Professional Practice Skills
PPS-21: Time Management
(Adapted from MPS 17, Don Woods 2003)

Pre-class assignment
1. Read sections What is It?, Why Do It?, New Concepts, How to Do It, and Learning Objectives
2. Establish your Baseline on this skill on the Time Management Feedback Form.
3. Be able to name the four parts of the How To Do It section

What is It?
Time Management is the skill of using time to better achieve your goals.

New Concepts

Why Do It?
The simple answer to “Why manage your time?” is to get more done, but that misses the bigger question. What is the “more” that you want to do? On the job, if you can do 30% more work in a day than the guy in the next cubicle, the reward may be that you get assigned even more work while getting paid about the same as the less efficient guy. On this path you are more likely to “go postal” than become CEO.

Time management should help you achieve your goals. It is about focusing on most important and urgent tasks and delaying or skipping the tasks with less importance or urgency. The important tasks are the ones that achieve your goals.

How to Do It
The How to do it section is in four parts
• What am I doing now? (Where does the time go?)
• What do I want to do? (Setting priorities)
• What is the next task? (To-do lists, calendars, planners)
• How do I know the task is complete? (Deciding on “good enough”)

What am I doing now?
Most people get to the end of the day or week and wonder where the heck the time went. The first step to managing time is to answer that question. The most direct way to find where the time goes is to spend a week writing down what you do.

To record your time, divide the pages of a notebook into two columns, Task and Time Started. Each time you start a new task, log the time and very brief description of the task. Logging your time for a week is a time-consuming pain, but useful in the long term for finding wasted time.

At the end of the week, tally the number of hours spent in different activities. Each individual will have different categories. As an example, consider a single college student living on campus. Categories may include sleeping, eating, exercising, attending class, studying, socializing, and surfing web/game playing/e-mailing.

A review of your activity log can help you see where changes could be made and may help you set your priorities. After you have set your priorities and have changed your
work habits, you will want to do another time log to see if your changes have been successful.

What do I want to do?
Those of you who are ambitious can probably quote “Begin with the end in mind” from Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Successful People. You already have personal and professional goals and a detailed five-year plan.

The rest of us are thinking about what we’ll have for lunch today. Unfortunately for us, those ambitious people probably have a plan for our time as well. For self-defense, we lazy folk need some goals, too.

Our personal and professional goals will form the basis for setting priorities. If our goal is corporate success, we’ll reduce time with counterproductive activities (low exposure job tasks and time with family and lazy friends) and focus on productive tasks (high exposure tasks and time with powerful people). If our goal is family, we’ll be changing diapers and coaching soccer instead of volunteering to present that killer PowerPoint presentation to management. Just remember, if you don’t choose, someone will choose for you.

What is the next task?
Once you have goals, you can begin to prioritize tasks. Most of us have had a go at making To-Do lists, or used planners or calendars to schedule tasks. These are good for making sure we get to an appointment and have checked off all the tasks, but not so good for deciding whether or not to attend the meeting, or which task should come first.

One way to assign priorities is use the Importance - Time Sensitivity decision table shown below. We evaluate our task to see in which quadrant it belongs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Time Sensitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical to my Goals</td>
<td>Urgent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Important</td>
<td>Not Urgent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any given task will have some sense of urgency, perhaps a deadline or scheduled time, and will have some importance with respect to your goals. Thus, it will fall into one of the four numbered quadrants.

Certainly a task in quadrant I (Urgent and Critical to my Goals) will rate a high priority while the quadrant IV (Not Urgent, Less Important) tasks will go on a back burner. The other two quadrants are about the same priority. For example, your daughter’s dance recital this evening is sufficiently time sensitive to rate Urgent, but it may have little relevance to your personal/professional goals (quadrant III). If so, it may rate about the same as tennis with your supervisor (quadrant II). This decision won’t be aided by the table.

Since some of the items at the end of the priority list are going to be skipped. If someone asks you to perform a task that is in quadrant III or IV, you should say “No”. Agreeing to a task and failing to perform it, is a good way to kill trust and makes
achieving your own goals harder. Your “No” answer should be polite but firm, so the requestor has little wiggle room. Answers of “No” to your boss have to be particularly tactful.

How do I know the Task is complete?
Most engineers know when a meeting is over, but can’t tell when their design is complete. There are many engineering tasks (designing, programming, and improving) that are like housework – they are never finished. The same thing can happen with students and homework. Some find that design, laboratory, or programming courses “take more time than the rest of my courses put together”.

So, how do we decide what is “good enough”. Designing to a well defined minimum standard, rather than designing to an ideal is a good place to start. Then anything above minimum is a bonus. If we design to an ideal, we’ll always fall short. Students do this all the time when they do just enough work for a “C” and hope its better.

