



Important? Not important?

Do you feel like you’re always veering from one crisis to the next? Do you run out of time to do your homework because you’re dealing with family drama? Do you forget to read your textbook because you’re so busy playing Call of Duty? Ever been told you should prioritize? Here is a way to help you figure out what you need to change to be more in control of your life.

The upper squares represent things that are *important* to you. These are things that help you move toward your long-term goals and give you the kinds of experiences you want from life. Some of the important things are *urgent* and must be taken care of soon—possibly now. An approaching tornado is an important event that requires an urgent response from you. Some important things, though, are *not urgent*. Creating an educational plan is important, but it is not necessarily urgent—unless you have procrastinated to the point where you are about to lose your financial aid. Then it does become urgent.

The lower squares represent things that are *not important* to you. These are things that don’t help you move toward your goals, or that actually inhibit you from doing so. Sometimes these unimportant things are *urgent*, such as when a relative pressures you to skip class to help watch her small children. Other times we develop a *false sense of urgency*—for example, someone who is compulsive about checking his phone for messages even when it interrupts his other activities. Still other unimportant things we recognize as simple time-wasters, diversions from our goal-oriented activities.

URGENT

NOT URGENT

IMPORTANT →
(Moves toward your desired goals & experiences)

NOT IMPORTANT →
(Inhibits or doesn’t move toward your desired goals & experiences)

<p>1 “Or else” emergencies, “putting out fires,” due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circumstances outside my control • My own procrastination 	<p>2 Planning ahead, taking steps to invest in and achieve my long-term goals</p>
<p>3 Allowing distractions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving in to other people’s needs & goals • Clinging to a false sense of urgency 	<p>4 Wasting time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment • Games

Ideally, we want most of our daily activities to fit in quadrant 2: goal-oriented, planned activities. Sometimes we act in quadrant 1 because we can’t avoid certain setbacks. We *can* avoid most procrastination-related emergencies. Likewise, while we can’t avoid being pressured by others (quadrant 3), and while we may choose sometimes to give in, we don’t want to live most of our lives in this quadrant, meeting the needs of others while

neglecting our own. Quadrant 4 activities help us relax our minds and bodies. It's okay to spend some time there, but not so much that we lose sight of the need to carry out our plans and achieve our goals.

To use this system, start by making a sticky-note list of the things you've done in the past two or three days, one activity per sticky note:

Slept
Wrote in my journal
Watched Game of Thrones
Talked to mom on phone
Picked up aunt at airport (missed class)
Read history chapters
Wrote rough draft of English paper
Played chess with brother
Completed my income tax forms
Facebooked
Job hunted on craigslist
Scholarship hunted on Fastweb
Went to work
Went out for drink after work
Met with transfer counselor
Wrote financial aid appeal letter

Now sort your activities into quadrants. The key, of course, is to know what your long-term goals are. You have many different kinds of goals: academic goals (skip a math level, pass my classes, graduate, transfer); career goals (learn new skills, get a better job, get a promotion); personal goals (stay in touch with friends, have enough money to pay bills, learn to crochet, sleep more, exercise).

If most of your activities sort into quadrant 2, you are in a fairly stress-free zone. You are pursuing your goals and anticipating what you need to do to achieve them.

On the other hand, if most of your activities sort into quadrants 1 or 3 (both classified as *urgent*), you are probably stressed out. Your stress comes from having to resolve emergencies that may be in part of your own making, or from dealing with other people's emergencies. Maybe you need to learn to say no more often.

If most of your activities sort into quadrant 4, you are acting too aimlessly. You need to spend less time in quadrant 4 or you are unlikely to achieve your goals.

Now decide what you need to change. Your goal is to figure out how spend most of your time in quadrant 2. You will always have things come up in quadrant 1, but at least make sure it isn't due to procrastination on your part. And of course, you can choose to meet the needs of others even if it doesn't help you achieve your goals (quadrant 3), but be conscious that you are making this trade-off. Visiting quadrant 4 is okay, too—as long as you are living in quadrant 2.

(Self-Management Quadrants adapted from Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*)

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



This Yuba College Writing & Language Development Center Tip Sheet is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>