

BACKWARDS PLANNING

Do you sometimes find yourself underestimating how long it will take to complete an academic task like a large project, assignment, or lab? Backwards planning is a method of planning your time that allows you to break it down into smaller, more manageable tasks and then create a plan to complete those tasks ahead of the due date.

Step 1 – Know your task:

check your course syllabus and/or the description of your project or test and fill in the name of the task, the course it's for, and the final deadline in the backwards plan chart on page 3. If there are other associated deadlines (such as submission of a proposal), save those for step 4.

Step 2 – Create a to-do list:

identify the major steps you'll need to do to complete your task. Your to-do list might include:

- › Create an outline or proposal
- › Submit proposal
- › Meet with teammates for a group project
- › Conduct a literature review
- › Write introduction, conclusion, and body paragraphs
- › Compile lab observations
- › Review course content relevant to the topic
- › Prepare questions for Instructor/Teaching Assistant office hours

Step 3 – Identify other dates and put your backwards plan together:

on the chart, add the day before the deadline as your date for your final review, and then consider other important dates, such as:

- › Attend Instructor/Teaching Assistant office hours
- › Book Writing and Communication Centre appointment
- › Connect with a peer proofread your essay draft
- › Other deadlines associated with the task (for example, a proposal must be submitted)

Working backwards from the final essay submission deadline, fill in these dates and when the other tasks need to get done. For each item, include how long it might take you. If a to-do-list item task seems too big, think about breaking it up into smaller items.

Step 4 – Take Action:

Once your backwards planning chart is filled in, consider adding your tasks and deadlines to your existing time management schedule, like your agenda or online calendar, and start checking them off as they get completed!

Step 5 – Review:

Want to improve your planning effectiveness for next time? As you work through your plan, track the time that each step **actually** takes you to complete. Review why your estimates were (or weren't) accurate to improve how you plan your time and tasks in future backwards plans.

BACKWARDS PLANNING CHART EXAMPLE

Task: Final Essay

Course: PSYC 101

Date:	Task (Time to complete)	How long did it actually take to complete this task? (Why?)
March 1st	Review assignment guidelines and rubric (1 hour)	1 hour
March 1st	Start literature review (3 hours)	3.5 hours (extra time needed to consult with Psychology Librarian for creating successful search strategies)
March 11th	Literature review and references page complete (3 hours)	2.5 hours (found relevant research resources faster than anticipated)
March 12th	Finalize topic and essay outline and create essay document with headings (2 hours)	2 hours
March 14th	Identify any questions or clarifications to bring to office hours (1 hour)	1 hours
March 15th	Attend office hours (1 hour)	1.5 hour (booked follow up appointment to discuss writing progress)
March 19th	Write draft of body paragraphs (3 hours)	3 hours
March 22nd	Write draft of introduction and conclusion paragraphs (2 hours)	2 hours
March 27th	Finalize essay draft for Writing & Communications Office appointment (1 hour)	1 hour
March 28th	Writing & Communications Office appointment (1 hour)	1 hour
March 31st	All feedback and changes incorporated into draft	2 hours (more time needed to review feedback and decide how to incorporate changes)
April 1st	Ask peer to review draft (2 hours)	2 hours
April 4th	Final edits to essay (2 hours)	2 hours
April 5th	Day before deadline Final Review (1 hour)	1 hour
April 6th	Final Deadline	

Task:

Course:

[illegible]