

Time Management

Time management is a combination of skills. Determining priorities, planning, and executing, along with good communication so everyone involved can be more productive and efficient.

- More gets achieved and opportunities are maximised.
- Problems are foreseen and prepared for or eliminated.
- Stress is reduced leading to a more pleasant work environment and enjoyable home life.
- A calm, collected demeanour sends a message of capability and competence.

1. A prioritised 'to-do' list

A great to-do list helps keep you focused on priorities and needs to be written with priorities in mind. It's a place to record all the things you *must*, *could*, or *should* do, in any given day, week, etc. By keeping a prioritised list, with tasks under the *must*, *should*, and *could* headings, you should start to find you are more efficient and feel more in control. It will also help you manage the temptation to tackle the easy or most interesting tasks, when priorities should come first.

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	<p>A</p> <p>Important & urgent</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Urgent but not important</p>
Not important	<p>C</p> <p>Important but not urgent</p>	<p>D</p> <p>Not urgent and not important</p>

- Important and urgent. Do immediately, before anything else.
- Urgent but not important. Ideally delegate or sort quickly and move on.
- Important but not urgent. Plan sufficient time to do this well and deliver to deadline.
- Not urgent and not important. Do these things need to be done at all?

2. Planning

Once you've established priorities, make sure you consider the duration of tasks and give yourself a realistic time frame blocked out in your diary.

It's best to plan your work for the day/week/month by putting things in your diary straight after you have completed your list. This is a good way to see the bigger picture. It will either make you feel calmer if it looks manageable or make you realise you can't fit it all in.

If you can't fit it in, you might need to do more work on your prioritisation, or talk to your manager to get help with prioritising or sorting it out. Either way, it gives you a chance to do something about it or discuss it with your manager nice and early.

A big part of being an effective planner is ensuring you are a strong, timely communicator. This might involve ensuring everyone else involved understands in plenty of time what is going on with your part of the work, or communicating in advance so colleagues know not to disturb you, unless it's critical, so you can get your work done.

This level of communication does less to upset work relations than trying to communicate when you are under pressure. Also consider moving to a quiet place, to avoid distractions, if you are struggling to focus.

Writing notes of conversations or requests can be a great help to ensure you have an immediate reference, as recall when we are busy isn't always as good as it could be. Using a tablet or a book dedicated to your notes, will eliminate time spent looking for a loose note or asking a colleague to refresh your memory. It's also helpful to have a lasting record of conversations, messages, action plans, and ideas, which you can refer back to.

You might want to set up a filing system on your computer or tablet, or divide the book up into different sections for the various aspects of your role, to find things easily. It can be good to archive these once you have moved onto a new book. It's surprising how often you may wish to revisit something.

Always make sure you update your list at the end of each day. You should spend 15 minutes looking at what is remaining on your list, and planning a new list for the following day. It's not bad to have things left on your list, as long as they are not the most important things.

By spending 15 minutes each evening, you can leave work feeling organised and switch off, no longer worrying about what you need to remember for the next day. You will also start your new day focused on the things that matter most.

3. Executing

If you have all these techniques in place and you still get to the end of every day feeling overwhelmed, it may be that you are simply trying to fit too much into a day or need a decent holiday. If it's not just that, take some time to consider if some more training would make a difference, or if the systems need improving or updating.

It's a good idea to write a work diary for a week and then, looking at each task or area, work out what is taking the most time, down to the least time. Compare these with your priorities. Something you had not previously considered might suddenly jump out at you. Consider talking to your manager or taking action. This could mean work needs to be reallocated or more resource recruited.