



The Sunday Meeting

I've spent a great deal of time in the past three weeks helping people to create their **semester plans**. While doing this, it's become clear to me that many people are great at making a list of goals, but remain unclear how to connect their goals to time, and how to make their plan work on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. In other words, a semester plan is unlikely to be useful if it is only a statement of goals that won't be touched again until the end of the semester. Instead, I encourage you to see the process of creating a semester plan as one where you identify **WHAT** your personal and professional goals are, outline **HOW** they will be accomplished, and **WHEN** you will do the work. From that point, the real secret to making a semester plan come to life is to use it on a weekly basis as the foundation for planning out your week. One of the simplest and most transformative strategies that I have seen graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and new faculty put into practice is what I call "the Sunday Meeting." As with all strategies, you may want to try it out for a few weeks, see how it works for **YOU**, and then adapt it to your particular needs, workload, and lifestyle.

The Sunday Meeting is quite simple: devote 30 minutes of time at the beginning of each week to planning your week. It doesn't have to take place on Sunday, but many people begin preparations for the week on Sunday night. What's important is that it's in place before your week begins. The purpose of this weekly planning time is to make sure that all the things that contribute to your **LONG-TERM SUCCESS** get done and that you don't get distracted by seemingly urgent (but unimportant) tasks throughout the week. During your weekly meeting time, try the following five steps:

STEP #1: Create Your Skeleton (5 Minutes)

The meeting starts by blocking out all of your commitments for the week: research and writing time, classes, office hours, and meetings, etc... You should also include non-work items that you are committed to a specific time and place, such as child-care pick-up, date night, and/or Zumba class. If you haven't tried it yet, you may want to schedule your writing time first thing in the morning (before checking e-mail or Facebook, prepping for classes, and/or responding to everyone else's needs in your workplace). Your commitments form the skeleton of your week because everything else has to be fleshed out on top of them.

STEP #2: Brain Dump (10 Minutes)

Write out all your to-do items for the week including the short term tasks you need to get done, as well as the strategic tasks associated with your long term research agenda (these should be listed by week in your semester plan). Many of the new faculty members I work with categorize their to-do items under the headings "teaching," "service," "research," and "personal" to quickly assess the relative length of their to-do tasks and to determine whether their lists are aligned with their priorities and how they will be evaluated for promotion and tenure. The purpose of this step is to: 1) reconnect you with your semester plan on a weekly basis, 2) get everything out of your head and onto paper, and 3) to put you in a position to control your week (instead of your week controlling you). The brain dump can cause either relief or anxiety, but no matter how you feel about it in the moment, go on to the next step.

STEP #3: Introduce Your Tasks To Your Calendar (15 Minutes)

Here's where it gets ugly! Turn back to your calendar for this week and assign each of your to-do items to a *specific block of time*. This will require you to estimate how long your tasks will take, prioritize what's most important, and commit to actually doing specific work at specific times this week. Inevitably, you will have the same devastating realization each week: you don't have enough time to complete all the tasks on your to-do list. Breathe deeply. Having more tasks than time is the perfectly normal reality of academic life. No matter how frustrating it is, it's far better to deal with that reality at the beginning of the week than to walk blindly into that realization at the end of the week.

STEP #4: Decide What To Do With Everything That Doesn't Fit

Knowing that you have more tasks than time, consciously choose how you will spend your time this week. You may need to prioritize the tasks on your list and I suggest using the criteria by which you will be evaluated for your next step. For example, if you're on the tenure-track, use the criteria for tenure and

promotion as your guide.

For the tasks that don't fit, you have many different options! You can:

- delegate
- lower your standards (especially for non-critical tasks)
- compromise
- renegotiate deadlines
- ask for help
- let some things go

Step #5: Commit To Executing The Plan

Of course, the best-laid plans can be thrown into disarray by unexpected circumstances and daily chaos. But having a clear plan and genuinely committing to its execution are essential to moving forward each week, will help you to easily say "no" to additional request during the week, and will assist you in being far more productive than you would be operating on crisis management each day.

The Weekly Challenge

This week, I want to challenge you to do the following:

- Take 30 minutes and try having a Sunday Meeting. If you want to spend a bit more time and walk through this with me, download February's training on this topic by [clicking here](#).
- If you still don't have a calendar, it's time to acquire one (it doesn't have to be fancy and you can even download and print my [free and simple time map](#) as the most basic way to get you started).
- Gently acknowledge that having more tasks than time is perfectly normal for academic life. It is not an individual shortcoming or personal flaw.
- Review your calendar and tasks before saying "yes" to any new commitments this week.
- Re-commit yourself to 30-60 minutes each day for your writing.
- If you haven't created your [semester plan](#), it's not too late.

I hope this week brings you the willingness to try a Sunday Meeting, comfort in knowing that you are not alone in having more tasks than time, and the creativity to make conscious decisions that are in line with your priorities.

Peace and Productivity,



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