# Time-task estimation

Target and improve time-task estimation to feel more in-control of your time and advance your time management skills.

## What is time-task estimation?

Time-task estimation refers to the ability to **estimate the amount of time required** to **complete** a task or series of tasks.

Many students find themselves falling prey to the **planning fallacy**

"The tendency to set unrealistic expectations for the time needed to complete a future task"

Students facing barriers may want individualized support! You can meet with an Access Advisor at the SAA to navigate services and accommodations.

## Why target time-task estimation?

Education psychology researchers have identified the **most impactful time-management skills** to be:

A. **The setting of goals and priorities**

B. **Perceived Control of Time (PCOT)**

For more information on effectively identifying and setting goals and priorities, check out the other resources on time management.

PCOT refers to the **feeling that you are in control of how your time is spent** while working and your **ability to meet deadlines**.

**Refined time-task estimation skills** are a key component of strong PCOT!

## Evaluating Perceived Control of Time (PCOT)

To determine where you stand on PCOT, **consider how you would respond to the following statements**:

Y/N   1. I underestimate the time it will take to complete tasks

Y/N   2. I feel myself procrastinating on tasks that I don't like but that must be done

Y/N   3. I often feel overwhelmed by the tasks I need to get done

Y/N   4. I feel like I lack control of my time

Y/N   5. I find myself getting involved in small details

Y/N   6. I find myself taking on too many tasks

Y/N   7. I can't stick to the schedules I create for myself

Y/N   8. I am unable to say no

If you found yourself agreeing with **three of more** of these statements, you are not alone! There is still room for improvement, and you may benefit from trying a time-task estimation exercise!

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Adams, R. V., & Blair, E. (2019). Impact of Time Management Behaviors on Undergraduate Engineering Students' Performance. SAGE Open.

# Time-task estimation exercise

1. Create a list of tasks you intend to complete
2. Beside each task, **estimate how much time it will take you**
3. As you complete these tasks throughout the day, pay attention to and **make note of how long they actually take to complete!**

**Pro Tip:** when estimating, consider the **assumptions** and **constraints** associated with your tasks; what do you need to complete? What can you ignore?

Consider creating a log of all the tasks you typically complete and their average duration for future reference!

**Example**

## Time-task estimation log

| Task | Estimated Duration | Actual Duration |
|------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Research for biology paper | 1.5 hours | 3 hours |
| Walk to school | 5 mins | 12 mins |
| Read through lecture slides | 30 mins | 47 mins |
| Take post-lecture summary notes | 20 mins | 1 hour, 15 mins |

When you better familiarize yourself with how long it takes to complete a task, this can result in:

- **Confirmation** of existing beliefs
- **Modifications** of study strategies
- **Changes** which can improve long-term outcomes

The goal with this activity is for your estimations to become as close to the true execution-time of a task as possible!

# How to overcome the planning fallacy
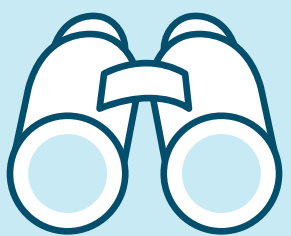
Use the following tips to help overcome the planning fallacy and build stronger time-management abilities:

Take the **outside view**. Using your time-task estimation log, take a look at previous related experiences to guide your planning!

Set **implementation intentions.** Clearly identify and write down the date, time, and location you will start in.

Use the **segmentation effect.** Break up large projects into component, more manageable parts!

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Why do we underestimate how long it will take to complete a task? The Decision Lab. (n.d.). Retrieved August 2022.