
HOW TO PRIORITIZE AND GET THINGS DONE

When you prioritize, you're determining what needs to get done, and in what order you should perform those actions. Very often, one may concentrate on getting lots of easy tasks done. But just because you're crossing off tons of items on your To Do list, doesn't necessarily mean you're completing the important stuff--the tasks that will help you achieve your goals.



1. Make a Master List. This is simply a long running list of everything you need to accomplish. It's in no particular order, but is essentially a holding place and a reference so you don't forget any activity and so that you're not trying to remember everything that needs to get done. Start by writing down the tasks that face you, and if they are large, break them down into their component elements. If these still seem large, break them down again. Do this until you have listed everything that you have to do, and until tasks are will take no more than 1 - 2 hours to complete.

Tip:

When you have a large task on your Master list that isn't a high priority, you may find it useful to create some high priority "micro-tasks" related to it. These might include commissioning some research in advance so that you have the data you'll need once you actually start the project, or even just spending 15 minutes each day thinking about how you'll tackle the project when it comes to the top of your To Do list.

2. Prioritize Your List.

- **First: Scan your list and note due dates.** When you know when something must be finished, it is easier to find the time to finish it by its due date.
- **Second: Scan your list and assign A, B or C.** Assign each activity one of the following letter codes:
 - **A (Vital)**- Those activities that are important AND urgent and will impact you greatly if you don't accomplish them right way.
 - **B (Important)**- Those activities that are important to be done, but not urgent.
 - **C (Nice)**- Those activities that may be nice to do sometime, but if you don't do them, you wouldn't be terribly disappointed.
- **Third: If your tasks do not have any concrete due dates, assign them due dates yourself.** By giving yourself a time frame to accomplish the work, you will likely be more productive.

3. It's not set in stone. Your letter assignments and due dates may change over time. Just because you assign a B priority to one of your activities today, doesn't mean it has to stay a B priority. It may turn into an A priority or a C priority in the future. Use your priority assignments as a guide, but don't be reluctant to change them if the need arises.

4. Focus. Now it's time to focus on just a few activities listed on your Master List. You'll want to include a mixture of activities on your Daily To Do list. I recommend you choose three A priorities, two B priorities and one C priority. So each day, you'll have a total of 6 activities to focus on.

5. Make a schedule. Use a tool, such as a Daily Planner to plan your day. Schedule in time for each of your priorities, leaving some free time throughout your day for getting daily things done and for rest and relaxation.

6. Early bird or night owl? In general, you'll want to schedule so that you actually get those A priority tasks done, no matter what. I find that if I do my top priority tasks first thing in the morning and get them out of the way, than it's pretty smooth sailing the rest of the day. However, some people are able to better focus in the afternoon or the evening, so A priority tasks are sometimes better left for this time of day for some people. No matter what time of day you choose to focus on your A priorities, be sure you don't allow anything (except dire emergencies) to take over the time you originally scheduled to complete those priorities.

7. If something comes up . . . There are going to be times when you decide to do something in place of the activities you have initially assigned. For instance, the other day I had some activities planned for the afternoon, but a friend called and asked if I wanted to go to a local event with her in town. I weighed my options. I still had one B and one C priority on my list and I knew if I went to the event that these would not get done today. I decided to meet her at the event, and complete the B priority I had assigned when I returned home afterwards, and I also decided to move the C priority to tomorrow.

Of course, while I do allow for flexibility in my schedule from time to time, I don't make a habit out of doing this. Most of the time, I stick to getting my priorities accomplished unless something very palatable arises that is important enough to me to push some of my originally assigned activities to tomorrow or another day.

8. The next day. You'll always want six activities on your Daily To List, again three A priorities, two B priorities and one C priority--or less than 6 if you can never get 6 completed. If you did not accomplish one or more of your priorities from yesterday, those priorities should be on your list the next day--along with other priorities from your Master List to take the place of those priorities that you did manage to accomplish yesterday.

9. Reward yourself. If you follow this system, you will get an enormous amount of important things done, and you'll more easily be able to reach your goals. As you get things done, particularly your A priorities, reward yourself along the way. For instance, you can sprinkle mini rewards throughout your day, such as a walk in the park or an outing with a friend. A more major reward should be enjoyed when you accomplish something big, such as passing a major exam or remodeling a room in your home.