

Being resilient: Planning and managing your time

Workshop led by Catherine Bertola

Weds 28 October, 10-11am

This year presents a number of new challenges to negotiate, as we learn to adapt to new ways of working. This workshop will introduce different strategies and approaches to planning, to help you get the most out of the time you have both in and outside the studio over the next few months.

Notes

What is resilience?

Psychologists define **resilience** as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity

All of you have already demonstrated your resilience, in how you managed to navigate the last few months of the last academic year, when the rug was pulled out from underneath you all by the Lockdown situation.

Earlier on in Lockdown I came across this quote which I thought was really useful;

“Artists – many of them locked out of studios and with projects, residencies and exhibitions having evaporated – are improvising with the means at their disposal..... Many are getting used to working in new ways..... But this is what artists have always done. As Martin Clark, director of Camden Arts Centre in London, says:

“I used to work at Tate St Ives. There it’s really noticeable that when you get to the war years, paintings became really small – because there wasn’t much canvas around. Everyone’s work changed to accommodate the material conditions. In a way, what’s happening now is no different.”

Forget Titian, here's a talking dog! Is this digital art's big moment?
Charlotte Higgins, The Guardian, Tues 12 May, 2020

Throughout history artists have always found ways to continue making work.

We are now in a new, and possibly more difficult stage of the Pandemic, as we try to adjust and find new ways of continuing to work in the long term, with a new set of parameters-socials distancing, reduced access to studios. It is quite an unsettling time, with an impending sense that things could shift at any moment. Hopefully this workshop will offer some ideas and suggestions of how you can stay focused and plan your time over the next few months.

When I talk about plans and planning, I don’t mean in a rigid sense, but how you can use planning strategies to be nimble and responsive to stay focussed on what you are trying to achieve.

Compartmentalising time

You have all been given quite a clear structure in terms of time in the studio this year.

It can be difficult to get used to working in a more fractured way. Depending on your work and situation it might be difficult to work across two spaces, so how can you use the time in and out the studio effectively?

If you have a clear plan of what you need to do, it becomes easier to compartmentalise different aspects of what you do and what makes up your working process; research, learning skills, visiting exhibitions and gathering materials-that are not necessarily studio based.

Have a clear sense of direction or goal?

Having a clear aim is really important. This might sound difficult in relation to developing work in the studio, as specific defined outcomes may not always be tangible to picture, especially for experimental, research and process based practice. However you probably will have a clear sense of what you want to achieve like producing a series of drawings or a film, or something more process based like experimenting with a particular material to see where that takes you.

A clear goal doesn't mean you have to know what things will end up looking like it's more like a direction of travel. Goals can be big (a feature film, a 10ft bronze sculpture) and they can also be small (a drawing a day, write 200 words)

All goals need to be timely, specific and achievable but that doesn't mean they can't be ambitious.

- By my next tutorial I want to have completed a series of experiment with clay
- By interim I will have produced 3 resolved paintings
- By the end of the month I will have written a chapter of my dissertation

Once you have got a clear goal, you then can assess where you are in relation to achieving it, think about what else you need to do and make a plan. GROW

Remember goals can change over time, and that is okay, it's your work and your rules.

What else?

A really good question to always ask yourself is **if I can't do that, what else can I do?**

- If you have to isolate for two weeks, what can you do at home presuming you are not ill?
- If you are working on large scale project, what else can you do outside of the department to plan and prepare? Drawings, materials orders, tests.
- If it becomes too difficult to shift work between home and the studio, Can you have two strands of work happening?

There will always be something you can do, even if it is reading and listening to lot's of artist talks online.

Tools and strategies

The foundation of time and workload management is planning, so here are some useful tools. You may already do some of these things instinctively.

To do lists

A list of what you need to do, in order of importance.

Brain dump-get everything that is swimming round your head, all the things you have to remember to do on paper; from calling your mum to ordering materials, finishing a painting or writing your dissertation. This list will most likely be very long and very unwieldy, but it can be a really useful somewhat cathartic exercise.

