation
- read and check a three-page report
- have a meeting with a colleague
- solve a problem you have not seen before

Discuss in pairs before checking as a whole class.

What might make the task take longer?

- unfamiliar task
- waiting for information
- technology problems
- interruptions
- misunderstanding
- needing to check work
- unexpected complexity



Simple planning rule

Estimate → Check → Add Space

Estimate	Check	Add Space
How long do I think it will take?	Have I done something similar before?	What could delay me?

Question: if a task usually takes you about 45 minutes, would you schedule exactly 45 minutes? Why or why not?

What Interrupts My Plan?

Not every interruption is a distraction.

This distinction is important.

- What things can interrupt work?

List 5 possible distractions.



What Interrupts My Plan?

Interruptions will vary in relevance and importance, you can usually categorise an interruptions three ways: 'Must Respond', 'Can Manage' or 'Distraction'

MUST RESPOND	CAN MANAGE	DISTRACTION
Something genuinely needs attention.	Necessary, but perhaps not immediately.	Does not need attention now.

Could the same thing appear in different categories?

Yes! An email could be:

- critical information;
- something to schedule later;
- irrelevant distraction.

The professional skill is not avoiding every interruption. It is deciding whether the interruption deserves your attention right now.

What Interrupts My Plan?

Sort these examples:

- Teams/email message
- customer query
- colleague needing help
- phone notification
- manager asking for information
- emergency
- social media
- meeting
- conversation
- system alert

MUST RESPOND	CAN MANAGE	DISTRACTION
Something genuinely needs attention.	Necessary, but perhaps not immediately.	Does not need attention now.

First Week at Work Challenge



Your situation: It's Wednesday of your second week in a new job. You work from 9:00 to 17:00, and your manager is in meetings for part of the day. You have several responsibilities competing for your attention.

Your challenge: Decide what to prioritise and create a realistic plan for your working day.

Download the group worksheet from Moodle and get organising.

First Week at Work Challenge

Tasks:

A. Manager information

Your manager has asked for a short piece of information by 3pm. Estimated time: 45 minutes.

B. Team meeting

Team meeting at 10:30–11:00. You need about 15 minutes preparation.

C. Important project

You have a project task due Friday. Estimated work today: 90 minutes.

D. New colleague

A newer colleague has asked you to show them how to use a system. Estimated time: 30 minutes.

E. Routine administration

Needs completing by the end of the week. Estimated time: 45 minutes.

F. Possible error

You notice something in important information sent yesterday that may be incorrect. You are not sure.

Debrief

Whole class check: what did you put first? Why?

- What happens if that task is late?
- Who else might be affected?
- Do you actually have enough information for each task?
- Where is your buffer?

Professional prioritisation often begins with asking good questions.



Unexpected event

We're continuing with the same scenario, but something unexpected happens.

- **At 11:45 your manager contacts you. They need a new piece of work completed by 2pm. You estimate it will take about one hour.**

You cannot simply add it to the plan. Something now has to change.

- **What will you move?**
- **What will you keep?**
- **What will you ask?**
- **Who needs to know?**



You cannot squeeze everything in. You still only have the same number of hours – 8 hours .

Discuss in pairs what adjustments to your schedule you'd need to make.

When I Cannot Do Everything

Consider the four communication questions:

1. What do I want to achieve?
2. What should I do?
3. How do I speak?
4. What do I say?

Your manager gives you another task but you do not think you can complete everything.
What do you want to achieve?

- **Agree realistic priorities.**

Which professional response might help?

- **Negotiate or clarify or seek advice.**

When I Cannot Do Everything

How best to communicate in this situation:

Avoid saying:

I don't have time

I can't do that

Okay, I'll try

Instead try :

- **“I currently have the report due at 3pm and the project work due Friday. I don't think I can complete all three to the required standard today. Which would you like me to prioritise?”**

This is why it works:

Observe: I have these current tasks.

Position: I need a clear priority.

Impact: I cannot complete all of them properly.

Request: Which should come first?



Short paired practice

Work in pairs. Choose one scenario and produce one professional sentence you could actually say in this situation.

Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C	Scenario D
Two managers give you tasks due at the same time.	A task is taking much longer than you expected.	Does not need attention now.	You do not understand which of two tasks is most important.

Use these prompts to help you:

“I currently have...”

“I am working on...”

“I am concerned that...”

“I don't think I can complete both by...”

“Could you clarify which...?”

“Which would you like me to prioritise?”

“Would it be possible to...?”



My Professional Planning Toolkit

When deciding what to do first, I will ask:

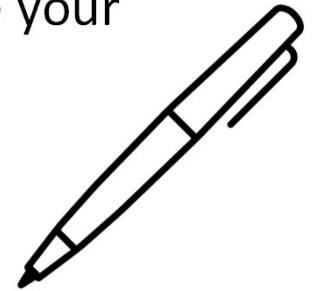
- What is urgent?
- What is important?
- What happens if I wait?
- Do I need more information?

Take time to reflect and consider how you manage your time and prioritise your tasks. Try to complete the following sentences:

One thing that often disrupts my plans is

One professional phrase I can use when I have too much work is

In my next professional role, I will manage my time more effectively by





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