

Manage Your Time

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Time is an equally shared resource.
Each of us has 24 hours in a day.

Time cannot be stopped or saved
for later use.

We manage our time by deciding
how to use it, and which activities
will benefit us most.



We view time in different ways. When we view time chronologically, we are measuring it in seconds, minutes and hours. Being paid by the hour or by the month puts a dollar value on your chronological time. Chronologically, no second is worth more than any other second. But we can also view time another way—by associating it with the value we get from its use. Some activities may mean more to you than others.

Your cultural background may influence how you view time. If you are from a Northern European ancestry, you may seem time-dominated, and prefer to do one thing at a time to complete work within a schedule. To you, efficiency may mean doing more within the time available. You hate to lose time, so you seize the present and make it work for you in the future. If you are from a Southern European, Asian or Arabic culture, you may view time as circular. You expect the future to look like the past, with time moving through cyclic periods. Instead of seeing time as racing away, you expect unused time to come around again, so that when the same opportunities appear you will be wiser about how to use it. Consider how your cultural background affects the way you plan and manage time.

*Both cited in Bauer, J. It's Time!

Some people think of time management as “putting first things first.” Others think of it as doing things efficiently.

Time management is self-management. “You can’t master your time unless you’re first willing to master yourself,” notes Gerald Achenback.* No one else can manage time for you.

The way you manage your time can affect people with whom you work and interact, just as their time management can affect you.

Effective time management means deciding which activity should be done from all the possibilities available, and then doing it. It is a matter of setting priorities. Deciding which jobs are most important and working on those may be better than doing less important jobs, no matter how efficiently. In *Guidance for Living*, Bernard Meltzer notes, “Hard work is often the easy work you did not do at the proper time.”

We often think of time wasters such as phone calls, meetings, visitors, paperwork, children or other interruptions and delays as beyond our control. A closer look usually reveals that we cause these problems by failing to delegate, letting minor jobs interfere with a big job, allowing people to interrupt us at any time, failing to make a clear plan and set priorities, and procrastinating.

Some activities are so important that it doesn’t matter how much time they require. Examples include visiting a sick friend or being a good parent. People tend to value the activities that involve personal relationships.

The three time management tools presented here can help you understand how you use and manage your time now, and identify changes you might want to make.

Three Tools for Taking Charge of Your Time

Tool 1: 24-Hour Time Log and Chart



Successful time managers keep track of how they spend their time. The chart below is a good way to track your time use. Use it for a few days or weeks to check how you tend to spend your time and spot changes that could make the greatest difference. Do you allow enough time to stay healthy and be productive? Is more time used for some activities than you thought?

Start at the center of the chart with the blocks numbered (1). Cross out the (1) square for the first hour used for any of the four types of activities. Cross out (2) for the second hour used for the same activity.

WORK (JOB) ACTIVITIES						PERSONAL WORK ACTIVITIES					
24	23	21	18	14	10	10	14	18	21	23	24
22	20	17	13	9	6	6	9	13	17	20	22
19	16	12	8	5	3	3	5	8	12	16	19
15	11	7	4	2	1	1	2	4	7	11	15
15	11	7	4	2	1	1	2	4	7	11	15
19	16	12	8	5	3	3	5	8	12	16	19
22	20	17	13	9	6	6	9	13	17	20	22
24	23	21	18	14	10	10	14	18	21	23	24
PERSONAL MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES						PERSONAL FUN ACTIVITIES					

Adapted from: “How Do You Spend Your Time?” unpublished handout for Extension Agent Staff Development by Dr. Jan Armstrong, Extension Specialist, Purdue University.

When you finish, 24 squares should be marked for each day. See the example below as a guide.

Work (Job) Activities include paid work and household work that supports your family.

Personal Work Activities are things you need to or want to do away from your job, such as meetings, shopping, hobbies, special interests, reading for growth, church work, and community service.

Personal Maintenance Activities include eating, sleeping, getting dressed, exercising, etc.

Personal Fun Activities are things you do just for enjoyment, such as talking with friends, going to movies or parties, reading for fun, playing sports, or playing with children.

Example:

If you use your time this way. . .

Number of Hours	Activity
8	Work (Job)
3	Personal Work
2	Personal Fun
11	Personal Maintenance

your chart will look like the one below.

When you have an accurate picture of how you use your time, decide which activities were most rewarding and which were not worth the time spent. Plan how you will

use your next 3 days to get more return for each hour.

Tool 2: Self-Assessment of Thinking Styles and Time Management Skills



Ann McGee-Cooper's Self-Assessment of Thinking Styles and Time Management Skills will help you learn if you are right- or left-brain dominant. Right- and left-brain dominant people manage time differently.

Left-brain dominant individuals concentrate on the job and do one thing at a time. They take time commitments and promptness seriously. They seek information, but adhere rigorously to plans. Respecting privacy, they hesitate to interrupt others and expect short-term relationships.

