

Time Estimation

to be included on all subsequent homework assignments

One of the most important lessons you can¹ learn in graduate school is good time management. Below I have listed three skills you need in order to have effective time management:

1. estimating how long a task will take
2. prioritizing tasks (deciding what comes first, and what goes last)
3. creating and keeping to your task list²

A big part of time management is estimating how long something will *actually* take (#1) - not how long you *want* it to take. Next is deciding which tasks are most important and which are less of a priority (#2) and finally, creating a task list that balances both the priority level and the amount of time you think something will take (#3). This third point also means deciding when something is good enough to accomplish the job so that you can move on to another task.

Thus, for *all homework assignments* in this class, before starting the assignment I want you to estimate the total amount of time it will take you to complete it. Then, I want you to decide the maximum amount of time you can spend on the assignment and write it down. *Do not spend more than your maximum amount of time on the assignment, since I am certain you have other tasks on your list to get to.*³ And finally, I want you to keep track of how much time you actually spend on the assignment. You will be expected to record all three of these numbers as part of your homework solutions (see below).

Homeworks Cover Page

For each assignment, I want the following three entries to be included on the first page of your solutions.

Estimate of Time to Completion: _____

Maximum Allotted Time to Completion: _____

Actual Time to Completion: _____

¹I say “can” because a lot of people don’t make it a priority and they should.

²Although one must of course be ready to be flexible

³As an example, I get invited to give talks at departments and conferences. I could spend an entire week, morning to night, making the perfect presentation, however, other aspects of my work would suffer tremendously and I would not be able to keep up the quality science that got me invited in the first place. Thus, I typically give myself 2 days or less to make a talk from scratch. When the time is up, it is what it is.