

About Time

Time Management

Objectives

- A** Describe the nature of time and time management.
- B** Describe time-management principles.
- C** Demonstrate time-management processes and techniques.



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Table of Contents

A	What Is Time Management?	2
B	The Basics of Time Management	8
C	Putting Time Management Into Action	13
So What?	Why bother learning about time management?	2
THE GRAY ZONE	What would you do?	7



Poor Mike is ready to tear his hair out. He was 20 minutes late to his meeting this morning because he couldn't find his presentation notes (which had somehow found their way into the back of his filing cabinet), missed the beginning of the meeting, and had to ask a coworker to bring him up to speed when he got there. Halfway through his presentation, he realized he was using the wrong draft of his notes. He finished the presentation by "winging it," knowing he wasn't doing as good a job as he could have. After the meeting, Mike went straight back to work on his quarterly reports for his supervisor, Marilyn. At 5:00 p.m., Marilyn stuck her head in the door of Mike's office. "Got those reports ready for me?" she asked. "What?" Mike answered in surprise. "They aren't due until next Friday, right?" Marilyn sighed and shook her head. "No, Mike, they're due *this* Friday, as in *today*!"

Does this story sound familiar to you? Maybe you're not as stressed out as Mike, but chances are your time-management skills could use improvement as well. As you graduate from high school or college and begin your career, your professional (as well as personal!) success hinges upon your ability to manage time wisely. Read on to learn more about what time management is, and how you can use it to keep up at work and still have enough time for a social life.

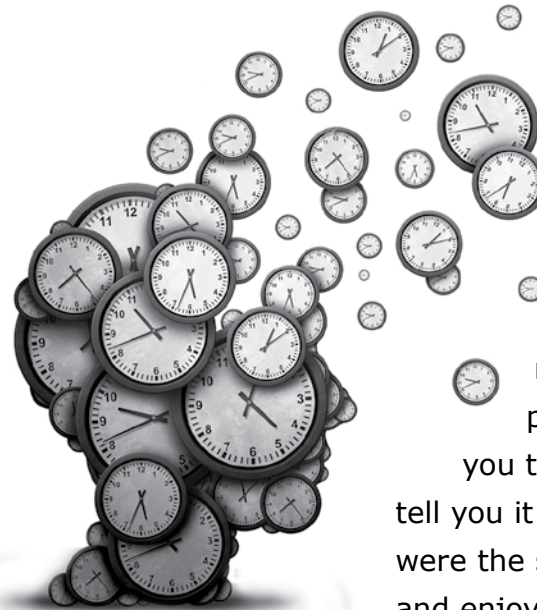
A

What Is Time Management?

What is time?

Sometimes the concept of "time" seems pretty abstract. You can't see time, touch it, hear it, or taste it. So how can you be expected to *manage* it?

It's important to start thinking of your time as a natural resource, just as you would think of your health, your energy, your intelligence, and relationships with friends, family, and coworkers. None of these things is tangible, yet they can all be wasted or squandered if you don't take care of them properly.



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Time is a very **valuable** resource. Perhaps at this point in your life, time seems to be passing very slowly. You're anxious to be finished with school, to start your career, to make more money, and to get that promotion. It seems as if all those things are so far away right now. But if you talk to your parents or grandparents, they will tell you that "time flies." They will probably tell you it seems like only yesterday that they were the same age as you are. Learn to value and enjoy all the time that is yours *right now*.

Time is an absolutely **free** resource. You will never have to pay a single dime for the time you've been given, but on the flip side, you can never buy any more of it. If extra time were for sale, how many people do you think would pay to add more hours to their day? Would you?

Time is an **equally distributed** resource. For every day of your life, you have 24 hours—no more, no less. It doesn't matter how much money you have, how smart you are, or where you live—you get 24 hours. Time is the one natural resource that everyone has equal access to.

What is time management?

Time management refers to how people use the 24 hours in their day to effectively accomplish goals. In many ways, however, the term "time management" is misleading. Time itself is not under our control, but our actions are. If we learn to act in a way that makes the most of our time, then we are using the resource wisely. In *The Time Trap*, a classic book on time management, Alec Mackenzie makes the following observation: "We cannot manage time. We can only manage *ourselves* in relation to time. We cannot control how much time we have; we can only control how we use it. We cannot choose *whether* to spend it, but only how."

How will you choose to spend your time? Will you use this valuable, free resource to accomplish your goals, or will you let it slip away? Will you control how you spend your time, or will time control you?



▲ Time is a precious resource. Are you using it wisely?