Right-brain dominant people do many things at once, change plans often, are easily distracted and interrupted, and focus more on how they do the job than on the information needed for the job. They think of time commitments as objectives to achieve, if possible. They are more committed to people and human relationships than to the jobs to be done. They do first the things that are most important to people whose relationships they want to build, so they have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships.

WORK (JOB) ACTIVITIES

PERSONAL WORK ACTIVITIES

24	23	21	18	14	10	10	14	18	21	23	24
22	20	17	13	9	X	6	9	13	17	20	22
19	16	12	X	X	X	X	5	8	12	16	19
15	11	X	X	X	X	X	X	4	7	11	15
15	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	4	7	11	15
19	16	12	X	X	X	3	5	8	12	16	19
22	20	17	13	X	X	6	9	13	17	20	22
24	23	21	18	14	X	10	14	18	21	23	24

PERSONAL MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

PERSONAL FUN ACTIVITIES

Do any of these traits sound familiar? Do you find working with people with a different thinking style stressful because they don't do things your way? How can you take advantage of your different time management styles? Can you fit the job that has to be done to the style that handles it best?

Time management strategies work differently for each individual. Choose strategies that fit your time management style, but be tolerant of others in your family and work environment who use other strategies.

Read the following pairs of statements and decide which describes you best. Then

circle the number closest to the place where you fit on the line ranging from L5 (extremely organized, plan- and routine-oriented) to R5 (extremely random, flexible, spontaneous, rarely repetitious or predictable).

If you are sometimes orderly and sometimes not, you would probably fall between L3 and R3. If you are extremely organized and attracted to plans and schedules at work, but just the opposite at home, circle two numbers on the same line, one representing work and one representing your personal life. Let your intuition guide you as you rate yourself on each answer. Go with your first impulse.

Do you start your day by making a list, setting priorities, and sticking with them?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you work best by just getting started and working on several tasks at once?

Is it easy for you to prioritize tasks and know how much time to allow for each?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you find it difficult to prioritize tasks because the order and amount of time you spend on them can change hourly based on circumstances?

Do you find it easy to schedule projects and events and keep your business and social life organized with a calendar system?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you need to get into a project first to find out how long you need to spend on it, or wait until the weekend to see if you are going to be in the mood for a social event?

Does project follow-up come naturally for you? Do you enjoy buttoning down details?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you find it difficult to remember phone calls that need to be returned or questions that still need to be answered 2 weeks after a meeting?

When planning a meeting, do you like to send out an agenda in advance so that attendees will know how to prepare and what to bring?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you purposely not send out an agenda order to remain flexible and open to what each person in the group brings to the meeting?

In meetings, do you feel more satisfied when items are brought to closure?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you feel best when brainstorming new ideas, working to achieve consensus, and keeping options open?

Is it more important to you for meetings to start promptly and end on time?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Is it more important to you to be flexible, follow the group's needs, and keep going until all of the feelings and input on issues are heard and considered?

Is your desk relatively uncluttered? Do you prefer to file things in drawers and have only one project on your desk at a time?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you function best when your work is within arm's reach where you can see it, or when it is stacked in piles around you?

Do you function best when you are allowed to work on one task at a time?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you prefer to work on several projects at once so that you can transfer ideas from one task to another and shift back and forth to relieve fatigue?

Do you find it easy to say no to projects that will consume too much of your time?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you usually say yes and then find yourself spread too thin, with no time left for yourself?

If you need to communicate with someone in another office, do you prefer to send a fax or letter to provide the recipient with a written copy?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you feel that people are covered up with paper and would prefer a personal phone call? Or, better yet, would you communicate in person when possible?

Are you more likely to execute a plan that has been tried and tested before, and that has a proven track record?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you enjoy initiating a fresh approach that is uniquely designed for the situation at hand? (Do the risks seem to be balanced by the benefits of innovation?)

When you clean your desk, a closet, or the garage, is it easy for you to throw things out?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you tend to get hopelessly bogged down in trivia and remain unable to throw things out?

Do you read books and magazines front to back, scanning the table of contents to decide which articles or chapters you want to read?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you frequently read magazines back to front and browse through them, or skip to the last chapter in a book to see if you want to read the middle part?

Are you good at estimating in advance how much time tasks will require?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Are you typically unrealistic about how much time tasks will require, and stressed out with too much scheduled in too short a time?

If you have a choice, would you rather work alone in your office on paperwork with the door shut?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you find yourself drawn to people, listening to them and coaching them to create solutions, with no time for the paperwork?

If you want to put together an unassembled piece of furniture or an appliance, do you read the instructions first and follow them step-by-step?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you only read instructions when all else fails?

Do you like to plan things well in advance?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you prefer to "fly by the seat of your pants"?

When you go grocery shopping, do you typically make a list in advance, perhaps writing items down as you run out of them? Do you group the items by their location in the store?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you quickly jot down a few needs and then browse through the aisles, looking for new, interesting items? Is impulse buying half the fun? Do you wait to see what fruits and vegetables are fresh or priced well?