Once you have this, you can then start to break it down into smaller chunks, organise and prioritise the tasks. Make smaller more manageable to lists for a week or even a day- consider making it a habit to, at the end of each workday, go ahead and write out your “to-do” list for the next workday. The key word here is manageable- be kind to your self make sure that what you put on your list is realistic-so you feel like you are making progress and ticking things off.

Calendar

Alongside to do lists, calendars are also a big help Enabling you to plot keys dates and write down the deadlines - actual or self imposed-this could be a tutorial, assessment, exhibition- for tasks that are part of completing the overall project. Think about which days might be best to dedicate to specific tasks.

Map out you week so you can block out time for certain things. If the most important thing for you to do this week is read a particular book, or spend a day trawling charity shops for materials-ring fence a time when you can do that, and do not commit to doing anything else in that period.

How to prioritise?

Prioritising the things that are most important so you can given them your full attention, without getting distracted by other things is often harder that you might think.

I’m going to share a few strategies drawn from business to help improve productivity.

Eisenhower Matrix or the The Urgent – Important Matrix (see Appendix 1)

The number one mistake that really ruins your productivity is setting your priorities all wrong.The problem arises not from doing too little, but from doing too much of the wrong things.The philosophy behind this tool is to organize your tasks by their urgency and importance and then decide on the action you should take.

Place every task from your to-do list into one of the squares, according to the task’s importance and urgency status. Each of these four squares actually represents the kind of action you should take.

#1 Urgent – Important (Necessity)

Place here: Tasks of high importance concerning your life, career, family that you need to do immediately

Best action: Do them first and as early in your day as possible.

Don't over crowd this square

#2 Not Urgent – Important (Quality)

Place here: Tasks concerning your life goals, career, family, quality activities etc that are really important but can wait for later

This is the most important square!! Plan them, find an appropriate time and schedule a time to do them.

#3 Urgent – Not Important (Deception)

Place here: Tasks that are not important to you but need to be done by someone as soon as possible.

Can someone else do them for you, can you delay them for a couple of days. In most cases these tasks are not so urgent as you thought at first, or you can avoid them altogether.

#4 Not Urgent – Not Important (Waste)

Place here: Neither urgent nor Important tasks like internet, social and fun stuff.

Kanban (See Appendix 2)

Kanban is a Japanese work-flow management system for industry but it has been adapted to be used as an individual planning tool. It was sent to me by Ruth Claxton from Eastside Projects, Birmingham.

3 columns from left to right; To Do, Working on, Done

Place all the things you have to do in the left column. Place three things from your list in the middle column, the rules are you can only have three things in the middle column, you only move things out to the right column when they are done. It really makes you think about what you prioritise.

One thing a day

Commit to focussing on the one important thing you want to get done today. Write it down and put where you can see it to remind you and keep you focussed.

Be aware of your time thieves-what things distract you the most and suck up a lot of your time? Can you turn off your phone for an afternoon, delete/mute Apps on your phone, don't check emails for a day. Simple things that might help you stop getting easily distracted

Reflect and rethink

Sometimes things don't go to plan, and plans are never fixed they change all the time, for a myriad of reasons and especially at the moment. So it is important to continually reflect on what you are doing. Spend a few minutes at the end of the day, or end of your studio session reflecting on what you have done, have my goals shifted? What are they now? What do you think you need to do next-so you can make sure you have what you need. Document the work in your studio so you have a visual record to look at when you are not there. This will also help provide content for your Digital Notebook as well.

Be kind to yourself

It's really important to be kind to yourself, sometimes the best thing to do if you are feeling overwhelmed is take a break. Go for a walk (or whatever helps you to switch off and relax), sometimes doing something different can help you think and coming back to things with fresh eyes can give you a new perspective

To sum up

1. Be clear on what you want to achieve

2. Prioritise -Prioritize tasks so you can make sure you find time for the things that are most important for what you are trying to achieve.

