

Time Management: Three Ways to Think About Prioritization

Academic Success Center
Iowa State University

A. Urgency vs. Importance (Steven Covey)

Consider the importance (or “weight”) of the items on your list, and the urgency “when is it due?” Steven Covey recommends we spend most of our time in Quadrants 1 & 2 and as little time as possible in Quadrant 4.

EXAMPLE:	Urgent	Non-Urgent
Important	Quadrant 1: Ex: Things due today or tomorrow, dealing with emergencies	Quadrant 2: Ex: Long-term projects, planning ahead, studying in advance, getting started early
Not Important	Quadrant 3: Ex: Interruptions, distractions, fun events that come up, social invitations	Quadrant 4: Ex: Time wasters, busy work, procrastination activities, aimless internet browsing, Netflix

Now you try...

	Urgent	Non-Urgent
Important	Quadrant 1:	Quadrant 2:
Not Important	Quadrant 3:	Quadrant 4:

B. The ABC Method (Alan Lakein)

The ABC Method was originally developed by Alan Lakein and consists of assigning a priority status of “A,” “B,” or “C” to each of the items of your to-do list or task list. *Below is an example:*

“A” Status Items—“Must Do”	High priority, very important, critical items, with close deadlines or high level of importance to them.
“B” Status Items—“Should Do”	Medium priority, quite important over time, not as critical as “A” items, but still important to spend time doing.
“C” Status Items—“Nice to Do”	Low priority at this time, low consequences if left undone at this moment.

Now you try...

“A” Status Items—“Must Do”	
“B” Status Items—“Should Do”	
“C” Status Items—“Nice to Do”	

C. Weekly To-Do List

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This method can be used on its own or together with either Method A or B. It allows you to take a total inventory of all you need to do within a week and then fill them into the high or low priority categories for each day of the week.

Go ahead and do a mind-dump of EVERYTHING you need to do:

This week, I need to...	
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Now pull from the above inventory and place them into the appropriate boxes below:

Week of:

High Priority

Low Priority

	High Priority	Low Priority
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		