

Reflecting on your current working practice, describe your working routine for a day, showing how you prioritise, delegate, and deliver tasks, and how you ensure that they meet the required standards within the time available. How do you manage the need to communicate effectively with different audiences?

A successful work day relies on a series of routines and habits, as well as flexibility (Daoire, 2023). My working practice as a Roman pottery and finds specialist involves upholding the ClfA *Code of Conduct's* (2014a) principles of reliable reporting and dissemination, conservation responsibilities, and ethical, respectful behaviour (ClfA, 2025; ClfA, 2014b, pp. 3-5). In addition to a plethora of relevant, accessible guidance (ClfA, 2024; ClfA, 2021; Tyers, 2014; CA, n.d.a), I utilise several systems to support, streamline and maximise my workplace efficiency. Terminology will be used in accordance with the ClfA *Toolkit for Finds: Pottery's* Glossary (2024, pp. 47-49). Where applicable, additional terms will be defined, and acronyms introduced and used thereafter. This essay characterises my methods for prioritising my workload, delegating where necessary, and delivering high quality project outputs in a timely manner. Furthermore, I will demonstrate my approach when communicating with various people.

Starting off the day

Preparation

My ideal Monday starts with arriving at the office as early as core hours permit to capitalise on morning productivity and align with my key colleagues' availability (Locock, 2010, p. 66). The catalytic task involves connecting my laptop to my dual monitors and switching it on. A couple of habits are stacked onto this: making a cup of tea and briefly discussing incoming finds with the post-excavation [PX] team, including their anticipated work programme for the week (Clear, 2022, pp. 72-79).

Emails and Task List

Back at my desk, I sip my beverage while reviewing my calendar and new emails since late Friday afternoon. After the initial overview, I process the information

and incorporate applicable details into my plan for the day and beyond (Locock, 2010, p. 67).

The emails are broadly assigned to one of three categories:

- Questions
- Informative
- Tasks

Replies are required for direct questions, and in some instances for the latter two types, even a temporary acknowledgement and flagged for later.

Regarding informative emails, I'll make a record (e.g. update my programme) or take brief notes to maintain an external working memory.

“Many adults with ADHD suffer because of poor working memory [and] come to rely on aids such as writing everything down and placing reminders all over their homes and workplaces” (Selikowitz, 2021, p. 198).

For instance, upon seeing the agenda for tomorrow's Finds Team meeting, I bullet-point my current and near-future projects, contributions for scheduled items, and thoughts on any other business.

Creating a task list is the third step. “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!” (Franklin, cited Aarssen, 2018, p. 12). My preferred method is the Eisenhower matrix (Figure 1; Nevins, 2023). By quartering a page, I can classify tasks based on their importance and urgency.

I was introduced to this system to address ‘IBNUs’: ‘important but not urgent’ tasks that “contribute to our success, to long term goals” (McCabe, 2023). With no distinct deadline, it is easy to keep pushing them down a regular list when more urgent jobs arise. This matrix allows them to be identified and scheduled.

According to Clear (2022, p. 55), the “Four Laws of Behavior [sic] Change are a simple set of rules [...] to build better habits”. Achievement depends on making it obvious, attractive, easy and satisfying (see Table 1). I am still refining my email habits, especially the ‘ease’ phase. For now, an empty desk obviously requires a laptop, having a cup of tea and morning check-in makes the workday more appealing, and compiling a robust, prioritised plan is satisfying. The ‘Four Laws’ are also the rationale behind keeping an open tab so I can update my timesheet with as little friction as possible.



Figure 1. The Eisenhower Matrix

(adapted from Team Asana, 2025; © 2025 Asana, Inc.)

The Four Laws of Behavior Change

Building Good Habits	Breaking Bad Habits
1. Make it obvious 2. Make it attractive 3. Make it easy 4. Make it satisfying	1. Make it invisible 2. Make it unattractive 3. Make it hard 4. Make it unsatisfying

Table 1. The Four Laws of Behaviour Change

(adapted from Readinggraphics, 2025 and Clear, 2022, p. 54; © 2025 Readinggraphics)

Finally, I quickly email my line manager about my anticipated schedule for the upcoming week. I am fortunate to be 'managed by exception' (PRINCE2®wiki, 2025). In conjunction with autonomy, the accountability afforded by this action is beneficial to my working practice (McCabe, 2024, p. 175-177).

Unscheduled tasks

Whilst planning is advantageous, high performance requires anticipating changes and being "quick to adapt [...] to new demands" (Boyett and Boyett, 1998, p. 136). Since reading the initial messages, two urgent tasks have appeared in my inbox.

Spot dating

One email requests fast spot dating of several pottery sherds from three contexts (CA, n.d.b). The on-site project officer has a meeting with the County Archaeologist at 10:30 and is seeking dating information. I retrieve the dirty finds bags that were left on a manager's desk late on Friday, sans email until now.

If I deemed my current workload overwhelming and the opportunity to delegate presented itself, I would do so (Locock, 2010, pp. 67-68; Koontz and Weihrich, 1990, pp. 186-190).

On this occasion, I have the capacity, and I recognise that delegation is not feasible. Instead, I need to manage upwards (Grant, 2024). I am aware that our finds officer has a strict policy of not identifying unwashed or damp pottery; therefore, I elect to quickly wash, examine and date the sherds as a priority.