Read the article “Time Management Personality Types” by Susan Ward. Do you identify with any of the patterns of behavior described?
<https://www.thebalance.com/time-management-personality-types-2947337>

What time management *isn't*

You might think that learning time-management skills is going to require a lot of extra work—and you're already swamped with work to begin with! Sure, you might have to get used to a few new things at first, like setting goals and determining priorities, but in the end you'll find that spending just a few minutes a day on time management can save you many hours and help you become much more efficient! It's actually a pretty simple process.

You might also think that learning time-management skills is just a matter of common sense. You have a planner right on your desk with all your deadlines listed on it, and you add all of your meetings and appointments in your phone reminders every day. Isn't that enough? Well, it's a good start, but time management is more than just writing down appointments and project deadlines. It is a process that, when developed, can help you plan for the future and take major steps toward achieving your goals and becoming the person you want to be.



▲ While writing down your tasks and assignments is important, time management is so much more than that.

Benefits of time management

Time management can improve your quality of life. Being able to manage time not only increases productivity but also benefits you in many different ways.



Reduces stress. One of the most important effects of time management is that it helps to reduce your stress levels. Think of a time that you felt overwhelmed, when you had way too much to do in too little time. Even thinking of that time might make your heartbeat quicken and your stomach turn to knots. Those feelings of stress make it more difficult to focus and get things done, which just makes you even more stressed—it's a vicious cycle! Effective time management lessens that anxiety by allowing you to focus, comfortably reach deadlines, and be more productive.



Minimizes procrastination. *Procrastination* is putting off until tomorrow what could be done today. For example, you might find yourself waiting until the last minute to start studying for a test rather than


studying a few days in advance. Everyone procrastinates at one point or another, but the result is usually lower quality work, errors, and stress. Effective time management, however, makes it easier to avoid procrastination overall. When you're using time in the right way, you won't feel as tempted to procrastinate. You'll have the tools you need to stay on task.




Helps you achieve your goals. With increased productivity comes success. You'll reach deadlines, hit key targets, and finish tasks on time. Time management helps you more easily focus on the most important work you need to do to reach important objectives. You'll be on a direct path toward your goals.



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 **Improves self-confidence.** Because you're achieving your goals thanks to time management, you'll feel much more confident about yourself and your abilities. You'll know that you're capable of success, and you might even feel ready to take on new responsibilities and challenges.

 **Gives you more opportunities and free time.** Free time is time that is not allocated to scheduled or planned duties and responsibilities. Everyone needs free time to rest, relax, and recharge. When you manage your time well, you'll have more of it available to be spent in any way you want! You can even use that time to find new opportunities, such as doing some freelance work on the side, joining a recreational sports league, or learning to play an instrument.



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The video "Benefits of Time Management Skills—Too Many to Count" reinforces the importance of time management: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8p9Fg1H-RY>.



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▲ *In your spare time, you could learn a new skill, such as coding or web design, that could help you in your future.*

Summary

Time is a natural resource. It is very valuable, absolutely free, and distributed equally to everyone. Time management refers to how wisely people choose to use this resource to accomplish goals. We can't really manage time; we can only manage ourselves in relation to time. Time management does not require a lot of extra work and is more than just common sense—it can help you plan your future and achieve your goals. Time management can improve the quality of your life in many ways, including reducing stress, minimizing procrastination, helping you achieve your goals, improving self-confidence, and giving you more opportunities and free time.

THE GRAY ZONE

Danielle considers herself a pretty good time manager. She's organized, punctual, and keeps her goals, objectives, and to-do lists up to date. But like anyone, Danielle sometimes falls behind or forgets to write down a deadline in her planner.

Yesterday afternoon, Danielle had planned to work on her presentation for today's meeting, but she was sidetracked by several phone calls she needed to take. Now, it's 8:00 a.m., and Danielle has only one hour left to complete her presentation. Unfortunately, that hour is filled by an all-employee meeting in the conference room. While her supervisor talks about some new company policies, Danielle appears to be taking notes, but she's really putting the finishing touches on her 9:00 a.m. presentation. There are so many people in the conference room that she's positive no one will notice what she's doing.

Danielle smiles—she's pretty sure that getting work for one meeting accomplished during another meeting is making great use of her time. It's multitasking! What do you think? Is Danielle managing her time wisely? Or is she acting unethically?


TOTAL RECALL


1. List and describe three characteristics of time.
2. Describe time management.
3. List and describe two things that time management isn't.
4. List five benefits of having time-management skills.

