

# Time Management: Task Batching and Time Chunking

Time management is difficult- but you are not alone! There are scholars dedicated to discovering how we can best be productive and manage our time to reach our greatest potential, and plenty of bloggers, writers, and teachers happy to pass this information along. While there are plenty of ways to manage your time, today we'll be focusing on two strategies that can be especially helpful to graduate students: task batching and time chunking.

## Task Batching

Task batching (or simply batching) is when you gather all similar tasks and do them all at once. By completing tasks this way, you can maximize your focus on one type of task over a period of time, and therefore greatly increase your productivity on that particular task. Task batching for graduate students may look like completing all your grading in one time slot, emails in another, and data entry in another. While this may seem overwhelming at first, as you get started you can find yourself more focused by the repetitive task.



So why batch your tasks? Task batching can allow you to gain a greater sense of focus, as you stick to one type of task at a time. When we switch from one task to another, research from the American Psychological Association suggests that we lose about 40% of productivity as we take time to set up and adjust to a new state of mind<sup>1</sup>. Task batching allows us to skip this process and stay focused for a longer period of time. Focusing on one type of task for a period of time can also help us achieve a state of flow, a long interval of deep focus where we perform at our best<sup>2</sup>. Time-batching can also be helpful outside of your work and school responsibilities. You can batch responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, running errands, and being on social media. The benefits are the same!

## Time Chunking

Time chunking is similar to task batching, but instead of separating your day by task, you're separating it by topic. As a graduate student, this could look like dedicating hours or full days to different classes. This way of structuring can encourage planning ahead to avoid the urgent rush when an assignment is due the next day, in addition to many of the same benefits from task batching, such as improving focus and reducing start up time. Time chunking also encourages long-term planning and can significantly help with procrastination. By dedicating certain hours or days in the week to a specific class or project, you are no longer working exclusively on urgency of due dates. This way of managing your time requires planning ahead so you can complete the necessary tasks each week at the time you plan, but it also give you the control back. You decide when you work on a project, not the due date.

Example:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Focus	CRS 601	REL 601	CRS 683	CRS 601 (AM) CRS 683 (PM)	Teaching Assistant (AM) REL 601 (PM)	Catch-Up (if needed)	Planning/ Prepare for Week

<sup>1</sup> American Psychological Association (2006) Multitasking: Switching costs, Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/research/action/multitask>

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about Flow, read Mihaly Csikszentmihályi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990).