Simple Planning Checklist for Creative Projects

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It's hard! How do you decide exactly what needs to be done to complete your creative project?

Or which part to do first?

Using this Project Planning Checklist you can quickly decide exactly what you need to do. And in what order.

It will help you breakdown your tasks step-by-step so that you don't get overwhelmed by complexity. And help you estimate how

long you'll need.

Yes, this is the baby steps school of project completion!

Brainstorm your How: Determine Your Project Activities and Order

Hopefully, you've already written your Project Objectives. So you should know what you want to have done, achieved or made by the end of your project. Your 'creative destination'.

Likewise, I hope you've done your Pre-project Check & Prep process so you know:

- the scope of the project
- any potential pitfalls you might need to deal with
- how you might deal with these potential problems
- a ballpark estimate of how long the project will take

Now you need to figure out the exact steps you need to take to reach your creative destination.

Sequence your Actions (and make a checklist!)

To do this you're going to outline the sequence of actions necessary to complete the project.

(I like to use Trello for this. It allows for an infinite number of distinct checklists within a project. And it has fabulous new template feature.)

List the major stages in achieving your objectives

The first step in breaking down a project is to look at its broad phases.

For example, if you're writing a book or a piece of long-form content you might have stand-alone stages to:

- Develop initial ideas
- Draft
- Edit
- Proofread
- Design
- Publish

If you've done a similar project before, you're already ahead of the game. You can use this information as a model for this one.

If you haven't done a similar project, maybe you've done a number of projects that mirror parts of this one. Then you can combine the information into an approximation of your project's trajectory.

But what if you've never done anything even vaguely similar before? In this case, start by doing some directed research, or reach out for advice to others in your field.

Once you've gathered your information, make a best-guess at the phases. Then adjust as you go along so that you're even better prepared next time.

Order the stages

The next step is to place these stages in order of execution. Some stages may run in parallel.

For example, say you're doing the layout of your book yourself. You could work on the basic template whilst the proofreaders are doing their thing on your text.

So the first part of the layout stage could run in tandem with the proofreading stage.

List all the actions in order for each stage

So now you have an idea of the broad stages of the project. It's time to go ahead and fill in the actions you're going to take to complete each stage. You'll need to list these in order.

Again, refer to any documentation from your previous projects or from your research.

I recommend making a checklist of steps for any project type that you do often. It's so easy to forget the steps it takes you to get from start to finish. A checklist will save you a ton of time and angst next time round.

(Yes, I now have an Artist's Book checklist.)

OVER-estimate how long your project will take to complete

You now have a rough schedule of everything you need to do to complete your project. With the steps for each stage laid out in detail, you can now estimate the timescale. To do this:

1. Estimate ROUGH target dates for completing each of the different stages

2. Add up the time you allotted for each stage

3. Double your estimate!

Even if you've already done a similar project before, I'd recommend adding 50% onto your timescale for safety's sake. It's so easy to display an optimism bias whereby we underestimate the time we'll need to complete a future task.

Plus life happens and often gets in the way of the best of plans. And if it doesn't? Woohoo! You get to choose what to do with all that extra time in your schedule!

4. Get feedback on your proposed timescale

To make sure you've got a truly realistic estimate of the timescale, ask a trusted other to pick holes in your plan. Constructively, of course!

See how to do this in Why You Need To Negotiate Your Goals To Avoid Failure. There's also an exercise for how to do the process by yourself.

Be Prepared to Adjust Your Plan

So now you have not only a clear set of objectives for what you want to achieve with your project but a roadmap to follow.

However, for your plan to be effective, you must use, review, maintain and update it regularly. So be prepared for your plan to change.

It's a creative project after all!

The ideas and decisions you make now, may alter as your project develops.
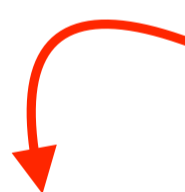
(If you do decide to make big changes mid-way, re-evaluate the timescale using the process above.)

Congratulations. You have a solid plan for the completion of your project and the achievement of your vision!

In the next part of this series, we'll look at how to make sure you don't fall prey to function creep by suddenly adding a BIG new area of content you didn't plan for!

Before that though, grab your

Simple Project Planning Checklist

GET PLANNING CHECKLIST

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