The Basics of Time Management

General principles of time management

Before you learn how to make a time-management plan for yourself, it's important to understand some of the general principles of time management.

 **Focus on goals, not on tasks.** Activity is not the same thing as results. For instance, you spent four hours today working on the McMillan family's tax return, but where are you in terms of finishing it? 60 percent finished? 85 percent finished? Measuring your work this way will help keep you focused on the bigger picture.

 **Determine which tasks are important and urgent.** Not all tasks are the same. Some can be categorized as important, which means they are essential for achieving your goals. Urgent tasks are those that demand immediate attention. An urgent task isn't necessarily important, and important tasks are not necessarily urgent. For example, answering a phone call is urgent because if you don't pick up right away, you'll miss the call. However, that phone call might be from a telemarketer who is selling a product that you have no interest in. Also, some tasks are neither important nor urgent, such as redesigning your email signature or reading a funny article that a friend posted online. These types of tasks should be limited or avoided if possible because they won't lead to any results.



▲ *When you've spent hours studying, remind yourself that you're one step closer to finishing the class and graduating.*



Know when and how you work best. Everyone has a “peak” time of the day. Yours may be first thing in the morning when you arrive at work or in the afternoon just after your lunch break. As much as possible, you should plan tasks that require a lot of energy or concentration for this time. Everyone also has an ideal environment for tasks such as writing or researching. You may love the quiet solitude of your private office, or the silence might drive you crazy. Either way, find the place that works best for you and work there. You’ll make better use of your time that way.



Don’t bite off more than you can chew. ▶▶

No matter how good you are at time management, you’ll still be stressed if you agree to take on seven new projects at work. If you spread yourself too thin and rush from task to task, you’ll never really give any of them your best effort. So, as much as your job situation will allow, try not to overschedule yourself or agree to activities that are too challenging. It is important to learn how to say “no” when you cannot successfully take on another responsibility.

Accountability



Be flexible. Even a master of time management will encounter frequent interruptions and unexpected changes to his/her schedule. You may have planned on spending the afternoon making follow-up sales calls, but then your boss tells you he needs your full attention on the new trainee. Or you may have been planning a lazy, relaxing weekend at home, but then you find out you have to fly to Toronto for a trade show. Don’t get upset when you get thrown a curveball. Try to have a backup plan in place in case your original schedule needs to be rearranged.





Plan meetings wisely. Working with a group may very well be one of the most important skills you'll need in your career. Meetings can be very productive, but they can also be huge wastes of time if you don't manage them well. The most efficient meetings are ones that start on time and focus on the topics at hand. Leave the socializing for later.



Brian Tracy's video "How to Conduct Effective Meetings" provides several time-saving tips to help you make the most of your meetings:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wm0XtZ_K3kA.



Learn to be on time. Part of time management is respecting others' time as well as your own. Arrive at work and for meetings on time. Don't make people wait for you. Always give yourself a few extra minutes just to be on the safe side.



Get enough sleep. Getting the proper amount of rest is crucial for taking on the responsibilities and activities of the day ahead. If you're not getting enough sleep, you may need to actually plan more into your schedule. You should also try your best to eat healthy foods and exercise. When you're feeling your best, your work will reflect that.



Divide large projects into smaller parts. Be realistic about how long it will take you to finish the first draft of that article or paint the Molinas' house. Then, set smaller deadlines for yourself along the way to make sure you're staying on task. Always leave yourself a few extra days in case something unexpected happens and you need a little more time to finish.



▲ You can use charts like this one to help you visualize the breakdown of your work.



Make the most of your down time. You may not have a task scheduled for every minute of your day. When you have free time or have a spare 20 minutes before your next commitment, use it wisely. Get to that list of things you need to do but haven't had time for yet, such as catching up on emails or getting a head start on next month's presentation.



Avoid interruptions and distractions. Interruptions and distractions can come in many forms—coworkers and supervisors, noisy offices and office equipment, telephone calls, and the Internet, just to name a few. You must learn how to encounter distractions without becoming sidetracked from whatever you're working on. You might have to enforce strict "no interruptions" hours for your office or surrender your cell phone while you are working, so you won't be tempted to answer it.



To learn more about eliminating time wasters, watch this video that discusses three easy steps to improving your time management:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUk6LXRZMMk>.

The role of organization in time management

Time management and organization are two skills that go hand in hand. If you think about it, time management is really just "organizing" your time. Being organized in other areas of your life will also help you manage your time more effectively.

