

Prioritising What Matters Most

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority

Turning busy lists into bold priotities

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Using the

Prioritising What Matters Most

Workbook

When everything feels urgent, nothing truly important gets done.
Prioritisation is choosing what deserves your best energy.

Not all tasks are equal.
Some directly move your work, your research or career forward.
Others simply make noise.

This lesson introduces several tried-and-tested methods.
Each one helps cut through the clutter in a slightly different way.
By experimenting with them, you'll find the approach that suits your style or combine them, building your own system for focusing on what matters most.

These are my reflections

.....

on ___ /___ /_____

What filters fuel our priorities?

Our priorities are often driven by unconscious demands and both internal and external pressures, things like:

- This is the most urgent/the closest deadline
- My manager/most demanding client really wants this done
- This needs to be perfect!
- This is what I said I'd do

These may be helpful though a conscious questioning may reveal other - better? - options are available to us.



How would your choices change if you applied a different filter?

- Is this central to/aligned with my project goals?
- Is this a suggestion or a need?
- What are the consequences of doing or delaying this?
- What one thing would make doing everything else easier?

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What filters fuel our priorities?

What would happen if your prioritisation also included an evaluation of

- Impact vs Effort/time/energy required
- Supporting others vs Protecting my own time
- Short term demands vs Long term goals
- Institutional expectations vs Personal priorities
- Balancing roles such as Research - Teaching - Service?



When you felt pulled in too many directions:

- Which of these drivers influenced your choices?
- Which ones should have influenced your choices?
- What shifts would you like to make going forward?

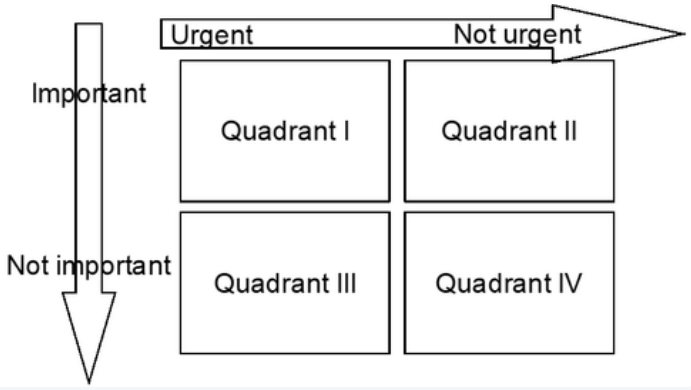
The following pages describe a number of prioritisation methods that can be used alone or in combination.

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1. Important vs Urgent (Eisenhower Matrix)

The matrix organises your activities by asking two questions:

- Is this important?
- Is this urgent?



Reflecting on your list of things to do, what is

1. Important & Urgent?
2. Important but Not Urgent?
3. Urgent but Not Important?
4. Neither?

What are your
"Important, Not Urgent" tasks?

People also have different definitions of important and urgent or different boundaries they will not cross:

Being late for an agreed meeting?
Cancelling with no notice?
Not doing something you promised...
Not finishing the reviewers comments - again.
Can you do it by the end of the week - the end of the day?
Spending time with friends?
Missing someone's birthday?
Time to rest and replenish...

Where do you draw the line?

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1. Important vs Urgent (Eisenhower Matrix)

Important & Urgent?
Obvious activities to prioritise. Keep the number of tasks in this quadrant small. They demand attention.

Important & Not Urgent?
Our most important activities for career development, health & wellbeing, friends & family. Rarely scheduled in our diaries, often the first to be sacrificed when something "urgent" crops up.

Not Important & Urgent?
They scream for attention they rarely deserve.
Often these tasks are important to others and we agreed to assist them.

Not Important & Not Urgent?
Why are they on your list?

Note: Recreation: "re-creation" is an Important & Not Urgent Quadrant II activity

Acting on your prioritised list:

1. *Important & Urgent?* Do these first.

2. *Important but Not Urgent?*
What stops you doing your "Important but Not Urgent" tasks?
Protect time for these activities. Focus here will minimise the number of urgent crises that arise and progress your most important priorities.

3. *Urgent but Not Important?*
Not necessarily important for you, but sometimes need to be done.
Team-work, collegiality, fair contribution…
Decide - and limit - how much of your time you invest here.
Maybe change "How long will this take?" to "How much time will I give this?
Learn to delegate, set boundaries and be content with less than perfect.

4. *Not Urgent and Not Important?*
Mostly distractions. Possibly explorations. Limit time tightly.

