

Sparkle * Class

Time management resource pack

for

Manchester International Festival

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Introduction

An important note about this pack

Different tools work for different people. Use what you like in this pack and ignore the rest. You may find that you need to change the tools you use, or you get out of the habit of using one and need to come back to it. Do whatever works for *you*.

What is time management?

Time management is not about being on time. Or finishing on time. It's about planning your time effectively so you spend the right amount of time on what's important. That's why we start by setting priorities and goals – so you can work out where to spend your time before you start scheduling it. Time management also involves managing energy. There's no point having lots of time if you have no energy.

Perfect time management isn't a real thing. What you're doing by attending the workshop and reading this resource pack is getting more balance in your life and work. You'll become more productive by spending more time on the things that matter and less time on those that don't. Time management is not a goal in itself, it's a collection of tools and resources that we use to reach our true goals.

This resource pack

This pack covers what we've done in the workshops, and there's a resource directory at the end, with things like apps and all the worksheets. So the three sections are:

- [Goals and priorities](#)
- [Planning and scheduling](#)
- [Resource directory](#)

I hope you enjoy using this pack and find it useful. You can keep it and share it with colleagues but I ask that you don't share it outside your organisation.

If you've got any questions or feedback, email me at rachel@sugarcat.co.uk or phone me on 0161 4488846.

“If it's stupid but it works, it's not stupid.” - US military expression

Section 1: Goals and priorities

“A goal properly set is halfway reached.”- Zig Ziglar

What's the difference between goals and priorities?

Goals are your longer-term plans. Goals describe where you want yourself or your project or your organisation to be in a month, 6 months, a year, 5 years. Goals are what you're always working towards.

Priorities are what needs to be done right now. Sometimes these will be to do with your goals, and sometimes they aren't directly connected but need to be done so they don't interfere with your goal.

Setting SMART goals

If your goal is not a SMART goal, you won't have a clear idea of what you're working towards. SMART stands for:

- **Specific** – what exactly do you want to achieve?
- **Measurable** – how will you know when you've achieved this?
- **Attainable** – can you really achieve your goal?
- **Relevant** – is this goal important to you, your life and your values?
- **Timely** – when are you going to do it?

[SMART goal setting worksheet](#)

Stepped goals

It's sometimes difficult to work out when to do the different tasks related to your goal. The stepped goals graph can help.

[Stepped goals graph \[PDF\]](#)

Mark out the time along the bottom in weeks or months. For example, if you want to reach your goal in 6 months, you could mark out one-month increments.

Along the side, mark out the achievements which show you will be reaching your goal. For example, this could mean number of social media followers, how many hours per week you're working on it, or if the tasks related to the goal have been completed.

When you have completed the graph, you might find it useful to transfer the achievements and time to a timeline. You can then use this to assess if you're on track to reach your goal.

Stepped goals timeline

Prioritising

If you have a “to do” list with no hierarchy, you don't know where to start or what's most important. If you have a lot of items on your “to do” list, this can be overwhelming.

Use the priorities matrix to help you work out what is important, what is urgent, what is both, and what is neither. The tasks in the urgent/important square need to be done first, then the urgent/unimportant, then important/not urgent, and the unimportant and not urgent tasks can be left until last (you might find you don't even need to do them at all!).

Priorities matrix [PDF]

Tackling perfectionism

If you know what's important, but struggle to complete a task because you want it to be perfect, try using the standards matrix. Not everything in your life can be done perfectly, and this worksheet will help you work out what needs to be done well, and what can be done less well.

For example, producing marketing material must be done to a high standard (because it's representing your brand) and is important, so that would go to the top right of the matrix. Having a very clean and tidy desk every day is less important, so you can reduce the standard for that as well as the importance.

You'll see on the matrix there's a dotted line across it, from the lower left to the top right. Your tasks should ideally be fairly close to this line. If something is off, or if everything is creeping towards the top right, that's an indication that you need to examine those tasks and perhaps consciously reduce your standards. This can be difficult, but it's part of managing your time effectively and ensuring you don't burn out.

Standards matrix [PDF]

Logging and evaluating time

Use this time log to track where your time is going. You might prefer to use your own notebook and pen to note down where it's going – or even an app on your phone ([see the directory](#) for suggestions).

