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Essential Skills

Time Management & Prioritisation

Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

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During this session we will…

- distinguish between urgency, importance and dependency;
- prioritise competing workplace tasks using relevant criteria;
- estimate workload more realistically and include contingency;
- explain the reasoning behind a prioritisation decision

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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.

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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 colleague is waiting for your figures before they can complete their section of a shared report.

Your manager asks for information by 3pm.

A report due tomorrow

Mandatory online training must be completed next week.

A client has sent a complaint

Individually, <u>prioritise the five tasks</u>.
Decide which tasks involve someone being dependent on you?

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Debrief

Whole-class discussion:

- What made something seem urgent?
- Does a deadline automatically make something most important?
- What information are we missing?
- Which tasks involved dependency?

What makes something a priority when several things matter at the same time?

Urgency is only one reason a task may matter.

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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

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Deciding on priorities

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

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Sorting activity

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

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.

URGENT & LESS IMPORTANT

URGENT & IMPORTANT

NOT URGENT & IMPORTANT

NOT URGENT & NOT IMPORTANT

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Debrief

Whole class check: which two were hardest to place?

Sometimes <u>it depends</u>. 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.

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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.

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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.

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What might make the task take longer?

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

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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?

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What Interrupts My Plan?

What things can interrupt work?

Work in pairs to list 5 things.

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What Interrupts My Plan?

- **<u>Sort</u> the 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.

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.

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First Week at Work Challenge

Your situation: It's Wednesday of your first 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.

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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. Junior colleague

A junior 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.

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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.

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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?**

It is not possible to squeeze everything in. You still only have the same number of hours.

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

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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?

- **<u>Negotiate</u> or <u>clarify</u> or <u>seek advice</u>.**

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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?

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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…?”

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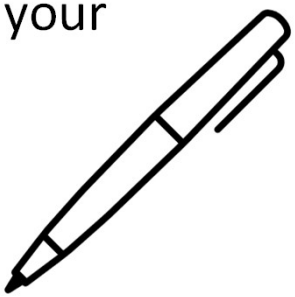
My Professional Planning Toolkit

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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