Time Management and Effectiveness in Grad School

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Research Skills Seminar, September 2010

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Effectiveness and Time Management

• Why time management matters in *grad school*
  • Many directions for research
  • Many distractions
  • High flexibility in managing your time

• Problems with time
  • I have time but don’t use it right
    • Procrastination, confusion, lack/loss of motivation
  • I have too much work and feel like drowning
    • Too many deadlines, lack of focus, stress and anxiety
Ideas from ...

- The Now Habit
  - Neil Fiore

- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
  - Stephen R. Covey

- Getting Thing Done
  - David Allen
Why We Procrastinate

- Perfectionism
- Fear of ...
  - Failure
  - Success
  - Conflict, and judgment
- Rewarding
  - Painful work
  - Work completed by someone else
  - Work becomes unnecessary
  - Difficult decisions will be made for you
  - Indirect way of resisting pressure from authorities
Procrastination Cycle

Perfectionism → Fear of failure → Procrastination

Loss of confidence → Anxiety and depression → Self-criticism

Greater fear of failure → More procrastination → ...

Procrastination → Fear of failure → Perfectionism
Walk a Board Metaphor

- **Situation A**
  - 30cm wide, 20m long, on the ground
  - OK to walk even run

- **Situation B**
  - Same as A, 100m high
  - Now it’s scary! 😊

- **Situation C**
  - Same as B, building on fire
  - Now it’s for real
    - Fear of failure goes away
    - Fear of imperfection goes away
    - Focus on solution not worry
Procrastinator’s Pattern

- Raise the board
  - Perfectionism
- Get frozen
  - Fear of failure, ...
- Set building on fire
  - Increase urgency/threat bigger than fear of failure
- Move!
Breaking the Pattern

• Situation D
  • Same as B, no fire, *support net*
  • Can be OK with a bit of practice

• Support net
  • It’s OK to be imperfect
  • It’s OK to fail
    • You can always recover
  • Sense of worth
Quadrant II Time Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Urgent</td>
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### Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
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</table>
| • Assignments, exams  
  • Deadlines  
    • Paper submissions  
    • Course projects  
    • ...  
  • TAship  
  • ... |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Interruptions  
  • Phone ringing  
  • IMs, SMS  
  • Some e-mails  
  • Some TV shows  
  • Updating Facebook status!  
  • ... |

<table>
<thead>
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</table>
| I | • Planning  
  • Reading papers  
  • Writing up your results  
  • Attending talks, seminars, ...  
  • Physical exercise  
  • Leisure  
  • ... |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II</th>
<th>IV</th>
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</table>
| • Games  
  • Web surfing  
  • Browsing OSNs  
  • Most TV shows  
  • Some e-mails  
  • ... |
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Not Urgent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sleep problems</td>
<td>- Perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Health problems</td>
<td>- Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Burnout</td>
<td>- Control</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Out of control</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Out of control</td>
<td>- Dependence</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Short-term focus</td>
<td>- Irresponsibility</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feeling victimized</td>
<td>- Loss of focus</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>- -</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lack of motivation</td>
<td>- -</td>
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Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approaches

- Quadrant II time management
  - Top-down
  - Identify priorities
  - Set goals, plan according to what matters

- GTD
  - Bottom-up
  - Cope with high load by creating a workflow
  - Remove the need to remember, relieve stress
  - Planning and priorities happen during reviews
Getting Things Done – Surviving High Work Load

- Task or action item
  - Something that can be done in one step
- Project
  - A collection of action items with a specific goal
- Next action item
  - An action of a project that you can immediately start working on
- Contexts
  - What you need to work on a task
  - Example: @Work, @Home, @Phone, ...
GTD Workflow
Time Management Tools

- ClearContext
  - Microsoft Outlook
  - Nice integration of calendars, to-do lists, notes, projects, ...
- GTDInbox
  - Firefox addon, manage everything in Gmail
  - Not as many features as some other applications
- iGTD
  - Standalone application for Mac
  - Free, but unfortunately not maintained anymore
  - Closest alternative: THINGS
- Omnifocus
  - Great flexibility, steep learning curve
  - Mac application accompanied by nice iPad and iPhone apps
The Trap

- Your goal is to get things done but you may ...
  - spend a lot of time finding the right tool
  - spend a lot of time learning and getting used to the new tool
  - spend a lot of time moving your existing tasks, projects, ... to the new tool
- But when it comes to actually doing, you might go back to old habits.
- Remember, these are just *tools* meant to help with *getting things done*.
Thank you!

How do you manage your time?