

Assignment 3: 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?

Introduction

Like many other technical professionals working in Higher Education institutions, my day-to-day working practice can be incredibly variable due to the range of responsibilities I undertake across my department. Indeed, in the first three years since starting in my current role as Assistant Technician in 2022, my workload and tasks have varied significantly in both nature and quantity, covering everything from implementing last-minute mitigations for large-scale lab closures due to emergency maintenance and renovations works, to making the most of quiet vacation periods by spending time organising and restocking the technical cupboard. This level of diversity and fluctuation within my regular working practice often means that I cannot reliably plan my days in advance due to the likelihood of additional urgent tasks arising and requiring my attention, which can also make prioritisation very difficult when all responsibilities needing to be considered are not known (MI Talent, 2022). In attempts to combat this, before leaving work I usually dedicate five minutes to write a post-it note for myself, listing all my high priority tasks for the following day and identifying ones with unchangeable time commitments, to be able to fit more flexible responsibilities around them the next morning. In order to demonstrate how I prioritise, delegate, and deliver tasks within my daily working practice, and ensure their outcomes satisfy the required standards in the time I am able to dedicate to them, I will use a fictitious version of one of these post-it notes (Figure 1) with examples of tasks designated to me recently. By exploring how I would ensure these tasks are fulfilled throughout the day, and also examining who I would need to communicate with and in what way to achieve this, in this essay I hope to successfully evidence my approach to managing my time commitments, priorities, and the need to communicate effectively with different audiences.

Tasks for tomorrow:

- Undergraduate practical - lab demonstration (9-11am)
- Geoarchaeology lab renovation design meeting (2-3pm)
- Monthly laboratory statutory testing
- Finish laboratory noticeboard displays

Figure 1: An example of a post-it note that I would usually write at the end of the working day to help me lay out and keep track of my main responsibilities for the following day. These four examples will be used within this essay as part of a hypothetical daily working routine (created by author using Canva, 2025).

Managing Tasks and Communication Needs: Example Daily Routine

8am – 8:45am

A typical working day for me begins as I arrive in the office at 8am, and open my Outlook calendar to review my schedule for the day. I aim to put all my work obligations into this calendar as a tool to capture my completed and upcoming tasks effectively, which has been useful in the past when compiling evidence for my annual review documentation to demonstrate my continuous development and identify changes in responsibilities throughout the year (Johnston, 2019). Comparing the contents of this regularly maintained digital time-keeping record to the post-it note (Figure 1) which captures my in-the-moment thought process about upcoming tasks, allows me to ensure I have documented all of my obligations and have a clear understanding of my required actions for the day, therefore not having to rely on memorising my responsibilities and potentially forgetting important commitments (Allen, 2015). For similar purposes, the Technical Team also keeps a separate group calendar (informally known as the “tech diary”), where we add our main responsibilities for the day and update it every morning. This functions as an indirect form of communication between the entire team, providing a simple yet effective way for us to communicate where we will be throughout the day, when we are unavailable, and when we may have flexibility to take on any unscheduled duties that arise. Once I have reviewed and refined my own calendar and updated the tech diary, I will usually spend the time I have left before my first scheduled commitment completing short-form tasks such as replying to emails or printing completed resources for the noticeboard in preparation for laminating later. This aligns with Allen’s (2015) recommended two-minute rule, which encourages taking a proactive approach to prevent postponement of simple tasks that would otherwise expand my to-do list and cause unnecessary stress.

