

Insight Sheet

Topic: Project Timelines

Timelines are critical for achieving a lot of work in a limited amount of time (and for assuring you can go snowboarding when you planned). The following points provide some insights into how to go about setting up an effective timeline. These are critical for both team and individual projects, and build invaluable skills that will be expected of you in a professional work setting. Ignore these ideas at your own peril!

And remember, the most important aspect of creating a timeline is creating a timeline! You have to do it to have one that will work, so take a shot at it, and then work on refining it as you go.

- Put it **on a calendar** or some graphic representation that allows you to SEE relative lengths of time
- List clearly date/times for **commencing and completing** tasks and products
- Use a graphic method that ensures you can show **overlapping tasks**...and then actually show those overlaps when you apply each task
- Get all the tasks & products and their deadlines **brainstormed** and noted somewhere before you start making the final timeline
- **Compare** your list of tasks & products w/ some other folks' lists
- Make it **professional** (e.g., don't slap your name on at the last minute)
- Get down to **SPECIFICS**, esp. in noting the # of hours you will allow for each task & when it will occur
- Include time for **presentation prep**, again estimating hours you will devote to it.
- Include the **other responsibilities** you have (e.g., work, classes, dates) but distinguish them clearly from the project
- Consider a **color coding** system to help break out different tasks or project phases
- Get it **reviewed** by someone
- Look at **others' timelines**
- Think back over **past projects** you've done and recall what time was allotted for tasks
- Allot a specific **hours total** for the project and then break those out into your tasks
- **Get real**; don't put down a bunch of deadlines or task duration's that you already, in your heart, are saying won't happen
- If you do **all-nighters** then mark when they are to occur; if you want to break the habit then budget the last week very carefully and work in extra hours early on to prevent a crunch

- Devote a full 8.5x11/day, **detailing each day** really helps you decide when work will occur (a critical thing especially on group projects)
- Consider it a **living document** that you update as you go along
- Be sure to **post it** so that your peers, team mates and/or professor can review it (and hold you accountable)
- Use it to **tally the hours** each person will do, if on a team, to assure equitability. This will also help you assure you have time for a personal life, and that your Project Mngr is not overloaded.
- List **deadlines and due dates**. When does Joe need to have the base map done and to you? When must all sheets be submitted? When are your desk critiques?
- Above all, **learn from it**; see what was accurate, what was dreaming, etc., and makes notes for yourself for next time. Then save the file and you can reuse or at least reexamine it on future projects.

After each timeline is used be sure to make a few notes to yourself, perhaps on the timeline, stating what worked and what didn't. This will help you to get better at the process each time you do a new one.

Finally, if you are wondering why you need to become proficient at timelines, think about how professional firms operate. Time on a project is not endless. Each hour is costs the firm, is billable, and needs a justification. The further you advance your skills at budgeting time the more valuable you will be to your future employer.