Time log

After a few days, have a look at where you're spending your time. Take some coloured pencils or pens (or use little symbols) and mark:

- Things that you **don't want to do**
- Things that are a **waste of time**
- Things that **need to be done**, eg sleep, admin
- Things that are **fun**
- Things that you want to do to **move forward** (towards your goals)

Look at your time log. What is most important? Write down on your time log or in your notebook why this is most important.

Have a look at what you're doing that you don't want to do, or things that you think are a waste of time.

How can you minimise the things you're doing outside of priorities and goals? Write down:

- **Ignore** – what happens if you don't do that task?
- **Delegate** – who can you delegate this task to?
- **Quickly** – how can you do this task faster? Eg can you set a time limit?
- **Efficiency** – can you automate the process? Or have things set up so you can proceed more quickly?

Procrastination, time wasting and executive dysfunction

Procrastination is one of the main reasons we waste time. Procrastination is when you put off a task because you don't want to do it. If you're not starting a task that you *want* to do, this isn't procrastination, or laziness. This is executive dysfunction. It's also sometimes described as inertia. (If you're experiencing executive dysfunction you may need more one-to-one help).

To help tackle procrastination, we can use different words for our tasks. This might seem a minor change, or even a silly thing to do, but it can make a big difference.

Here are some ideas:

Boring

- Vanilla
- Essential
- Basic
- Elementary

Chore

- Assignment
- Task
- Job
- Mission

Difficult

- Challenging
- Special
- Gauntlet
- Ambitious

Initiation techniques also help. These are in [Part 2 – Planning and scheduling](#).

We can also look at *why* we are wasting time or procrastinating.

Write down an example of when you felt you wasted time.

- **Consider whether that time is really “wasted”.** Perhaps you really *needed* to do whatever you were doing? Examples might include: to right a wrong, to have some down time, because you were learning as you went.
- **Recognise** that you're getting something out of it (or trying to) – eg connecting with colleagues, taking a break, some kind of reward.
- **Be honest** with yourself about how and when you waste time. If you tell yourself you're only going to be 5 minutes on social media but every time it's at least half an hour, stop pretending!
- **Use technology** to prevent yourself wasting time ([see the resources directory](#) at the end of this pack).
- **Make what you need to do more fun** (eg do it with someone else, listen to a podcast while doing it), or give yourself a reward for when it's completed.

How to save time doing the boring stuff or difficult tasks. Sorry – “vanilla assignments” and “challenging missions”:

- **Batch your tasks** – do all the same kind of tasks at once. So if you've got 10 people to call, make all your calls one after the other. It might not be appealing but it's quicker than doing bits here and there.
- **Do five minutes** here and there – the opposite of batching tasks! If “chipping away” at something works better for you, grabbing a few minutes when you can to work on the task might be an effective strategy.
- **Use a “launch pad”** and other organising systems. A “launch pad” is where you put everything you need to start your work, or to go out. If the things you need are always in the same place, it saves you looking for them all the time. Filing your work appropriately also helps – it sounds boring but it's not as boring as spending half an hour searching your computer for a file because you can't remember where you left it or what it's called.
- **Play upbeat music** – it will encourage you to do your tasks faster.

Balancing

Everything we do costs time and energy and some cost money as well. Time is not a stand-alone resource.

To help you balance your time with your energy (and money, if appropriate), first of all, get an idea of how much each is depending on the other, using this balancing worksheet with circles.

Balancing worksheet – circles

For example, you might write in the “time” circle “posting on social media”. But that might be something that brings in money, so you would draw an arrow from “money” to “time”.

The circles exercise is just to get a general idea of how everything is connected. For more clarity, use the balancing worksheet with columns.

Balancing worksheet – columns

This gives you a more concrete idea of how much time something will take and how it will effect your money and energy.

Permission slips

Finally, sometimes working towards our priorities and goals can be exhausting, when we have day-to-day life and other things to cope with. You cannot work constantly or you'll burn out. It's essential to your productivity to take a break once in a while and although it won't feel like it at the time, taking some time out or some time off will help you reach your goals quicker.

When you feel you need some time out, give yourself permission to do that. Formally granting permission can feel easier than just trying to ease off, so if you have trouble taking time out, use these permission slips to help.