8:45am – 11:15am

My first scheduled task of the day is a two-hour lab-based practical class in which I will be acting as a demonstrator, supervising second year undergraduate students in learning how to prepare tooth samples for incremental dentine analysis. As a named demonstrator in the module’s handbook, this is a non-negotiable obligation that I am

timetabled in for by the university's central administration almost a year in advance. Consequently, I will typically add these student-facing responsibilities to my own calendar and the tech diary when I first receive the timetabling information and would also remind others in the office in-person on the day of the class, so it is clear to my team that I will not be reachable during this time, thereby allowing them to communicate this to other staff who may come to the office to request my time for last-minute tasks. This combination of communicating availability in advance and providing reminders to appropriate colleagues is especially important to successful delivery of teaching commitments, as lab-based classes are incredibly time-sensitive, requiring multiple student groups to undertake induction, training and sample preparation within two hours due to capacity limitations, so it is essential this dedicated time is not disturbed. Preparation is also essential to successful delivery of teaching, despite set-up and pack-down time not being timetabled. Reserving 15 minutes either side of the class allows myself and other demonstrators to work together to ensure necessary equipment is in place before students arrive, allowing quick turnover between groups, exemplifying good laboratory practice, and prioritising students' teaching time by preventing the need to rush at the start and end of the class.

As a demonstrator, my responsibility is to help students new to isotope analysis (and potentially lab work in general) develop a satisfactory understanding of the methodological protocol they are employing (Beaumont *et al.*, 2013) through effective communication. This necessitates purposeful language choices to foster both comprehension and learning development, such as introducing students to specialist terminology by supporting it with verbal explanation and practical demonstration of the term's application (Sherrington and Stafford, 2019). For example, tooth preparation for incremental dentine analysis requires removal of enamel down to the enamel dentine junction (EDJ: Beaumont *et al.*, 2013). This is often a daunting task for students, as preservation of the dentine below is crucial to construct accurate incremental profiles (Beaumont and Montgomery, 2015). However, by explaining that the EDJ is a visible line that can be used as a marker for where enamel should be removed to, and demonstrating this to students before monitoring their implementation, their understanding will be reinforced in multiple ways.

11:45am – 12pm

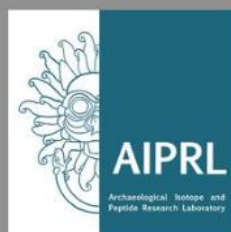
After demonstrating, I will return to the technical office to continue with short-form tasks, including laminating the noticeboard resources I printed earlier, which are required to finish displays before tomorrow's open day event.

12pm – 1pm

Lunch break.

1pm – 2pm

Following lunch, I planned to finish the displays before completing monthly lab equipment safety checks, but received an email from a contractor on the design team for the geoarchaeology lab renovation I'm involved in as departmental representation, alongside my line manager Beth and two senior academics, requesting urgent equipment dimension confirmation to finalise architectural plans before the meeting at 2pm. Previously, I would have asked Beth for instructions to manage this, however my confidence in my professional judgement is stronger now and to not disrupt her whilst in a meeting I implemented actions myself. As the open day is tomorrow, I asked another Assistant Technician if they had capacity to finish the displays using resources I prepared this morning and a plan I previously created (Figure 2). Providing clear instructions and pre-prepared resources supported both my colleagues' ability to deliver this delegated task and my ability to prioritise the design query without needing to oversee the display's creation (Harvard Business Review, 2014). Resolving the query required information from the academic familiar with the equipment, so I brought the architectural plans to their office to discuss the issue in person. As they mentioned being neurodiverse impacts their ability to visualise the 2D plans in 3D, we moved to the lab where I used a tape measure and labels to help them process how the equipment would fit in the space (Broome, 2024), and relayed the correct dimensions to the contractor in time.



ISOTOPE LABORATORY

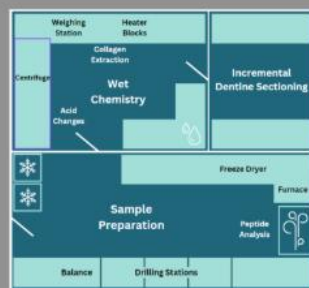
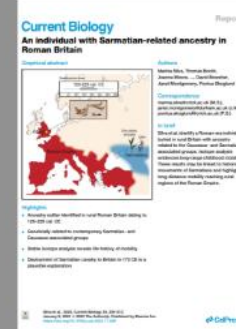
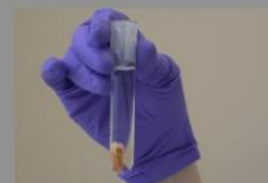


Figure 2: To support my colleague in finishing the displays in time for the open day tomorrow, I would provide them with this plan for the noticeboard alongside the resources I prepared earlier. This will make the completion of the delegated task much easier as they can refer to the plan to know where different printed resources should go, and will consequently not need to ask me for further instruction (created by author using Canva, 2025).

