

Everything Feels Urgent. What Comes First?

TRIAGE DESK

Sort the consequences before the noise

An alert is loud. A deadline may be quiet. When several people want a response, identify what actually changes if each item waits. You can then choose a first action and tell the other people when to expect a decision.



WHO THIS IS FOR

People facing several competing deadlines in an ordinary day.

BY THE END

Use a short triage sheet to make one defensible choice during a crowded day.

Collect the competing requests

Write the requests down in one place, using a verb and an object for each. Include the work already in progress. If you compare only the newest messages, an earlier commitment can disappear.

Include the commitment already underway.

TRY IT

List the three demands that are competing for the same hour.

The busy opening hour



A shop assistant is asked to refill a shelf, answer a supplier and update a poster while a customer is waiting for a collection.

WORKED EXAMPLE

The list includes the waiting customer and the already-promised supplier confirmation. The poster has no stated deadline.

WHAT CHANGES

Making the hidden commitment visible changes what can be compared.

Include the commitment already underway.

Find the real cutoff

Ask when the work must be usable and what happens after that point. A requested time can sometimes move; a dispatch departure may be less flexible. Verify rather than guessing which is which.

Ask what changes if this waits.

TRY IT

Ask one requester what their next step depends on.

Three messages marked urgent

A colleague wants slides by noon, a courier leaves in twenty minutes and a friend needs an answer before booking tonight.

WORKED EXAMPLE

The courier item has a near, concrete cutoff. The slides may still matter more if a meeting starts immediately, so confirm the meeting time.

WHAT CHANGES

A cutoff and its consequence give you better evidence than an urgent label.

Ask what changes if this waits.

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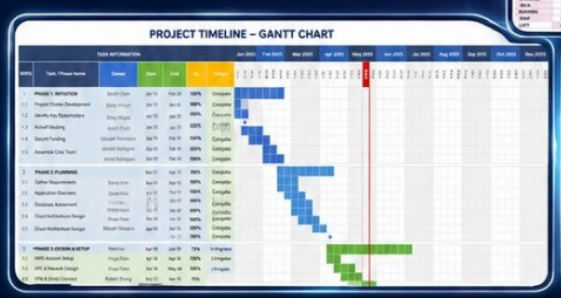
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Look for the smallest unblocker

Sometimes five minutes of work lets another person continue while a much larger task waits. Check whether the small action genuinely unblocks them and whether interrupting your own work carries a cost.

Use a small action when it releases real work.

TRY IT

Find the action that releases someone else's next useful step.

A technician needs access

You are drafting a long report. A technician cannot begin until you confirm which unit to inspect.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Send the verified unit number, then return to the report. Save a note of the sentence or calculation where you stopped.

WHAT CHANGES

You have removed a bottleneck without handing over the whole morning to new requests.

Use a small action when it releases real work.

Choose an order you can explain

Compare consequence, time sensitivity and the amount of work required. Serious immediate hazards call for the relevant response procedure. For ordinary work, name the reason for the order and who can authorize a trade-off.

Escalate a real conflict before a deadline passes.

TRY IT

Write “First I will … because …” using a real consequence.

One person, two deadlines

Your manager expects a customer quote and a stock count by four. Each requires the same final hour.

WORKED EXAMPLE

“I can finish the quote before the customer’s cutoff or complete the count first. Which commitment should move?”

WHAT CHANGES

The person with authority can choose the trade-off. You have made the capacity limit explicit.

Escalate a real conflict before a deadline passes.

Tell waiting people the next checkpoint

A person who does not know when you will respond may send more reminders. Give a realistic checkpoint and distinguish a progress update from delivery. Revise it when new information arrives.

Tell people what will happen and when.

TRY IT

Send one short expectation-setting message to someone whose item must wait.

The poster update

The poster can wait until the customer collection and courier dispatch are complete.

WORKED EXAMPLE

“I’ll review the poster at two and let you know whether it can be printed today.”

WHAT CHANGES

The message promises a review, not a finished print job. That distinction protects the next decision.

Tell people what will happen and when.

A fifteen-minute triage

A parcel is about to miss collection, a teammate needs a code to start and a report is due later today.

FIRST

Check the actual pickup time and the promised report deadline. Make sure the code request is authorized.

THEN

Send the correct code or route the request appropriately if it releases work quickly. Prepare the parcel before pickup.

FINISH

Block a realistic period for the report and communicate any risk to the owner now.

The order follows consequences, dependencies and authority. It can change when those facts change.

Try three situations

SITUATION 1

A new message says ASAP but gives no reason.

SITUATION 2

Two high-impact tasks truly cannot both be finished.

SITUATION 3

A quick request would interrupt delicate work for little gain.

Compare your approach

ONE RESPONSE / 1

Ask what decision or deadline depends on it before displacing existing commitments.

Volume and capitalization do not establish consequence.

ONE RESPONSE / 2

Show the trade-off to the person authorized to set priorities and offer realistic options.

Silently accepting both hides the conflict until it is harder to repair.

ONE RESPONSE / 3

Record it and offer a later time unless a real cutoff changes the decision.

A short task can still have a high switching cost.

Take it into your week

01

The competing requests

02

Their verified cutoffs and consequences

03

The first action and reason

04

Who needs an update and when



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Triage the next hour

A customer is waiting, a courier leaves soon and a poster needs updating.

Real cutoff

Check the courier departure and what the customer is waiting for. Protect the time-sensitive handoff.

Small unblocker

Send one verified detail if it releases useful work without risking the cutoff.

Movable work

Tell the poster owner when you will review it and what that review will decide.

What changes if this waits?