Organizing space. It's tough to be efficient when you are surrounded by a giant mess. Keep your office or workspace clean and find a place to put everything. Store things you rarely use in the hardest-to-reach places, and store things you use often where you can easily find them. Use labels so you don't have to dig to find what you're looking for. Not only will you save time, you'll feel less stressed.



▲ *It is so much easier to sit down and work if your desk is neat than if it is cluttered and disorganized.*



Organizing information. Papers can pile up quickly, so never keep any that you don't need. Get rid of all the papers you no longer need, then organize your important papers by subject so you can easily find them. Keep all your important phone numbers and addresses in one place as well. And remember that electronic information needs to be organized, too. Take time to categorize computer files in a way that makes it easy to find what you need and regularly delete unnecessary documents.

Summary

Before you learn how to make a time-management plan for yourself, it's important to understand some of the general principles of time management, such as planning meetings wisely and dividing large projects into smaller parts. Organizing space and information is also essential to managing time wisely.

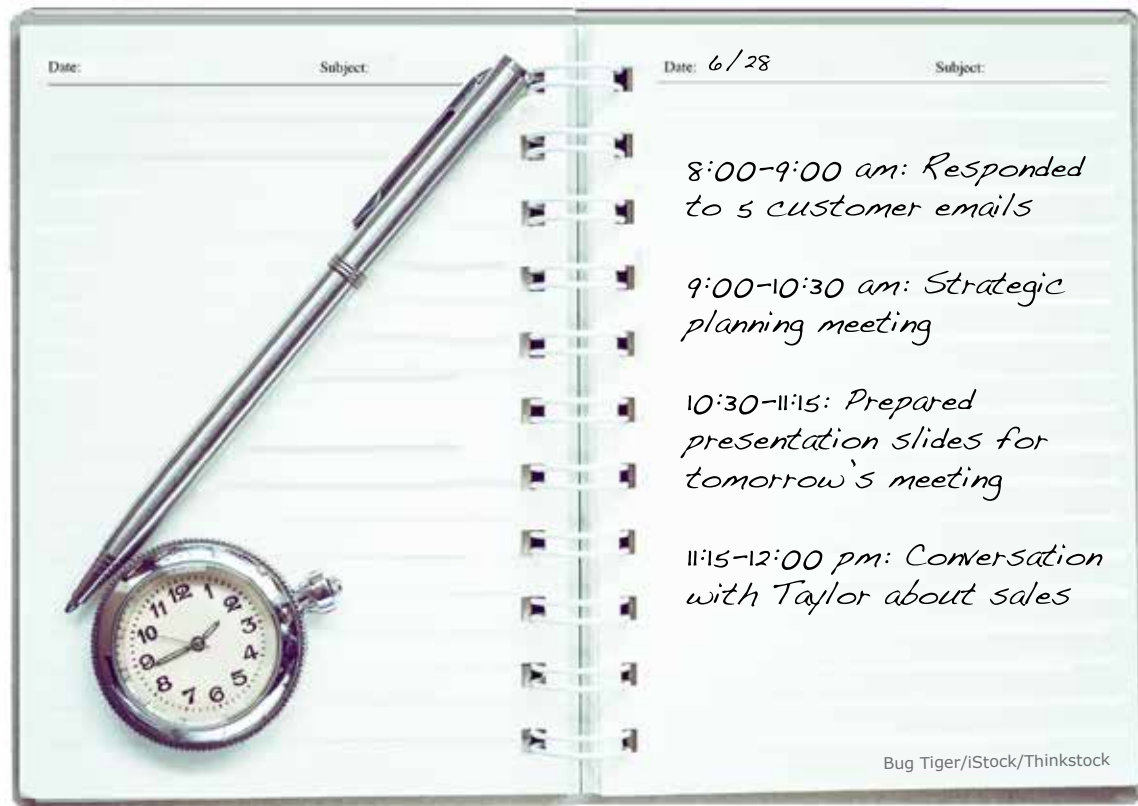
TOTAL RECALL

1. Give four general principles of time management.
2. Describe how to organize space.
3. Describe how to organize information.

Putting Time Management Into Action

Keeping a time log

Before you set up your time-management plan, you may find it helpful to keep a time log for a week or so. A time log is a detailed record of how you spend your time. As you go through the day, write down everything you do, what time you started, what time you finished or switched to something else, and how much you accomplished. At the end of the week, you should have a better idea of how much time you're actually spending on important activities, when you're most productive, and what your personal time thieves are. Armed with this knowledge, you'll be ready to start managing your time more effectively.