2pm – 3pm

Because the biweekly design meetings are already held in the department, I messaged Beth via Teams in advance of the meeting to propose changing their location to the lab, to ensure cohesive understanding of suggested design changes across the team and allow external contractors to familiarise themselves with the space before renovations begin. Being able to quickly communicate my reasoning in writing, and Beth consequently being able to forward this amendment to the meeting participants using the same platform, facilitated delivery of this last-minute change which will hopefully also aid eventual successful delivery of the renovation process.

3pm – 4pm

Despite being pushed back earlier, I will undertake equipment safety checks before leaving, to accomplish the final item on today's to-do list and comply with university health and safety protocols. I will also quickly debrief my colleague who I delegated responsibility for the displays to, asking how they managed the task and if there are any outstanding issues I can pick up tomorrow before the open day begins (Harvard Business Review, 2014), as well as thanking them for taking on this duty.

Conclusion

In summary, whilst my responsibilities are varied and cover many areas of the department, the time management tools and flexible approach I employ in my role allow me to fulfil the majority of my daily responsibilities. Using examples from my recent working practice and compiling them within a hypothetical working day demonstrates my approach to prioritising, delegating, and ensuring task delivery by showing that even when unexpected tasks arise, I can mitigate them successfully with support from my team. This format also evidences the diversity of communication techniques I employ within my role, and how they each allow me to convey information effectively to different audiences. Overall, although this essay does not capture the full range of my responsibilities, these focused examples provide a holistic insight into my professional practice.

Bibliography

Allen, D. (2015) *Getting Things Done*. London: Penguin Publishing

Beaumont, J., Gledhill, A., Lee-Thorp, J. and Montgomery, J. (2013) 'Childhood diet: a closer examination of the evidence from dental tissues using stable isotope analysis of incremental human dentine', *Archaeometry*, 55(2), pp. 277-295. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4754.2012.00682.x>

Beaumont, J. and Montgomery, J. (2015) 'Oral Histories: A simple method of assigning chronological age to isotopic values from human dentine collagen', *Annals of Human Biology*, 42(4), pp. 407-414. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3109/03014460.2015.1045027>

Broome, G. (2024) *Introducing the neuroinclusive communications guide*. Available at: <https://georgiabroome.substack.com/p/introducing-the-neuroinclusive-communications> (Accessed 20th May 2025).

Canva (2025) *About Canva: empowering the world to design*. Available at: <https://www.canva.com/about/?msockid=2e7a9f102c4b648f3c808afb2d7b6570> (Accessed 20th May 2025).

Harvard Business Review (2014) *20 minute manager: delegating work*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press

Johnson, L. (2019) *What is continuing professional development (CPD)?* Available at: <https://career-advice.jobs.ac.uk/career-development/what-is-continuing-professional-development-cpd/#:~:text=reading%20about%20new%20technologies%2C%20new,can%20do%20today%20or%20tomorrow>. (Accessed 19th May 2025).

MI Talent (2022) *The TALENT Commission: Technical skills, roles and careers in UK higher education and research*. Birmingham: Midlands Innovation.

Sherrington, T. and Stafford, S. (2019) *Great teaching techniques: Deliberate vocabulary development*. Available at: <https://my.chartered.college/research-hub/great-teaching-techniques-deliberate-vocabulary-development/> (Accessed 20th May 2025).