

# Prioritization



## Strategies to share with students

Suggested ideas and practices educators can share with students to support awareness of the topic and development of the skill. Strategies can be adopted/adapted as needed.

- To-do lists**

If you do not currently use a planner to organize your life, begin focusing on prioritization by making simple to-do lists of tasks you must complete. You can write daily lists and then begin building larger lists for weeks, months, terms etc. Gradually add time frames for the different tasks and prioritize these based on the deadlines.
- Time tracking**

Pick a day or week in which you will track everything you do in a day and how long it takes to do everything. People often underestimate how long it takes to complete different tasks. Consider where your time goes and how this information can inform how you prioritize.
- Eisenhower box**

Use this tool to think about your tasks and what will make you most productive. In this framework, there are four possibilities: urgent and important (tasks you will do immediately); important but not urgent (tasks you will schedule to do later); urgent but not important (tasks you will delegate to someone else); neither urgent nor important (tasks you will eliminate). Combine this strategy with time-tracking. When you have some data from time-tracking, organize all the tasks into the Eisenhower Box matrix by considering whether the tasks were urgent or important. Examine how your time is being spent in each part of the matrix and then reflect on how you can improve.



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### Consider your needs and wants

In addition to prioritizing assignments, you can prioritize other aspects of your life. Reflect on how you are spending your time and when you make a decision, consider whether the task involves a need or a want. This reflection can have a range of implications. You may be sacrificing some of your needs like food and sleep for other needs like exercise. Additionally, you may prioritize different courses based on needs and wants. You want to focus on an optional course because you enjoy the topic, but you need to take a required course that you are less interested in. This want-need relationship may then affect how you prioritize the courses and the completion of tasks related to them.



### Categorize your to-do lists into 'must-do', 'should-do', 'nice-to-do'

This is another strategy for prioritizing that can be done on a daily, weekly, monthly or semesterly basis. Reflect on how things are categorized: always categorizing everything into 'must-do' may contribute to you feeling overwhelmed to meet deadlines. Conversely, if everything is categorized as 'nice-to-do', you may not have sufficient motivation or incentive to move forward with completing the task.



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### Energy tracking

Use knowledge about your body and energy levels to determine when you should work on priority tasks. For one week, set an alarm or reminder for every hour of your day. When you receive the alert, rate your energy level from 1 to 10 on a spreadsheet. At the end of the week, calculate the average energy level for every hour of the day. Consider when you are most and least productive. If you have the most cognitive energy when you first wake up, consider prioritizing the hardest activities in that time. When you are more fatigued, you can complete the easier tasks.



### Eat the 'Frog'

The frog is something on your to-do list that you do not want to complete. You have limited motivation to tackle it and you will likely procrastinate to complete it. If you use the 'eat the frog' strategy, you will prioritize completing that difficult or frustrating task first and simply get it done. You might tackle it on a Monday at the time of day you have identified as your most productive. This commitment can build a sense of accomplishment because you completed your most difficult task first. Once it is out of the way, you can reward yourself with more pleasant tasks, and the rest of the day or week may feel easier.



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### Apply prioritization strategies to assignments and tests:

- When looking at the assignments for a course, consider what percentage of your grade each is worth to determine how long you will spend on certain tasks. For example, if you have a presentation worth 10% in the same week as a paper that is worth 45%, you want to consider the amount of time you will spend on each of those so that you are prioritizing and working efficiently.
- When you are working on one assignment, review all components of the requirements and break down the assignment into separate tasks. Think about how you will allocate time to sections of the assignment. For example, writing a section about academic literature may take more time to complete because of the additional research required.
- For test taking, review the entire test when you begin. How are the points allocated? Consider how you can use this information to prioritize different aspects of the test. This type of reflection at the beginning of the test can help you avoid running out of time and direct you to prioritize high-value questions.