Susan Ward's article "The First Step to Time Management for Business Success" offers helpful tips for time and activity tracking: <https://www.thebalance.com/the-first-step-to-time-management-for-business-success-2947280>.

The time-management process:

Set goals.

The first step in the time-management process is setting goals. To use your time wisely, you must know what you are working toward. **Goals** are statements that you make, telling yourself what you want to achieve. Goals come in many shapes and sizes. Some you make for yourself, and some your teacher, boss, or supervisor makes for you. Some are long term, such as what you want to accomplish in your career by the time you turn 35, and some are short term, such as how much of your design you want to have finished by Tuesday.

Make a list of all your goals. Next, rate each goal in order of its importance. Use a method that makes sense to you. For example, you could use letters to indicate each goal's importance ("A" for most important, "B" for somewhat important, and "C" for least important)—also known as the **ABC principle**. You could also use numbers or even symbols, such as stars (three stars for most important, and so on). Note whether each goal is long term, short term, or somewhere in between. Don't be afraid to revise your goal list as your career needs and wants change (they definitely will!).



▲ When setting your goals, make sure they are SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. SMART goals are easier to track and achieve.

2 Identify objectives.

The second step in the time-management process is identifying objectives. Objectives are concrete tasks that will help you on your way to achieving your goals. For instance, let's say one of your goals is to read 10 new articles related to your career path. An objective for that goal might be to read at least two articles this week. List and rank your objectives in the same way you listed and ranked your goals.

3-5 Create monthly, weekly, and daily to-do lists.

The third, fourth, and fifth steps in the time-management process are creating to-do lists on a monthly, weekly, and daily basis. A **to-do list** is simply a list of objectives that you want to accomplish during a specific time frame. Look at your big list of objectives. Which must be accomplished this month? Transfer those to your monthly list. Now, out of those, which must be achieved this week? Transfer those to your weekly list. Each day, look at your weekly list and decide which objectives to transfer to your daily to-do list. When you break down your objectives this way, they are much more manageable, and you will never feel overwhelmed.



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This video from MindTools helps you learn how to effectively use to-do lists: https://youtu.be/Z_Lz6AFgeFE.

6 Prioritize daily activities.

The sixth step in the time-management process is prioritizing your daily activities. Out of all the objectives that have made their way to your daily to-do list, which are most important? You can rank these using the same method you used for your goals. Be extremely cautious not to overload yourself. You can only accomplish so much in the span of one day. One rule of thumb says to give yourself no more than three top-priority objectives per day.

7 Schedule daily activities.

The seventh step in the time-management process is scheduling your daily activities. Set specific times for each item on your to-do list, always keeping in mind the need for flexibility if unexpected circumstances arise. It's important to keep your schedule in one place so you always know where to find it. Stores offer a variety of planners and organizers that will suit your needs. Choose one you like and use it to schedule all your appointments, meetings, and deadlines, as well as to keep your to-do lists and goal lists. Keeping all this important information in one place will save you time and keep you focused.



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▲ To stick to your schedule, check in and make sure that you don't lose track of time.

When scheduling your activities, try to group related activities together. For example, if you have several errands to run, it makes sense to run all of the errands at once rather than continuously breaking up the rest of your day with them.

Another important thing to remember during scheduling is to stick to your time limits. Set an amount of time to spend on each activity, and try not to go over that time. If you just finished writing an article, but you want to go over it one more time, give yourself an hour and then turn the article in. If you don't limit your time on individual activities, you will struggle to manage all that you have to do.

Follow your plan!

The final step in the time-management process is putting your plan into action. All the planning in the world doesn't help if you don't stick to the schedule you have made for yourself. Of course, some days will require you to be more flexible with your schedule than others, but having a framework to refer to will help keep you on track even when work gets crazy. To encourage yourself to stick to your plan, treat yourself to a reward after you've successfully followed your schedule. Once you start implementing time-management skills in your life, they will become like second nature to you. Time management is vital, but it can also be kept very simple.



imtmphoto/iStock/Thinkstock

▲ *When you follow your plan, you'll accomplish your goals—and that's a reason to celebrate!*

Summary

Keeping a time log for a week or so can help you see how you're really spending your time and identify your personal time thieves. The steps in the time-management process are setting goals; identifying objectives; creating monthly, weekly, and daily to-do lists; prioritizing daily activities; scheduling daily activities; and following your plan.

TOTAL RECALL

1. Describe how to use a time log.
2. List the eight steps in the time-management process.
3. What are objectives?
4. What is a to-do list?