Setting Priorities: how to get the most out of your time

It can be difficult to juggle many different tasks throughout the course of a day, and it can seem like there’s not enough time to get everything done. Here’s a 3-step approach to feeling good about how you spend your time.

1. Make a list of everything you want to accomplish in the day.
   - Example:
     - Complete scholarship application
     - Respond to Facebook wall posts
     - Do laundry
     - Finish Calc homework
     - Read chapter 6 for history class
     - Go to Dr. Smith’s office hours
     - Clean apartment
     - Go out for dinner with friends

2. Categorize each item according to its urgency and importance.
   - Urgency is about how time-sensitive the task is.
   - Importance has to do with a task’s value to you.
   - urgent
     - a crisis or pressing problem (e.g., overflowing toilet)
     - impending deadline (e.g., test tomorrow)
   - not urgent
     - planning and preparation (e.g., researching a paper that’s due in 3 weeks)
     - true recreation/relaxation (e.g., dinner with friends)
   - important
     - most interruptions (e.g., phone calls)
     - many popular activities (e.g., responding to an IM)
   - not important
     - reading junk mail
     - time-fillers (e.g., channel surfing)

3. Prioritize tasks to get the most out of your time.
   - If you find you’re not getting enough done, you may be spending too much time here.
   - At the end of the day, time spent here is the most gratifying.
   - These tasks tend to become urgent if you procrastinate.
   - Spend as little time on these tasks as possible.

Are you spending the bulk of your time on activities that are urgent, but not important? These can be time black holes – periods of time that just seem to disappear, without much to show for them.

See if you can shift your priorities to activities that are not urgent, but important. These tasks don’t seem as pressing, but they represent the things that you really care about. At the end of the day, you’ll feel that your time was well-spent.
Use this 3-step process to prioritize tasks in your day:

1. Make a list of everything you want to accomplish today.

2. Categorize each item according to its urgency and importance.

   - urgent
   - not urgent

   - important
   - not important

   Prioritize these tasks. They may be less pressing, but they represent things you really care about.

   See if you can give these tasks less priority. Their urgency may get your attention, but they tend to use up the day.

3. Prioritize tasks to get the most out of your time.

   Now that you’ve identified which tasks are a priority for you today, map them to a specific time and place in your schedule or planner.