Permission slips

“We will be more successful in all our endeavours if we can let go of the habit of running all the time, and take little pauses to relax and recentre ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more joy in living.” - Thich Nhat Hanh

Section 2: Planning and scheduling

“Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.” - Pablo Picasso

There are two main sections in planning and scheduling:

- How to plan and schedule everything (the “papery” stuff)
- Getting started, maintaining focus, and what to do when things go wrong etc (the “brain” stuff)

First though, let's look at how you feel about using all of these tools and techniques.

Dealing with embarrassment

Sometimes we can be embarrassed about the amount of tools, or worksheets, or techniques we need to plan and schedule our time. Not everyone seems to need it so it can make us feel like we're inferior, or not confident, or not very grown-up.

First of all, remember that no-one in the world can be expected to remember everything.

Secondly, bear in mind that some of these tools that we use in time management also appear in other places in the world of work, but under a different guise. So you might feel self-conscious about using a star chart to earn your rewards, but rewards appear everywhere from the Oscars to cracking open a beer on a Friday night.

You can adapt any of the tools in this pack to suit your own needs.

Star charts

I have never met anyone through my work who *hasn't* found a star chart useful.

Why a star chart works so well:

- It brings the reward closer and makes it more tangible
- It helps develop habits that help in working towards a goal
- It's very basic and easy to use
- It can be adapted if the effects start to wear off
- It helps to assess your priorities and get the most important things done
- It's very personal

Top tip: Do your star chart *before* you write your “to do” list. It will help you decide what the most important thing for each day or week is.

First of all, write the tasks in the left hand boxes. Then decide how many stars you want to aim for this week – make sure you don't pitch it too high so you don't get discouraged halfway through! Finally, choose a reward. This can be anything – as long as you really, really want it. It might be buying a new book, getting a takeaway, or even just giving yourself an evening off doing anything at all. It sounds obvious but unless you crave that treat, you won't be motivated to complete your chart! At the end of the week, put in the total stars and if you've got enough, enjoy your reward!

Star chart

If you've been using your star chart for a while, you might like to up your game with a bonus one. You need to do each task every day in order to get a bonus. You can also make sure every day sees you do one of these important tasks. If you do both, you get a double bonus.

Star chart with bonuses

If you want to start creating a habit, try the stepped rewards chart. You complete the task once on the first day, twice on the second, and so on. Some people find this useful for making sure they go to bed at a sensible time every day. On this one, you get mini rewards as you go, to keep you motivated.

Stepped rewards chart

To do lists and schedules

Top tip: Write your “to do” list *before* you create your schedule. If you've completed the [priorities matrix](#) from section 1, you will know what your top 3 priorities are for this day, week or month.

Why a schedule works so well:

- You are much more likely to **get something done** with a schedule than just with a “to do” list
- You can make your schedule **accountable** to help you stick to it. You can even use “sticking to schedule” as an item on your star chart.

- Most importantly, a schedule takes away the **cognitive load** of decision-making. You don't have to spend mental energy deciding what to do when it's already been done by Earlier You.
- It helps you **cope** when things are busy and you're at risk of being overwhelmed, by reducing the cognitive load and by helping you find time for everything.
- It helps tackle **perfectionism** and time-wasting by putting an "end" time on every task.

You can download and use these planners, use your own planner, or use a blank notebook to make schedules. The daily and weekly ones include a space to make your "to do" list.

[Monthly planner](#)

[Weekly planner](#)

[Daily planner](#)

Prioritisation emergency plan

If you've got so much on you're finding it hard to prioritise, use one of these emergency tools.

- **Pick one thing.** It might not be the most urgent or important, but at least you're getting something done, which will help get you started. The momentum should help you with the more important and urgent tasks later on.
- **Eat the frog.** Do the task you least want to do first, then it's out of the way and the rest of your day will be easier.
- **Eat the chocolate.** The opposite of eating the frog. Do the easiest, most mindless or most fun task first, then you will be more motivated to tackle the rest of your tasks afterwards.
- **Consider the stick.** Most of this time management course focuses on carrots – the rewards. But you might be motivated more by sticks – what are the consequences of not doing the task? For example, if you don't pay a bill on time, you will be charged a fee and end up paying more money. Or if you don't get that rattle on your car checked out, it might break down on the motorway.

Evaluations

Evaluating our time, our tasks, and our mental state can be really helpful in fine-tuning our planning and scheduling.

