Project Planning

If you have a large project you are unsure how to tackle, or are struggling to know where to even start, project planning can help you see the project in manageable terms and get you started on a path to successful completion.

1. **Set your goals.** The first step in any project is deciding what your end goal is. If you don't know what the end product should be, how will you know when you are finished, or if you've done well? If you are working on a school assignment, your professor has probably already made the goals clear. If so, make sure you pay attention to the professor's instructions. Once your goals are clear, come back to them throughout the project to make sure you are still on track. It can be easy to get off course if you aren't keeping your goals in mind.
2. **Brainstorm.** Not sure how to accomplish your goals? There is probably more than one way to go about it. Don't stress out about finding the one right answer! Brainstorm your options. To get your ideas flowing, do a "Google" search; talk to others; read a few short articles on the issue; anything to get you thinking about the goal from different angles and perspective so you can find the one that seems to be the right fit. Don't throw your brainstorming list away when you are done! You might decide on one path and realize partway that it just isn't working. This is not failure. It's an opportunity to try one of your other ideas.
3. **Break it Down.** Break your project down into small manageable steps. Looking at the whole project as one big task can be daunting. Identify the smaller components of the project so you can work on them one by one.
4. **Identify Resources.** Determine what you will need in order to get the project completed. Will you need help from other people, research materials from the library, expert opinions or advice, money? Identify the needed resources, and create a plan to obtain them.
5. **Create a Timeline.** Don't just look at the due date as your timeline. Create a series of deadlines to match up with the small steps you identified when you broke the project down into "bite-size" pieces. Doing this will help you set a good pace to complete the project on time. Give yourself a few extra "buffer" days at the end to make sure you have time for unexpected delays and final review.

Team Projects

Oftentimes projects require teamwork for successful completion. If you are working with a team, two important considerations are **responsibilities** and **communication**. As part of your project planning process, be sure to assign specific responsibilities to each team member, including selecting a team leader. Everyone needs to be in agreement and fully understand who is responsible for the various components of the project. It is important to consider each person's natural strengths as you assign tasks. People produce their best work when they are able to utilize their strengths for the assignment. As you move from project planning to implementation, your team will need to communicate to share updates and indicate any troubles they are running into. Including communication and updates in your timeline can help make sure your team stays connected.

Final Notes

Grace: As you move from project planning to implementation, give yourself (and your team members) grace when unexpected challenges and delays occur. Remain open and flexible to adjust your plan as necessary, and view your challenges as opportunities, rather than failures.

Priorities: Chances are, you will have more than one project or responsibility vying for your attention at any given time. Decide which issues need to take priority based on deadlines and level of importance. If you are the kind of person who can't do your homework until the dinner dishes are cleaned, take a moment to clean the dishes, but don't let it turn into cleaning the whole house as a means of distraction or procrastination.