

# Practicing project management

As the semester settles into a rhythm, the more daunting but less urgent projects that we've put off are beginning to demand attention. But where to start? How do we tackle these complex, looming obligations?

There are any number of companies with tools to solve this problem (Trello, Monday, Basecamp), and piles of books packed with project management strategies. Many of these tools and strategies work well because they commit us to a practice of ongoing project management. Make a plan, commit to a practice, and voila, the only work you'll have to do is the work, not the managing of the anxiety about the work.

## MAKE A PLAN

The first step in project management involves making a plan that articulates the steps needed to complete the project. If you are working on a project in need of management, you should expect to spend at least an hour and possibly three on this planning.

Being aware that the second step in project management is revision of the plan, do not push yourself to create a complete plan. Having the initial steps outlined with a deadline to review what's been done and plan the next piece is as good, if not better than, a complete plan.

### 1 Break the project down into phases, deliverables, and/or tasks.

These broken-down bits are broken down enough when what you need to do to complete them is immediately clear to you.

### 2 Set due dates for completing the pieces.

If you use a calendar or planner to organize your time, add these due dates to that space. If you use Google Calendar, this might be a good time to integrate [Google Tasks](#). If you want to see the whole set of tasks and deadlines in one space, consider [creating a Gantt chart](#).

### 3 On a regular basis (biweekly is good), review and revise your plan.

If at the start, you have created a water-tight plan, you should expect it to change due to factors beyond your control (or factors in your control, like shifting priorities).

## REVISE THE PLAN (CONTINUOUSLY)

So you've carefully broken your project down, set deadlines, and mapped the whole thing out to neatly beat external deadlines and allow yourself an actual week off over the holidays. But then you get asked to join another committee, or your kid starts struggling in school and needs extra support. For one reason or another, you start missing your incremental deadlines. What to do?

While you can certainly bump all the pieces of a project by a month, it may serve you to spend an hour considering your priorities. You might start by hiding or ignoring deadlines for a bit and, looking over multiple projects (including research, classes you're teaching, mentoring responsibilities, service, etc.), consider which align with your goals and values. For help connecting values to projects, consider the [Objectives and Key Results](#) approach.

As you clarify priorities and align projects and their associated tasks to those priorities, you might consider how projects could transform to accommodate time or other resource pressure. In addition to revising deadlines, for example, you might revise project scope.

## WORK TOGETHER

The popular "Agile / Scrum" project management frameworks have managers reviewing and revising project management plans on a biweekly basis. This approach is particularly well-regarded for team-based projects, though there is an entire book ([Agile Faculty](#) by Rebecca Pope-Ruark; I highly recommend it!) that applies this framework to all aspects of typical faculty workloads.

If you are working alone on something, reviewing your priorities and process monthly might make more sense. Also, even if your project is a solo one, don't work alone. Ask a colleague or friend to act as an accountability partner and, even as you work on your own projects, check in with each other, ask for process-feedback when needed, and encourage each other to continue this ongoing practice of project management.

Alternatively, just put a whiteboard in your office, and a stack of sticky notes on your desk.