We can see when we're most alert or tired, when we're most creative or when we are in the mood to do mindless tasks. Seeing what we did well and how we could repeat that in the future can help us feel more confident. And evaluations can help us deal with our mistakes constructively – we can reflect on what went wrong to hopefully avoid that next time.

Daily evaluation is too involved for most people but you might find you enjoy it! Weekly evaluation is more doable – you still fill it in every day, but not in as much detail. You can save several days or weeks to see if you can spot patterns.

Evaluating events is really valuable as well. Again, you can see what went well, what could have done better, and how to plan for next time.

[Evaluation worksheet](#) (day)

[Evaluation worksheet](#) (week)

[Evaluation worksheet](#) (event)

You can also try using a mood tracker. It will help identify what events or circumstances influence how you feel. You can see what's causing negative moods like stress or anxiety, or positive ones, like confidence or satisfaction.

[Mood tracker](#)

Initiation techniques to cope with overwhelm

When we're overwhelmed, and have too much to do, initiation techniques can help us get started. You don't have to do all of these. Just pick one or two that you think will work well for you.

And remember your 3 main planning tools:

- Prepare your star chart
- Write your “to do” list
- Create your schedule

Top tip: Do your preparation at a different time. You might like to think of doing things for “Future me”! Then when you come to begin your day, “Earlier me” has got everything ready. Some examples of this include putting your exercise clothes right by your bed the night before, or ensuring you have all the contact details you need to hand well before you need to start communicating with people.

Prepare a break

It's useful if can prepare your break before you get started on your tasks, so it's ready and waiting for you.

- You could choose something to read, have a drink or snack ready, or have in mind some stretches you'd like to do
- Use a timer so you don't disappear down an online rabbit hole

Complete an initiation ritual

Creepy though it sounds, an initiation ritual can be a powerful way of getting started

- It helps you form habits
- By doing easy or mindless tasks to begin your day, your brain is ready for the next step without you having to think about it too much
- On days when there are a lot of challenges, your ritual can start the day off with something relaxing or de-stressing
- Your initiation ritual could be as simple as making a cup of tea in your favourite mug
- You could include a short meditation, wash your hands or do your daily schedule. You could also write the outcomes you want to achieve.
- It could also include things you need to do anyway as those help us form the associations in our brain that help us get started. An example would be the start-up sound on your computer (set it to play a favourite piece of music if you like).

Microtasking

Microtasking is where you break down task into smaller chunks.

Depending on your own needs, and the task, you might find it works best for you to break the task into big chunks – for example:

- Fill in the form
- Get sign-off
- Post it

You may find you have to break it into tiny chunks. For example:

- Find a pen
- Complete the form
- Find X
- Ask for sign off
- Receive sign-off
- Find envelope
- Write address on envelope
- Find stamp
- Put stamp on envelope
- Walk to post box
- Post it

Which ever way works for you is fine. The tiny chunks way tends to work well for people who have anxiety, or who just can't sequence or visualise things very well.

Microtask planner

Some more simple initiation ideas:

- **Count to 5** then start
- **Take the first step** – for example, picking up a pen or opening a program on your computer
- **Change negative words** to positive (see the [procrastination tips in Section 1](#))
- **Visualise** the best and worst outcomes – this is useful if you have anxiety. It may seem counter-intuitive to visualise the worst outcome but it can help by making you realise that the worst outcome is either not that bad or extremely unlikely.
- **Use reminders** on your phone – not just “do this task” but “Do X and then Y will happen”
- **Set a real, public deadline** – if you’re unable to work without a deadline, then imposing one on yourself will help. Making it public, with consequences will work even better.
- **Meditation** and mindfulness – either some deep breathing or just allowing yourself to experience whatever your feeling can help you accept your feelings of overwhelm so they’re not paralysing.
- **Visual reminder** – have something you can see to remind you of your priorities and your goals. A picture that reminds you of what you’re working towards, or why you’re doing this.

Focusing during tasks

When we have a lot on, or we feel like we're being pulled in different directions, it can be really hard to focus on the task at hand. Here are some ideas of how to help yourself stay focused.

