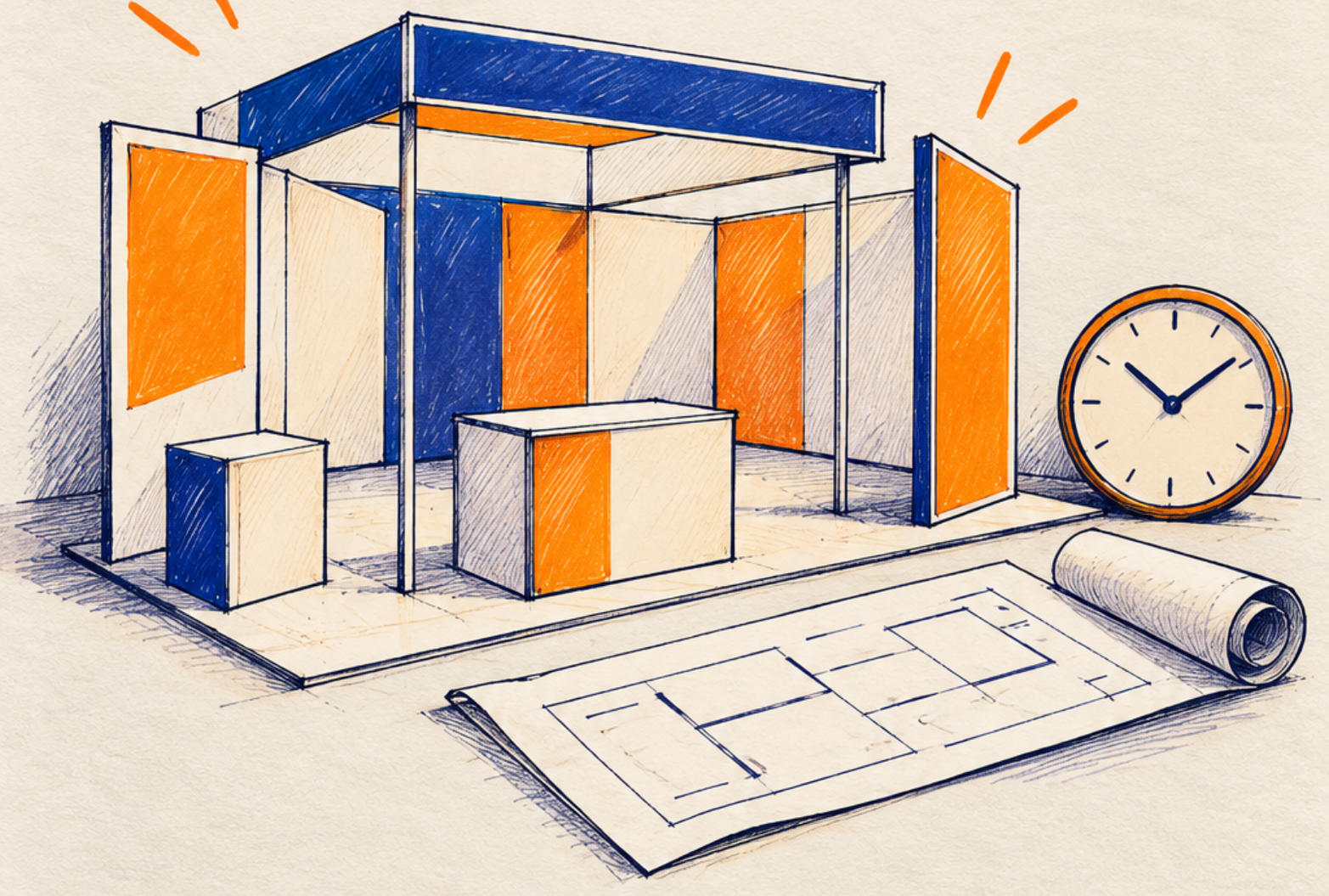
How to Turn a Project Idea into a Realistic Schedule



Turn the idea into a result

A schedule should explain how the team can reach an accepted outcome.

Start with purpose

Clarify the objective, scope, major deliverables, acceptance and constraints. A date without an agreed result is difficult to plan or control.

Exhibition case

The team must prepare and install a small exhibition, then verify it is ready to open. Graphics, display stands, access and inspection all affect readiness.

Use the model

This guide builds a simple working-day network, checks resources and uncertainty, then turns it into a controlled forecast. The example's durations are illustrative.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the accepted result your schedule must reach.

