Help! How Do I Manage My Time?

Xinlun Cheng

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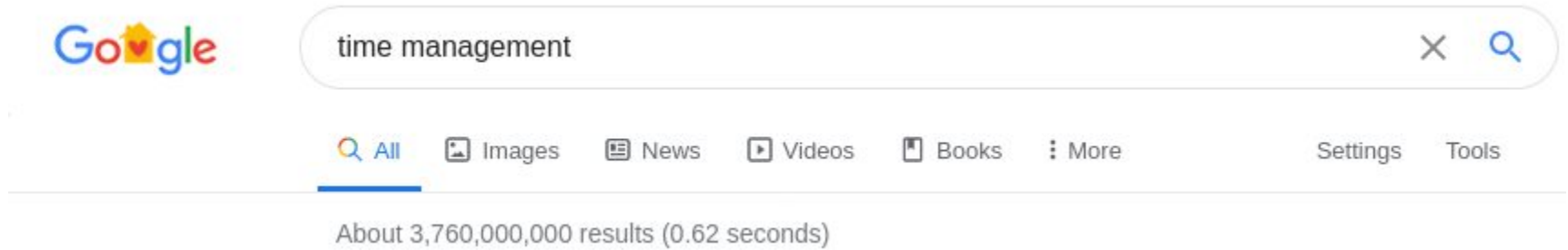
Common Problem

Hard to Solve

Click-baiting Results

The Most Common Tactic

- Make a schedule
- Allocate specific hours for things

But Does It Work ?

NO

Schedule/Time Table

Works for:

- Fixed-duration events
  - Classes
  - TA discussion sessions
- Routine events
  - Group meetings
  - Commuting

Does not work for:

- Flexible events
  - Impossible to estimate time necessary
  - Events without obvious goal
  - Eg: Research
- One-time events
  - Hard to estimate time necessary
  - Can only get an estimation once started
  - Homework

So What Should We Do?

Learn how to say "no"

Use time spent waiting

Protect the time you are most alert

Develop a time management strategy

- Flexible and robust strategy is hard to come by
- Differs from person to person

A Better-than-schedule Strategy

Dynamic Time Allocation

1. Identify the time you have beforehand
   a. Remove the part of the day occupied by routine/fixed-duration events
   b. Note the average time spent on lunch/arrive at office/leave office
2. Identify the tasks (not necessarily an exhaustive list)
3. Rank the tasks by priority
   a. Assuming sufficient time to finish everything
   b. If a task is close to deadline, put it high in the list
4. Start from the top of the list
   a. Feeling tired/exhausted? Reduce the priority of current task and switch
   b. An increase in error rate? Reduce the priority of current task and switch
5. Periodically update the task list

An Example: Tuesday Morning

Time available/unavailable:

- 9:30 Arrive at office
- ~12:00 Lunch: 30 minutes
- 14:00 - 15:15 ASTR 5610
- 15:30 - 16:45 ASTR 8500
- 17:30 Leave office

Task list:

1. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
2. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work
3. Research: building a simple model
4. Research: writing the paper draft
5. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)

An Example: Tuesday 9:30

Check email

- Advisor comments on the paper draft
- Not a lot comments
- No major changes

Update the task list

Do the first task on the list

Task list:

1. Research: going through advisor's comments on the draft
2. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
3. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work
4. Research: building a simple model
5. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)

An Example: Tuesday 10:27

First task done

No new task added

Move on to the next one

Task list:

1. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
2. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work
3. Research: building a simple model
4. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)

An Example: Tuesday 11:49

Increase in error rate in coding

Stop and have lunch

Move the current task down by 2

Task list:

1. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work
2. Research: building a simple model
3. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
4. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)

An Example: Tuesday 12:19

Finish lunch

Start on the first item left on the list

Task list:

1. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work
2. Research: building a simple model
3. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
4. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)

An Example: Tuesday 13:21

Successfully convinced Borja that it is not going to work

But also received 2 more papers to read

Update task list

Start from the top

Task list:

1. Research: building a simple model
2. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
3. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
4. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 13:59

Time for ASTR 5610

Task list:

1. Research: building a simple model
2. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
3. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
4. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 15:18

Burnt out by the class, but research is on similar topics

Move the current task down by 2

Start from the top

Task list:

1. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
2. Research: building a simple model
3. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
4. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 15:29

Time for ASTR 8500

Task list:

1. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
2. Research: building a simple model
3. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
4. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 16:47

Start from the top again

Task list:

1. TA: preparation for ASTR 3130 evening session tomorrow
2. Research: building a simple model
3. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
4. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 16:53

Task done

Move down the list

Task list:

1. Research: building a simple model
2. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
3. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Tuesday 17:26

Time to call it a day

Task list:

1. Research: building a simple model
2. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
3. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again

An Example: Wednesday

Time available/unavailable:

- 9:30 Arrive at office
- ~12:00 Lunch: 30 minutes
- 14:00 - 15:15 ASTR 5430
- 16:00 - ??:?? Group meeting
- 19:00 - 20:00 ASTR 3130 Session

Task list:

1. Homework: ASTR 5430 (DDL: next Monday)
2. Research: reading the papers that Borja suggested and telling him it is not going to work again
3. Research: building a simple model

Key Take-away

Develop a time management strategy that works for you

- Combine the advantages of other people's strategy
- Flexible and robust
- Avoid distractions but also take breaks by switching tasks
- Do NOT go down any rabbit hole