I do not wish to leave fieldwork colleagues stranded without information, albeit requested at short notice. If all finds staff are working from home or otherwise absent, the request invariably goes unfulfilled. However, if I am present and can re-organise to create availability, then I endeavour to be a helpful team member (Boyett and Boyett, 1998, p. 136). Not only do I experience a heightened sense of self-esteem and job satisfaction, I also recognise that stepping up encourages colleagues to assist each another.

External specialist contract

The second task, being both important and time-sensitive, cannot be delegated. Approval has been granted to hire an external medieval pottery specialist familiar with Lincolnshire's pottery type series [PTS] (Darling and Precious, 2014, pp. 357-360) and fabric type series (see ClfA, 2024, pp. 47-48 for definitions). Using the *Sub-Contractor Agreement* template (CA, 2021), I input the relevant information as confirmed in the email, with reference to our database of specialists. Crucially, I meticulously check all details are accurate and a faithful description of the job's requirements, including the precise fee and deadline. I save the outgoing contract to the project archive and attach a copy in a polite, concise email to the external specialist, requesting their signature to finalise the agreement. In case a reply is not forthcoming, I set a reminder to follow it up.

Scheduled tasks

As Clear (2022, p. 236) states: "Professionals stick to a schedule; amateurs let life get in the way". Despite being a rigid perspective, there is merit to staying the course whenever possible. With just over an hour until my next scheduled task, I use it to progress the detailed recording of a large pottery assemblage (ClfA, 2024, pp. 21-22).

Recording

For each project, I begin with an estimated duration booked into my programme. Whilst large assemblages can be intermittently ongoing, I prefer to record small/mid-sized groups in a single sitting or consecutive sessions.

I lay out the sherds in the specialist laboratory to gain a quick overview of the fabrics and forms. Tools and equipment are kept tidy, in a reliable location within easy reach: "A place for everything, and everything in its place" (Franklin, cited Aarssen, 2018, p. 82). I acquaint myself with the site's key details, including location for regional fabric codes and anticipating local fabrics/industries. Using relevant guidance (ClfA *Toolkit*, 2024), reference resources (Tomber and Dore, 1998; Tyers, 2014; CA, n.d.c-e), our offices' fabric type series, and the project's Access database, I record and date the pottery by fabric per context, detailing

forms (EVE, MNV, etc.), residues and decoration where applicable (ClfA, 2024, pp. 33-38). During longer sessions, I often use a 'sandwich' approach: a few easy wins, then harder, repetitive elements, and finally some enjoyable rim forms.

“Anyone can work hard when they feel motivated. It’s the ability to keep going when work isn’t exciting that makes the difference” (Clear, 2022, p. 237).

I resolve any issues immediately, either personally if the hassle is minimal, otherwise convoluted problems are delegated to the PX team for cost efficiency. Occasionally, I will request advice from more experienced specialists.

Work Experience session

At 11:00, I switch to setting up the conference room to host my 'Archaeological Artefacts' handling session for a couple of students on placement with us this week (CA, 2025a). Preparation and communication are essential. The artefacts (and associated handouts) are set aside during the previous week, selected from our reference collection and interesting objects awaiting deposition, which requires adaptability and the confidence to teach about a diverse artefactual assortment. The subject matter can be adjusted if they express a strong interest in a particular period or object class to provide greater social impact for each student and meaningful public engagement (Wilkins, 2019; CA, 2019). My session leads into a 'research and report-writing' task later in the week; therefore, I closely liaise with the publications officer to assist a smooth transition. As a rule, the glass door is left ajar to comply with safeguarding policy. I encourage the students to consider the various objects' functions, to think critically and ask questions, but am careful not to overwhelm more reserved audiences.

After re-boxing and storing the artefacts, quickly checking my inbox for anything time-sensitive, and acting accordingly, I break for lunch. Upon my return, I re-evaluate my matrix against messages received since mid-morning. Fortunately, I still have upwards of two hours to focus on an Early Roman PXA [post-excavation assessment] pottery report.

Reporting

To limit distractions, establish boundaries and enhance my concentration, I normally listen to ambient music. My report writing adheres to appropriate guidance, primarily the *ClfA Toolkit for Finds: Pottery* (2024, pp. 23-28, 39-41) and *CA Style Guide* (Watts, 2003), as well as CA's (2025b) *Catalogue* guidelines, where applicable. I utilise a mixture of templates, stock phrases and writing freely, for accuracy, efficiency and authenticity.

When writing for large PXAs or Publications, it can be easy to lose sight of the big picture across different excavation areas or staggered phases of work which create considerable back-and-forth and stop-and-start. Nevertheless, switching between tasks can sometimes “add novelty” and “reduce friction” (McCabe, 2024, pp. 171-175; Clog, 2024).

“The only way to become excellent is to be endlessly fascinated by doing the same thing over and over. You have to fall in love with boredom” (Clear, 2022, p. 236).

Fundamentally, project meetings maintain cohesion. Simultaneous measures, e.g. our SharePoint document for post-excavation requirements (CA, 2025c) and Quality Assurance of all specialists' reports, ensure approaching deadlines are well-defined and monitored, and required standards are upheld.

Conclusions

This essay has depicted my routine for delivering specialist finds recording and reporting to deadline in accordance with professional standards, through prioritisation, organisation, and where necessary, delegation. Diligent planning, adaptability, and efficient, respectful communication are integral to my working practice. I am mindful of my weaknesses, and recognise the need to self-manage how I communicate, retain information and stay focused. I play to my strengths of creativity, intuition and curiosity (Selikowitz, 2021, p. 198), and seek/accept advice and support from my incredible mentors and professional counterparts.

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