List the complete work

Missing activities create a schedule that looks shorter than the real commitment.

Use the scope

Review the WBS, requirements, supplier commitments, verification, transition and management work. Include external decisions or inputs that affect delivery.

Exhibition case

The compact model has A approve brief, B prepare graphics, C build stands, D install and E verify readiness. Real projects may need additional delivery, access and operating activities.

Check with the team

Ask whether completing every listed activity would achieve the required result. Add missing work before improving the appearance of the chart.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Find one readiness activity that a technical task list might omit.

Define manageable activities

An activity should be clear enough to estimate and report progress.

Describe the work

Use an action, boundary, owner and completion evidence. Choose a size that supports the decisions and progress checks the project needs.

Exhibition case

"Prepare graphics" includes producing the agreed files and completing the required review. It finishes when the approved graphics are ready for installation.

Avoid ambiguous status

A task called "graphics" can mean design, printing or installation. Clarify the boundary so its successor knows what will arrive.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Rewrite one vague activity with a completion condition.

Estimate duration from the work

Duration depends on effort, productivity, availability and the relevant calendar.

State the basis

Use team experience, comparable work or a work estimate with assumptions. Distinguish elapsed lead time, hands-on effort and working duration.

Exhibition case

A 24-person-hour preparation activity needs four working days if one person can devote six hours daily and the model assumes steady productive work.

Keep uncertainty visible

A single duration is a planning estimate. Record ranges or risks for uncertain work and identify evidence that could refine the estimate.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the capacity assumption behind one duration.

Use calendars and availability

The same number of working days can span different calendar dates.

Choose the calendar

Define working days, holidays, shifts, access windows and relevant resource calendars. Apply the calendar consistently before making a date promise.

Exhibition case

The installation crew cannot enter during visitor hours. The simple network initially assumes uninterrupted working days; the actual calendar must reflect the permitted access.

Check the difference

A three-working-day task starting before a closure may finish later in calendar time than expected. A bar chart needs the correct underlying calendar.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify a nonworking period that could affect your next milestone.

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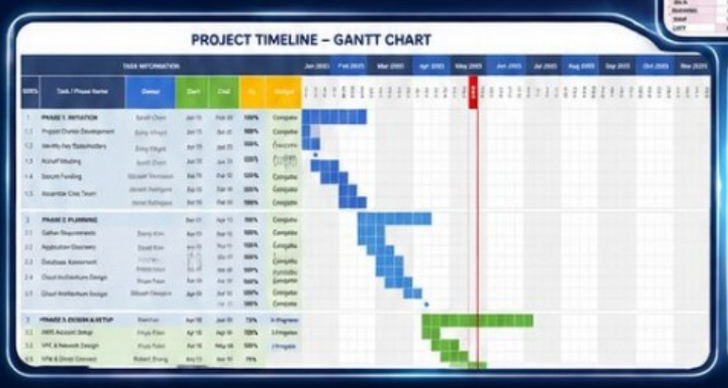
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Sequence real dependencies

A relationship should describe why the successor depends on the predecessor.

Build the logic

Connect activities using justified timing relationships. Avoid arbitrary date constraints where dependency logic better explains the work.

Exhibition case

A precedes B and C. D needs both B and C complete. E follows D. This is a parallel branch that rejoins before installation.

Review the reason

Ask whether a link is physically required, externally imposed or a chosen sequencing preference. Record important assumptions and opportunities for safe overlap.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Explain the reason behind one dependency in your network.

Build the first network

Use a small model you can check before adding detail.

State the inputs

Durations are A 2, B 3, C 4, D 2 and E 1 working days. All example links are finish-to-start with zero lag on one working calendar.

Trace the paths

A-B-D-E totals 2 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 8 days.
A-C-D-E totals 2 + 4 + 2 + 1 = 9 days.

Read the join

D must wait for both predecessors. The longer branch controls its earliest start under these assumptions, giving a nine-working-day earliest finish.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Add the two path durations and explain why they are not added together.

Calculate early dates

Use elapsed working time from zero to avoid inclusive-date confusion.

Forward pass

A starts at 0 and finishes at 2. B runs 2 to 5 and C runs 2 to 6. D starts at the later predecessor finish, 6, and ends at 8.

Finish the model

E runs 8 to 9. These offsets describe elapsed working time. Convert them into calendar dates only after applying the actual working calendar.

Check the evidence

The model assumes separate available resources for the parallel activities, clear inputs and no extra lag or delay. Verify those conditions before treating the result as a forecast.