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2. The Ivy Lee Method

Ivy Lee, a pioneer in public relations and a productivity consultant, introduced this task-prioritization method to Charles M. Schwab, in 1918. Schwab used the method to dramatically increase his team's productivity and considered it the most profitable advice he ever received, paying Lee a substantial fee for his work.

- Write down the six most important things you need to do tomorrow.
- Rank them in order of importance.
- Next day, start with #1, finish it and then move on/work down the list.
- Carry unfinished items over to the next day.





The method has an emphasis on single task focus, working until each task is completed before moving on to the next - un-distractibility.
It deprioritises dealing with "things that come up".

Where would practicing "un-distractibility" benefit you?

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3. The A, B, C, D Method

Analyse the tasks on your list and assign each a letter:

- A: Absolutely must be done today - serious consequences if ignored.
- B: Be nice if this could be done - some consequences but not today.
- C: Could do this if I have time - no consequences if ignored.
- D: Delegate — someone else can do this.



A: Tasks are completed first. If there's more than one, finish them all.
B: Tasks could be done, maybe "should" be done.
There's more choice or flexibility in organising these in a day.
C: Still need doing sometime. Limit the time you spend.
Use them to fill short time slots or when energy levels are lower.
D: Learn to delegate, say "No" or negotiate resources and timelines if there's no option to delegate these tasks.

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4. Warren Buffet Method

Warren Buffet was asked about prioritising career goals.
His advice can be applied across any timeframe - a lifetime career, a bucket-list, or a worklist for the week.

Create a list of your top 25 goals or tasks - just write them out, let it flow.



Start your list or mindmap here:

Identify your top 5 goals here:

You now have two lists: “the top 5” and “everything else”.

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4. Warren Buffet Method

Warren Buffet's advice was to focus on the five and ignore everything else.

The twenty options that don't make your top 5 are likely to be worthy and valuable tasks, activities or pursuits - and that is why they are most likely to stop you achieving the five things that are most important to you.

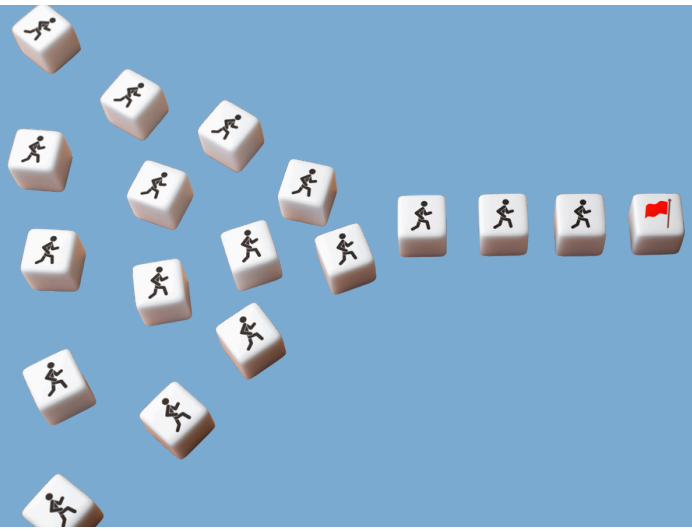
This prioritisation strategy invites you to eliminate all worthy distractions.

Saying "No" to things you don't want to do. Easy.

Deprioritising stuff you don't want, don't like, don't value. Of course.

This method highlights that it's the good that gets in the way of the great.

Where good, worthy activities, are stopping you from achieving more?



What matters most?

What do you do really well?

What is it that you
and only you, can do?

Putting Prioritisation Together

We've considered different methods. Each has its strengths:

- Eisenhower helps you see the big picture.
- Ivy Lee creates daily action and rhythm.
- ABCD gives you a quick triage system.
- Buffett's 25/5 challenges you to think strategically.

You might choose to bring more balance by choosing to achieve 1 big thing, 3 medium things, and 5 small things each day.

Some methods are preferred by different people or suited to different types of tasks, different types of projects or workflows.

Use your common sense. Experiment and find what works for you.



What have you learned about prioritisation?

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Reflections

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WANT MORE?



This workbook offers different ways to prioritise how you use your time.

Most people use these in combination for aspects of their personal/professional lives.

They offer structure and systems.
They are not intended to kill creativity, innovation or spontaneity.

Where will you start?

I hope this content has been useful.
If you know you need more, do reach out to me. I'd love to hear from you.

You can always explore the other resources on my website.

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Resources

Let me know how you get on!

Margaret

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