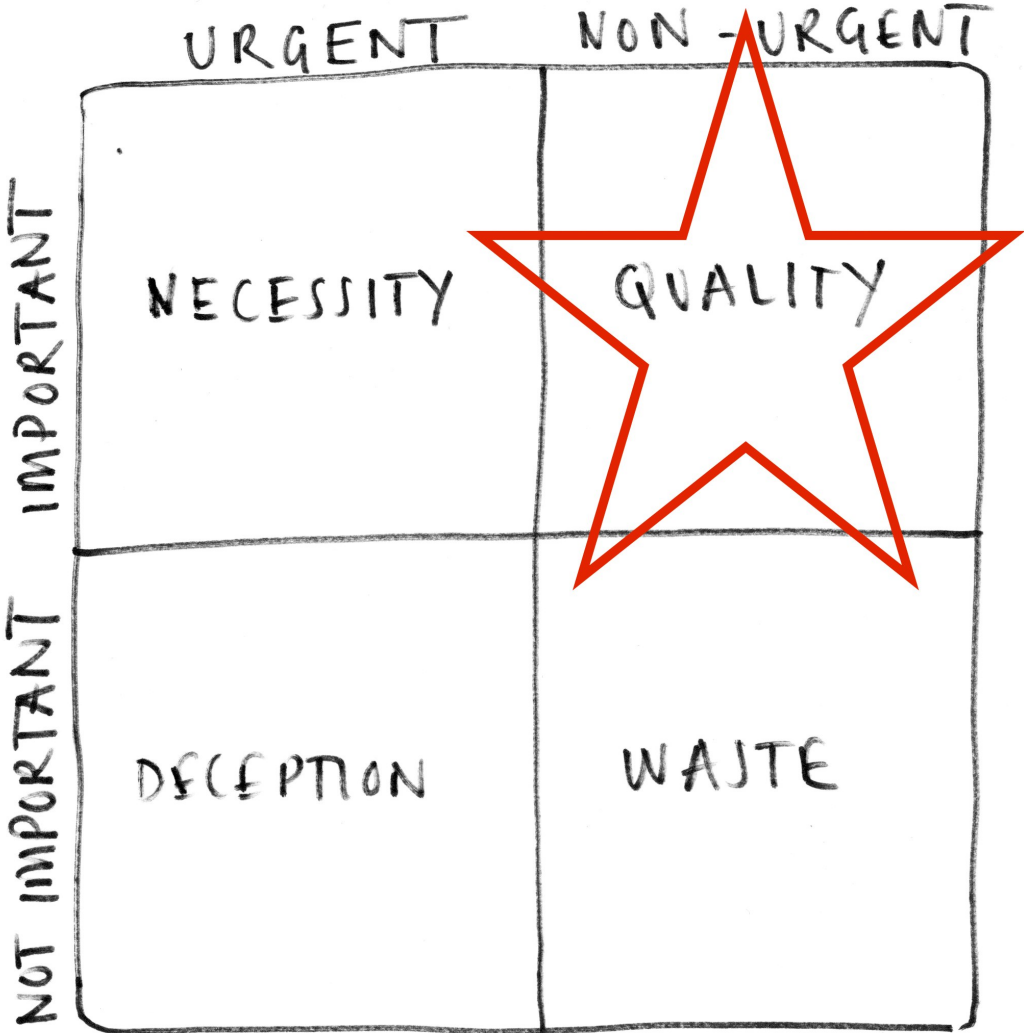
3. Organize yourself- use a calendar for more long-term time management. And think about which days might be best to dedicate to specific tasks.

4. Remove non-essential tasks/activities- Determine what is significant and what deserves your time.

5. Plan ahead- Make sure you start every day with a clear idea of what you need to do – what needs to get done THAT DAY or WEEK.

Appendix 1

Eisenhower Matrix or the The Urgent – Important Matrix



Appendix 2

Kanban

KANBAN

TO DO	DOING	DONE
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