Task	Start	Finish
A	0	2
B	2	5
C	2	6
D	6	8
E	8	9

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write the early start and finish of each activity.

Read the controlling path

The longest logic path identifies where a duration slip can affect the model's finish.

Critical path

A-C-D-E controls the nine-day finish in this simple network. A one-day increase on C moves the finish to day 10 if nothing else changes.

Float on the other branch

B finishes at day 5 while D needs it by day 6. Under these assumptions, B has one day of total float relative to the project finish.

Use the insight

Monitor controlling and near-controlling work, but still manage the whole network. Changes can create a different critical path.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Explain which task can slip one day without moving the current finish.

Check resource feasibility

A logic schedule is incomplete until the required resources can actually do it.

Use real capacity

Assign people, skills, equipment and facilities, and compare combined demand with availability. Resolve conflicts rather than assuming every parallel activity has its own crew.

Exhibition case

The initial model gives B and C separate resources. If the same person must perform both and cannot overlap them, they require 3 + 4 days after A.

Recalculate

With that sequential resource assumption, finish becomes 2 + 3 + 4 + 2 + 1 = 12 working days. Explain the changed basis before communicating the date.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Check one apparent parallel branch for a shared-resource conflict.

Include external handoffs

The team may depend on work it does not directly control.

Define the commitment

Record the needed result, owner, expected date and readiness evidence for suppliers, customers and other teams. Link it into the schedule where relevant.

Exhibition case

Installation requires confirmed access and delivery of the stands. A late delivery or unavailable loading slot can control readiness even when the internal build is on plan.

Monitor early

Review the handoff before its due date and prepare proportionate responses. A supplier's optimistic date should remain distinguishable from a verified commitment.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify an external dependency that lacks acceptance evidence.

Assess schedule uncertainty

A deterministic finish is one view of a model with uncertain inputs.

Examine the exposure

Look at duration ranges, dependencies, resource availability and significant risks. Use suitable analysis for the project's decision and scale.

Exhibition case

Stand materials may arrive late. Confirm availability, consider an alternative and assess the effect on the controlling branch. A contingency choice needs an owner and trigger.

Communicate clearly

State the planning assumptions and uncertainty behind the forecast. Avoid presenting the nine-day model as a guarantee when its inputs remain unverified.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Name the assumption most likely to move the finish.

Reconcile the required date

A target and a feasible plan can differ.

Show the gap

If the required finish is day 8 while the current feasible model finishes day 9, present the one-day gap with the relevant assumptions and options.

Exhibition case

If stand construction can credibly reduce from 4 to 3 days with approved support, both branches reach installation by day 5 and total duration becomes 8 days.

Check the trade-offs

Confirm cost, resources, quality and risk before committing to compression. Reducing a noncontrolling task alone may not solve the finish gap.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Evaluate one option that actually affects the controlling path.

Agree the baseline and controls

A schedule needs an authorised comparison basis and a reporting method.

Record the plan

Confirm scope, logic, resources, calendars, estimates and key assumptions. Use the organisation's process for approval and change control.

Exhibition case

The team agrees the selected resource arrangement and readiness milestone. The baseline identifies what was approved, while later forecasts can show a different expected finish.

Plan the updates

Define the status date, progress evidence, owners and review frequency. Keep the original basis visible so changes and performance can be understood.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Name the evidence you need from one activity owner each update.

Update from actual progress

A useful forecast is built from what happened and what remains.

Use a status date

Record actual starts and finishes, remaining durations, issues and updated assumptions. Recalculate the network instead of moving bars to preserve the preferred date.

Exhibition case

C started late and now has three days remaining. Inspect its dependencies and available support, then assess the readiness forecast and recovery choices.

Check the result

Avoid claiming progress from elapsed time alone. Ask for completion evidence and a realistic remaining-work estimate from the owner.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write a status request that asks for facts and remaining work.



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Your realistic-schedule desk check

A credible chart should survive questions about its underlying model.

Check completeness and logic

Does it cover the required work, verification and handover? Are links justified, dates calendar-aware and milestones supported by evidence?

Check capacity and uncertainty

Are resource demands feasible, external handoffs owned and significant risks visible? Does the forecast explain the assumptions behind the finish?

Use the case

The exhibition's nine-day model is useful only if its scope, parallel resources, access and durations are credible. Recalculate when those facts change.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Review one milestone by tracing backwards through the work that makes it possible.