

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?

Outlining a representative day is almost an impossible task given the level of variation I experience day-to-day. Ideally, I'd work to a nice consistent structure, but by and large most days involve simply attempting to wrangle the chaos of whatever needs continuously pop up. There are certain habits that I try to maintain some consistency with, just to feel like I'm keeping order of some sort, but these are mostly tasks undertaken at the start of the day, before the chaos ensues. This will be a rundown of as close to an average day as I've had recently.

Any day starts with my most important companion throughout it – coffee. As other colleagues start to arrive they'll generally also immediately gravitate towards the caffeine supplies. It is usually during this period that I will begin to get an idea how the day is going to go; casual chats will normally turn towards everyone else's schedule, and I'll usually take the opportunity to check in with the post-excavation manager to see if there are any new priorities or specific events I need to know about.

Once coffee has been acquired, I'll wander down to my end of the lab and check the current status of any finds we have and see if anything new has been dropped off by the fieldwork team the evening prior. If any loose finds bags have been left by them, I'll label up a box to keep them more secure. On this occasion I discovered a loose bag of pottery with a note attached to it asking for a spot date. This is something we like to try and resolve quickly to assist with the excavation strategy, so that was immediately added to the day's task list. There were also a new group of Small Finds that would need dealing with, particularly the metals which will start degrading if left in damp conditions. The final checks normally just involve looking over the drying shelves to see what is ready for marking and bagging and how much there is from each site. With all of this information acquired I can start figuring out the structure of day.

I usually plan my day in the knowledge that I will acquire a plethora of other tasks during it which will then swiftly derail these plans. This means I start off with very broad aims so that even if I only get a small amount of that work accomplished, it limits the frustration at not finishing things. This will normally be things like 'get some of the finds washed from site x', or 'clear some shelf space by

marking and bagging stuff from site y' etc. Tasks that would likely take more than a day to fully complete anyway so mentally it makes little difference if I'm still working on them the next day. On this day I settled on simply trying to get some of the finds organised, and checking everything was databased properly.

I am the only pure 'finds assistant' in the post-excavation team but we've recently hired two post-excavation assistants who can float between finds, enviro, and archives as needed. Finds are not being prioritised currently due to the backlog of enviro samples taking precedence, which means they are both assigned enviro tasks by default. There is however the flexibility for me to request help with finds if I feel like I need it, and having this available now is something I'm still adjusting to. I can forget to ask for that help sometimes. On this day, with another box of finds having come back the previous evening, we now had material that needing processing from all three of our main ongoing excavations. Knowing this was more work than I could handle by myself, I went and had a chat with our Environmental Officer, Rachel. Rachel and I are given the authority by our manager to organise the work of any of the post-excavation assistants among ourselves, trusting that we have the best handle on what needs doing to keep everything on schedule. Our chats are always light-hearted and amiable, so it wasn't difficult to reach an agreement over borrowing some help for the day. This meant I now had to plan out the day for someone else as well.

Both of the new assistants are competent enough to be left largely unsupervised, but they are still in their training period and require guidance on occasion. This meant I needed to make sure my own plans integrated well with the work I was assigning and that I would be on hand to help as much as possible. I ideally wanted to try and get finds moving through the system before things started to build up and become unmanageable. As I was doing a quick evaluation of the content of these fresh finds boxes, I discovered another stash of Small Finds in amongst some bulk material. These hadn't been signed-in properly and needed taking care of. As the assistant I was borrowing, Zoe, had expressed an interest in getting more involved in Small Finds work it seemed perfect to have her start off by taking care of both of the groups of these that had come in. This is only a short task, so I wanted to find an equally small job for myself while she was doing that, and suddenly remembered I had been asked to take some photos of some finds for a social media post. I'd nearly completely forgotten about this task because I foolishly tend to opt for making mental notes of things rather than ever writing anything down.

While taking the photos, I was then informed that one of our colleagues was on his way down to talk about the new flotation tank we were rigging up, and since I'm the 'handyman' of the lab they wanted my input on it. This meant I had to quickly finish the photos and then make sure I assigned further tasks to Zoe to keep her occupied. For this I simply picked out the fullest box of finds and asked her to start work on washing them once she'd finished with the Small Finds. The discussions centred around the flotation tank lasted a little longer than I'd anticipated, and it was now halfway through the morning and I hadn't done any work towards my plan for the day. I knew that I wanted to get the spot date sorted on the pot that had come in though, and after checking on Zoe to make sure she wasn't having any issues I moved on to that. This pot was from out of county and a fabric that I was unfamiliar with, so the spot dating also took a little longer than I would have liked. And then before I could put the reference material away, I received a call from the main office. Some of the lab supplies we'd ordered had arrived and they needed collecting as soon as possible, as they were bulky and taking up a lot of room. It's always a good idea to deal with stuff bothering the managers quickly, so I grabbed the sack barrow and asked Zoe if she could take a quick break from finds washing to give me a hand retrieving the supplies. This didn't take too long, but while we were doing so Zoe mentioned that the residues from the environmental samples were starting to build up on the shelves and she was running out of places to put finds to dry. An issue caused partly by my rushed decision making earlier in the day.

Putting away the supplies could wait for a spare moment later, so we dropped them in a convenient spot and went to take a look at the state of the drying shelves to figure out the next move. It was decided that the finds washing should be paused for now and Zoe should concentrate on getting some of the dry finds marked and bagged to get us some space back. I then finally had a chance to email the site director who'd been looking for the spot date on the pottery and quickly tidied away the reference material. I also took the opportunity to download the photos for the social media post, make some small edits, and then email them on. By this point it was now lunch time.

After lunch things calmed down a bit and I was able to do some of the organising I'd originally planned on. Though with the time lost in the morning and the key part of the task being sorting and individually re-bagging hundreds of pieces of flint, I knew I needed a bit more help. Getting the other finds moved off of the shelves was still the priority so I wanted to leave Zoe to work on that for the rest of the afternoon. Luckily we had one of our regular volunteers in that day. So, I made a polite request to my colleague who coordinates the volunteer work to steal them away for the afternoon to help me write some bags out, and thankfully he was amenable. This allowed me to have a

reasonably productive few hours. I was available to help Zoe out with some finds identification and marking questions, and other than that I just got on with things with the help of the volunteer. In the end, although I didn't get anywhere near as much done as I'd have liked, I at least got through the part of the organisation that was most in need of attention. And with that done, I tidied everything away, said my goodbyes, and went home in the knowledge that the next day would bring a whole new slate of fun.