Another way to prevent design tasks from subsuming your life is to build time fences around them. You can limit your time on the task to a certain number of hours per day or week to make sure that other parts of your life don’t get completely pushed out. You can also set hard deadlines for last design change before production. As a student you can budget a certain number of hours per course. For this technique to work, you have to be able to stop and move on when the time is complete. Some people use timers.

Learning Objectives
1. Learn where your time goes
2. Set short term personal/professional goals
3. Be able to prioritize based on Goals and Time Sensitivity

In-Class Exercise
Exercise 1
Given a set of goals, use the Importance - Time Sensitivity decision table to prioritize the following tasks.
Assignment
This assignment has two parts, keeping an Activity Log for a week and setting personal/professional goals.

Activity Log
1. List start time and task for all activities (that take 15 minutes or more) in a one week period. (Activities can be lumped. e.g. getting ready in the morning can include all those important tasks between awakening and walking fully-dressed out of your room.
2. Review your activity log and create at least 5 categories for time usage. (Categories may include sleeping, eating, exercising, attending class, studying, socializing, and surfing web/game playing/e-mailing.)
3. Tally amount of time spent in each category.
4. Turn in
   a. Activity log (probably hand written)
   b. Tally sheet with time per activity
   c. One to two paragraphs of lessons learned from the review of the activity log, especially how the review impacted setting of goals

Evaluation
Each of the parts a, b, and c of step 4 will be evaluated on the same scale. The work will be shown to four or five peers (student graders). Students will individually rate the work on a scale of 1 to 10 with

10 – Looks like an entirely true and sincere work, with no inventions or B.S.. Activity log covers the entire time with minimal or zero omissions. Time Tally has at least 5 reasonable categories and there is good agreement between time log and Tally.
5 – Relatively sincere effort with some significant omissions or attempts "to remember what they did". Time Tally has fewer than five reasonable categories and times do not correspond well with Activity log. Lessons learned are weak.
1 – Looks like they made it up, copied from someone else just before class, or stole it from a web site. Significant parts are missing or half-hearted.

The top three peer scores for each part of step 4 will be averaged to determine the score for that part.

Personal/Professional Goals
5. List 3 to 5 Personal/Professional goals for this term
6. List 3 to 5 Personal/Professional goals for the next three years

Evaluation
Numbers 5) and 6) will be evaluated in the same manner as above.
Time Management Feedback Form

Name _______________________

1. At the outset of this unit, place a “B” in each category to indicate your self assessment of your initial, or baseline skill level.

2. At the end of the unit place an “A” in each category to indicate your self assessment of your skill level after practicing the skill. Be prepared to provide documentation for your assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novice (less successful)</th>
<th>Beginner (shows little expert behavior) (1-2)</th>
<th>Good Start (some expert behavior) (3-4)</th>
<th>Getting There (frequent expert behavior) (5-6)</th>
<th>Almost There (mostly expert behavior) (7-8)</th>
<th>Expert (shows all expert behavior) (9-10)</th>
<th>Expert (more successful)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t know where the time goes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has kept a time log to see where the time goes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just works at stuff, and keeps track in their head</td>
<td>Make task lists, use planner, calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t worry about goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sets personal/professional goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes a list and starts doing the tasks in any order.</td>
<td>Prioritizes tasks based on goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works until the job is perfect.</td>
<td>Works to “good enough” or for set time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflections

What did I learn from this?

Which of the skills do I do pretty well? (List Evidence)

Which skills could use some work? (List Evidence)
A Time Management concept that annoys me

A favorite of the time management folks is the Pareto Principle or the 80-20 Rule. The 80-20 Rule says that 80% of your results come from 20% of the effort. (It also predicts that 20% of the people have 80% of the wealth or 20% of your customers provide 80% of your profit). This seems perfectly reasonable, so what is annoying? The annoying part is when people try to apply the rule by violating it.

My whining falls into two categories, theoretical and practical. First, if it is truly a rule, then we can't do much about it, and second, attempts to get around the Pareto principle lead to annoying results. The theoretical argument requires no support, but for the practical we'll provide examples.

Let's take a look at the task of performing an engineering calculation to predict stress in a bridge. Suppose we apply the Pareto principle and put in our 20% effort (to save time) and get 80% of the results. I doubt that Pareto would want to stand on or under that bridge. Safety issues require 100% results. Shortcuts are (and should be) actionable under civil or criminal law.

Companies like Wal-Mart have applied the principle with ruthless efficiency. The Pareto principle is why you have such limited choices (they only sell products that produce the most return) and why you get such crappy service (you are a small customer for whom service provides little return).

Lastly, you get the folks who invert the principle and say it means you should spend 80% of your time on the 20% of the tasks that are most important. Their level of misunderstanding invites cynicism, and you have to assume they are practicing management by buzzword.