Time management
And productivity
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Common Problems

Overcommitting

Procrastination

Busyness

Perfectionism

Disorganization

Distracting workspace

Hugh Kearns, Maria Gardiner & Kelly Marshall (2008) Innovation in PhD completion: the hardy shall succeed (and be happy!)
Plan for talk

Managing multiple engagements

Managing a single engagement

Managing the day-to-day
managing multiple engagements
Overcommitting
Taking on so many things that your high priority goals suffer.
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Technique: setting your priorities.
Exercise 1: list your priorities

Take a few moments to make an ordered list of your priorities.

Some examples:

- Research
- Mental and physical well-being
- Time with friends and family
- Religious or community engagement
- Coursework
- Hobbies
Busyness/Procrastination

Looking like you are very busy, but in reality only less important things are getting done.
Busyness/Procrastination

Looking like you are very busy, but in reality only less important things are getting done.

**Technique:** Set goals for your priorities. Schedule time to achieve the goals.
Exercise 2a: Setting goals

Pick one of the priorities you listed and set a 1 week goal for that priority, along with the number of hours it will take (approximately)
Exercise 2b: Scheduling time for your goals

Now make time in your schedule to achieve your goal.
**FB ads meeting**

- **Date and Time:** Wed 2/26/2020 10:10 AM - 11:10 AM
- **Location:**
  - Palak Jain didn’t respond.

Things we will have done before this meeting:

1. Palak will learn about how to link a business account to an ad account and run ads.
2. Marika will learn about A/B testing and make a document with the important stuff.
Overworking

Working to an unhealthy amount.
Overworking

Working to an unhealthy amount.

**Technique:** Give your brain a rest.
Part 2: managing a single engagement
Focus on the Task at Hand

When managing a single engagement, it’s best to put all the focus on the task at hand.

- **Examples:**
  - Distracting music
  - Anxious about something else

- **Suggestions:**
  - Turn off music and other forms of entertainment
  - Relax and don’t stress
  - Don’t worry about the next thing
Be Thorough

Take care in the work you do.

● Examples:
  ○ Not testing software for bugs in the early stages of development
  ○ Hand waving a proof, only to discover unsoundness much latter

● Suggestions:
  ○ Try to catch mistakes as early as possible
  ○ Develop a habit of checking
Perfectionism

Setting unrealistic and impossible expectations.

● Examples:
  ○ Overextending on a project
  ○ Overly fussy about every detail

● Suggestions:
  ○ This is very normal
  ○ Get a high level overview, then decide if details are worth pursuing
  ○ Know when to say “It’s good enough”
Splitting a Large Task

Splitting a large task into smaller pieces may be helpful

- **Examples:**
  - Implementing a large piece of software in self contained modules
  - Postulate certain lemmas as true, work on them later
  - Writing a paper in sections
- **Suggestions:**
  - Working on smaller tasks is less daunting.
  - Working on a large monolithic task can be dull.
  - Think about how a task can fit into your current schedule.
Be Flexible

Planning out tasks and engagements is a good habit for time management, but adhering to a plan strictly and mechanically might not be optimal.

● **Examples:**
  ○ Setting aside 2 hours for some problem, getting stuck during the first 10 minutes and not doing anything else.
  ○ Getting very close to solving a problem, giving up because the allotted time has run out.

● **Suggestions:**
  ○ Allow some degree of leeway in a day’s plan
  ○ Staring at a problem is not always helpful, putting it down temporarily can be more beneficial
  ○ Plan in advance in case of emergency situations
Be reasonable

Some tasks are simply too much to accomplish in a certain amount of time.

● Examples:
  ○ Only setting aside a single day for a large project
  ○ Taking on problems well beyond your abilities

● Suggestions:
  ○ Select tasks with reasonable difficulty
  ○ Don’t let ego cloud your judgement
  ○ Compromises sometimes have to be made
Managing the day to day

- Have a runner’s mindset.
- Be goal oriented.
- Be temperate in all (other) things.
The runner's mindset is important:

- Always look forward.
- Stop looking at previous mistakes and mishaps.
- Get used to that “good feeling” after “running”.
Be goal oriented.

Don’t punch in the air.
Organize your day (don’t punch in the air)

- Not developing a routine or system that makes managing your time and life easier will make you waste a lot of effort.

- Example:
  - Forgetting something important that needs to be done on time.
  - Over-exerting short term, underperforming long term.
- The first thing you should do in the morning is to plan your day.
  - Rank tasks by urgency and importance.

- Keep this plan always in mind throughout your day.
  - Humans like to work towards goals.

- Be sure to keep this plan in mind throughout your day.

Set goals.

SMART goals:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time Based
Keep a routine!

- A regular sleep and meal schedule will go a long way.

- A routine reduces stress because it’s one less thing you have to worry about.

- There are many other benefits of routines.
The myth of multitasking

“The research is almost unanimous, […] and it says that people who chronically multitask show an enormous range of deficits. They're basically terrible at all sorts of cognitive tasks, including multitasking.”

https://www.npr.org/2013/05/10/182861382/the-myth-of-multitasking
Be temperate in other things.

(also known as)

self control.
Pay attention to where you work

- trying to work in a busy or unsuitable location or situation
- Example:
  - Disorganized desk, hard to find documents or devices
  - “Too cozy” of a working space
  - Working space that’s physically uncomfortable
- Suggestions:
  - An organized desk is always a good feeling.
  - From the audience?
The internet profits off of your attention.

The average American professional spends 2.6 hours a day checking email.

https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/average-daily-time-on-social-media
https://hbr.org/2019/01/how-to-spend-way-less-time-on-email-every-day
Suggestions to use your attention wisely

● When you work on a certain task, avoid “useful” distractions like:
  ○ Checking email.
  ○ Checking Twitter for internship positions.
  ○ Replying to texts that you have to reply to at some point, but not immediately.

● Plan dedicated times during the day to check and respond to email.
Suggestions to use your attention wisely

- Do you really need that many “productivity” apps?
- Turn on “Do Not Disturb” mode.
- Avoid using social media from working machine.
Time management tools

● A physical notebook
  ○ Super customizable
  ○ Very helpful in forming good habits since it’s an “organization-only” tool, as opposed to a phone

● Google/Outlook Calendar
  ○ Can set reminders for events through email and push notifications for events
  ○ Different calendars for class time, research meetings, seminars, office hours, etc (one can toggle things on and off easily)
  ○ Integrated with every app (Zoom, Slack, Gmail .. etc)
  ○ Hard to beat UI/UX
Pomodoro technique

- Setting a timer for 25-30 minutes to focus and then taking a 5 minute break and repeating.
- Longer 20-30 min breaks after 4 rounds of focus time (about 2 hours).