- **Minimum requirement** – just do the minimum that the job needs. Set a low bar. Remember “better done than perfect.” Remember that “the first draft is perfect” because all that is required of a first draft is that it exists.
- **Human helicopter** – someone to work with you to ensure your tasks are getting done. They don't have to check on you, just be sitting with you (either in real space or online – [see the directory](#) for an online service) to work alongside you. This is surprisingly powerful.
- **Pomodoro timer** – 25 minutes of work, followed by a 5-minute break. The [resources directory](#) has apps you can use for a pomodoro timer.
- **Pavlovian playlist** – if you play the same music during a particular task, it can help you stay focused. It's like Pavlov's dog, you're training your brain to recognise the signs that it's time to focus.
- **Digital dog cone** – use a site blocker, turn off notifications (or your entire phone), or use block apps so you're not distracted by notifications or checking your email.
- **Distract-o-pad** – you might suddenly have a great idea, or a question that needs answering. Write it on your distract-o-pad to come back to later, then you can stay on the task you've already started.
- **Rabbit-proof fence** – ensure you're not interrupted by someone else who wants to talk at you for a long time. Your rabbit-proof fence might be technological – “out of office” on your email or turning your phone off. Or it might be verbal – communicating when you are available or not available for discussions.
- **Build habits** – the more you practise focusing, the better you'll get at it.

Creating a Plan B – before you need it

“**Spanner time**” will happen to you at some point and you'll need to plan in advance to cope with it.

Spanner time is what happens when a spanner is thrown in the works. Your car suddenly needs a repair. You get food poisoning. A client moves everything forward by a month.

Top tip: being prepared for spanner time can help you cope with it when it does happen. Just thinking through some possibilities will help you at least be mentally prepared. You can also pre-prepare some strategies.

If the spanner is upsetting, it's important that you allow yourself time to feel what you're feeling and absorb the news or change. It might seem like you just don't have time just to sit about and reflect on the change, but it's important that you do it now so you're in a better position to cope later on.

How will you cope with the spanner?

- **Drop tasks?**
- **Move** them to the next day or week? If you do this, where are that day's or week's tasks going to go?
- **Add your spanner item to your schedule**, if you can. Then you can tick it off – it helps you feel a sense of accomplishment which you'll need when all the important tasks you wanted to do have had to get shelved.
- **Have a Plan B ready**. This can be on paper if you feel it's necessary, but a mental Plan B can also be helpful. It stops us thinking “Everything has gone wrong and it's going to be really hard to do X, Y and Z” and instead shifts our mindset to “OK, Plan A is no longer viable so we're going to move to Plan B.”
- Having a conscious Plan B can also help you communicate changes to colleagues.

“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” - Dwight D Eisenhower

Resource directory

Note: Using parental controls on your devices can be one way of blocking apps or content.

Note: Setting sleep timers can help you limit screen time.

Phone apps

Block

Blocks apps at certain times or after a time limit has been reached. It also shows you how much time you're spending on different apps.

[How to block apps on Apple devices](#) [instructions]

Stay on task [Android]

Simple app that just dings to remind you you're supposed to be focusing.

Tick Pomodoro [iOS]

Pomodoro timer – 25 minutes of work followed by 5 minutes' rest, plus some other productivity features.

Forest [iOS] and Forest [Android]

Mindful productivity app that uses gamification.

Complex timer [Android] and Periodic timer [iOS]

Set timers for work and breaks – you can use this for a classic Pomodoro (25 minutes' work, 5 minutes break) or choose your own work and break times.

Daylio [mood tracker]

Log your mood twice a day and note what you were doing at the time. You can track your mood over a period of time.

Online tools

Toggl

Time tracker app for phone and desktop.

Clockify

Free time tracker app for phone and desktop.

Interval timer

Use for a classic Pomodoro (25 minutes' work, 5 minutes break) or choose your own work and break times.

Leechblock [Chrome] and Leechblock [Firefox]

Blocks sites that you determine are time-wasting.

Focusmate

Site that pairs you with a remote accountability partner, for whichever hour slot you book.

Worksheets

SMART goal setting

Stepped goals graph [PDF]

Stepped goals timeline

Priorities matrix [PDF]

Standards matrix [PDF]

Balancing worksheet – circles

Balancing worksheet – columns

Permission slips

Star charts [all PDF]

Star chart

Star chart with bonuses

Stepped rewards chart

Planners and evaluation worksheets [all PDF]

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