Making a *To Do* List
Setting Daily Priorities

Guidelines:

$ Include **all types of tasks**: schoolwork, home chores, paying bills, errands, and so on.

$ Include **only non-routine tasks**. Do not include going to class, eating meals, going to workB unless, of course, you think you will forget or your schedule changes often.

$ **Keep your list handy**. Keep it in your pocket, your backpack, your notebook, the car dashboard, wherever you know you will see it often.

$ Some people like a small notebook to keep lists in; others like a big sticky note, and others like the back of an envelope (handy to keep the grocery list, bills, and papers in).

$ Make a new list each day or keep updating one for a few days before starting over.

How to make a *To Do* List

Step One: **List the tasks** you want to complete. Be sure to include tasks from all parts of your life (school, family, work, friends, home, and exercise). Include both the serious and fun parts of your life.

Step Two: **Mark each item with its priority level**. Knowing how to set priorities (and sticking to them) is the **real difference** between people who manage time well and those who let it slip away. Only **you** can decide the priority level of each of **your** tasks.

> **Identify your priority** by rating tasks according to the **consequences (cause and effect) that will occur if you don=t complete them.**

> Try the following system for rating:

> ** (two stars) **Imperative task** (must be done; the serious consequences of your not doing it are something you really want to avoid).
> * (one star) **Important task** (needs to be done, but if it doesn't get done, you are willing to take the consequences).
> (no stars) **Nice-to-do task** (getting it done would be nice, but no negative consequences occur if it doesn't happen).

So what is the difference between imperative and important tasks? That is the toughest question in time management. If your homework is late, does that have a serious consequence? It might mean a lower grade, no points at all, being lost in the next class period, or feelings of letting yourself or the teacher down. But you might make a conscious choice one time that the lower grade is acceptable because studying for a test was a higher priority on that day. So you need to decide for yourself; after all, you are the one who will have to take the consequences.

Also, a task that might seem nice-to-do one day might be imperative on another. For example, if you have had a tense and busy day, going for a run or walk might be critical for clearing your head so that you can continue with the work you need to complete that evening.

***Step Three*: Use your list and cross off tasks as you complete them.** Evidence suggests that people who cross off completed tasks feel more productive and more committed to keeping up with their time management system.

***Step Four*: Move uncompleted tasks to the next day and reevaluate their priority level.** At the end of each day (or the beginning of the next if you are a morning person), create your next list.

As you move uncompleted tasks forward, consider whether their priority level (and their consequences) have changed.

X   Reading a chapter that could be put off yesterday may move from *important* to *imperative* today.

X   Grocery shopping or laundry may move from *nice-to-do* to *important* (or stay the same!)

X   Seeing an instructor to find out what happened the day you missed class is still *imperative* (and now has three stars).

Remember: The consequences will be yours to live with, and you control them better when you decide what priority to set on your tasks.

Sample student to do list *(your priorities will likely be different)*:

<u>Monday</u>

**   Turn in completed essay in writing class

*   See about signing up for a math tutor

**   Pay rent

         Get birthday present for Casey

*   Buy milk

*   Read first half of Chapter 7 for psychology class (due Wed)

*   Call insurance company

**   Meet at 3:00 for bike ride with friends

         Go to library to read reserve materials for psych

**   Do math homework (Section 2.2 and 2.3)
*   Check out Learning Center for computer help with inserting the chart into psych paper