Is filing easy and second nature for you? Do systems and categories seem obvious? Can you locate almost everything you need because you file it when you are not working on it?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Is filing a "black hole" that frustrates and confuses you? Can you think of four titles for each folder, which are useless anyway because you usually end up with more than one file for each project?

Do you almost always wear a watch?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you purposely look for times in your life when you can avoid wearing a watch? Is it important to you to respect your intuition and natural rhythms?

Do you pride yourself on punctuality and arrive a few minutes early to almost every appointment?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you often find yourself running late, pushing deadlines, and pressed for time?

Do you thrive on a predictable schedule and sequence of tasks? Do you get up, exercise, shower, dress, and eat in a regular sequence?

L5 4 3 2 1 0 1 2 3 4 5R

Do you enjoy changing your routine and surprising yourself?

Do you spend your time primarily on “doing,” getting things done, and being productive?

L54321012345R

Do you weed out paper and belongings often and systematically, bringing things into order and eliminating the unnecessary?

L54321012345R

Do you spend some time just “being,” relaxing, and enjoying being alive?

Do you wish order would magically appear? Does your fun come from starting projects, not from cleaning up, bringing order, or throwing out the trivia?

Did you have more L or more R ratings? How strong is your tendency to be left- or right- brain driven? Is your time management style similar to or very different from other family members or co-workers? How can your similar or different time management style make time management more challenging or easier?

It makes sense to focus our time more on the things we value before we are pressured to do them. When we aren't under pressure, we can be more creative, take time to gather more information, and try several approaches before finishing the task. The result is a feeling of greater control over our time and greater satisfaction with the results.

How might you change your use of time to focus more on tasks you value before you are under pressure to do them?

Tool 3: Planning Time Use With Priorities in Mind



Time is somewhat like money. The way we use it tells us and people around us what we value. What does your 24-hours time use chart say about what you value?

If you know how you typically use time and understand your time management or thinking style, you are better prepared to plan your use of time. Many daily and monthly time planning tools are available on the market. Check them out. You may find one that fits your management style and time demands.

Check your chart and ask yourself how much time you are using for activities that produce results you value? How much of your time is spent for activities that are pressing? How much time must be used to do tasks with results you do not value? Think about how valuable and how pressing the tasks are that you are planning to do. You aren't alone if you find yourself with a long list of pressing tasks with results you value, and a long list of tasks that are not pressing and are of little value to you. It is easy to let important things slide until you are under pressure to get them done, and instead to do easy or enjoyable tasks that are not very important.

Planning by Priority

Regardless of the tool you choose, plan first to do the things that will give you the greatest results or satisfaction, or help meet your most pressing responsibilities. One option is to make sure you plan time to work toward your goals. Goals are personal statements about what we value enough to try to accomplish. You likely have goals for each role you play in life, such as spouse, parent, child, employee or volunteer. The following planning guide may help you plan with priorities in mind.

List your goals for each life role. Place a letter of the alphabet by each goal, such as A, B and C.

Look at your past month's calendar and see if you did anything toward your goals. If not, why not? Is your time filled by activities that don't help you reach your goals? Figure out what you can drop to make time for tasks that help you reach your goals.

Use the next chart to list things you need and want to do for the next 3 months, and then rate each task. Check the "V" column if you value greatly the positive or negative consequences of doing or not doing the task. Check the "P" column if you are under pressure to do the task right away.

Last, write in the letter representing the goal each activity will help you reach. Are there planned activities that will not help you reach your goals? If so, do you need to drop those activities or add other goals so that your goals are compatible with things you must do? Now write specific things you will do in the months ahead to ensure progress toward reaching your goals before they become critical.

In addition to planning activities that will help you reach your goals, it is also important to plan ways to keep yourself in shape physically, mentally, spiritually, socially and emotionally. If you have no activities on your calendar leading to your personal well-being, plan for them. Add activities you enjoy which you are not under pressure to do.

Life Role:

Goal Letter	Goals

Life Role:

Goal Letter	Goals

Life Role:

Goal Letter	Goals

Summary

Time is a personal resource; only you can manage it to achieve your goals. Other people may influence your choices about how you use your time, but you make the choices. Choices may depend on your personal needs or your feeling of responsibility to others. Choices may depend on your willingness to accept responsibility for the consequences of your choices, or your preference for shifting responsibility to others when important tasks go undone. Remember that effective time management focuses less on getting more things done, and more on doing the right things at the right time. Choose ways to schedule your time that fit your management style. You may do best by planning several tasks that can be done at the same time, or you may do best by focusing on one task at a time. There may be times of the day when you are most productive.

Time management involves knowing how you are using your time now and identifying changes in ways you use time that will give you greater return and more satisfaction.

If you use any of these time management tools, please share the results with your county Extension agent—family and consumer sciences. The phone number is listed with your county government offices. Let your agent know if the tools are useful, whether or not you found ways to change your use of time to achieve the results you wanted, and information you want to share about any problems encountered in using the tools.

Take time to put this information to work for you and your family.

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