

Building Better Habits

How to Break Down Large Assignments

Large assignments and projects can feel overwhelming. Waiting until the last minute or trying to tackle the whole thing at once can cause a lot of issues – panic, decision paralysis, substandard work, etc.

To avoid procrastinating, decision paralysis, and feeling overwhelmed, it is good to try to break down large projects into smaller tasks. In general, it's easier to work on and complete short 30-90 minute tasks. Follow the steps below to break down assignments into manageable pieces.

Step 1: Define the project's "milestones"

- Break it into parts (milestones) that can be completed in 2-7 days depending on the final due date.
- Define the milestones, the order in which they need to be completed, and their due dates.

Step 2: Break the milestones into tasks

- Brainstorm every task you can think of for completing each milestone. This is your to-do list.
- When you write them down, use specifics - ex) "write 300 words" "find, read, and take notes for 3 sources" – broad words don't give us a clear goal to meet, which makes it less likely they'll be met.

Step 3: Put the tasks in the correct order

- Look at your tasks for each milestone and make sure they are in a logical order.
- What should you do first, second, third, etc.? And start to think about how long each task will take you.

Step 4: Add the tasks to your calendar

- Give yourself too much time for each task to make sure you don't miss deadlines.
- Ideally, you want items on your to-do list to take no more than 90 minutes to complete.
- Add the small tasks to your calendar, starting at the project due date (or 1-2 days before that) and work your way backwards.
- Assign yourself a deadline for each task and milestone to help with focus and staying on track.

Example)

