Balancing Productivity and Stress in Your Day

DANIEL MORRISON – UCI MATH DEPARTMENT
PROBLEM: HOW DO WE AS GRAD STUDENTS MANAGE OUR WORKDAY?

• Productivity: How do we plan our time, prioritize work, and work efficiently to get everything done?

• Stress / Burn Out: Pushing productivity too much has negative effects – both on your productivity and mental health

• GOAL: Find ways to strike a balance between productivity and burn out.
Disclaimer

• You can’t solve everything by being organized and thinking positively

• There are external effects that you can’t control (i.e. from students, the university, etc.)

• Productivity naturally goes up and down in cycles, you can’t totally control it

• Your productivity level is not a statement about your skill as a student, researcher, or teacher
Prime Your Environment

• Idea: The environment you work in impacts how you work and changing the setup can change the work you output.

• Have a designated work area that is free from distractions

• Working in the same setup over multiple days makes work go smoother and reminds your brain to be in the work mode
Take Breaks

• Idea: Stepping away from your work refreshes the brain and makes you more efficient when you come back

• Working for long stretches of time impacts your problem solving and increases frustration and burn out

• You get more done when you take time off and come back later

• Break come in many different sizes – few minutes between tasks, an hour, an evening, or a full day
Offload Information from Your Brain

• Idea: Remembering information like due date, tasks, meetings, etc. takes up mental energy better used to do productive work.

• The key is to design a system for yourself that you trust to save your important information

• Make a note of information as soon as you get it, check at the beginning/end of each day

• The easier it is to get the information means less distraction and more time for actual work

• Big Two: Task Lists & Calendars
Organize Your Information

- Meeting Time
  - Calendar
- Tasks
  - Task List
- Files
  - Computer
- Emails
  - Inbox
- Saved Conversation
  - Email Folder
- Active Conversation
  - Inbox
Prioritize Task Lists

High Priority
- Must get task done today -
  (respond to emails, deadlines, write lesson plan)

Medium Priority
- Main work goals for today -
  (research, homework due soon, grading)

Low Priority
- Would be nice to get to today, but can get rescheduled -
  (homework due later, extra tasks, time fillers)
Schedule Your Work Time

- Idea: Use your calendar to track both classes/meeting AND what times you work on each task in your task list

- Beginning of Day: Review task list for the day, add tasks to calendar

- During Day: Update calendar with your actual work

- End of Day: Review how your plan changed, when are you productive or not, what can change for tomorrow
Schedule the End of Your Workday

• Idea: Decide your end time at the start of the day to reduce guilt at the end of the day

• It’s easy to keep working into the evening due to guilt for not getting enough done

• This forces you to take time away from work at the end of the day
Separate Between Work and Rest

• Idea: Use physical indicators to show your brain it time to switch between work and rest modes

• In person – work in the office and relax at home, walk/commute each way gives time to switch mindset

• Remote – have environmental cues that change at the start/end of the workday
Reduce Decision Fatigue

- Idea: Making decisions takes energy away from productive work

- Decide how you want the day to go at the beginning and follow that plan all day

- Many decisions we agonize over aren't very consequential and it's best to pick and move on
Don’t Be Afraid to Experiment

• It’s very difficult to figure out what works best for you the first time around

• Try different things and see what helps you the most

• Being a perfectionist about your productivity is less helpful than trying something and fixing it later
Be Social About Your Productivity

• Productivity is something we all struggle with, but we often think that no one else is having these problems

• Being open about productivity issues helps yourself and others

• Sharing what helps you be productive is beneficial for other grad students
Thanks for Listening!

CONTACT - DMORRIS2@UCI.EDU