

## 17. Systems Activity: The Energy Line

Many students feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do. Some keep lists – scribbling down jobs and crossing them off when they’re done. And lists are good – they help you keep on top of what it is you’ve got to do.

The drawback of a list is that it doesn't tell you what to do first. A better tool to use for prioritising tasks is an Energy Line – it beats a to-do list any day of the week. Scott Belsky suggests this technique in his book *Making Ideas Happen* (2011). We love it! It helps you put things in order according to how much effort or energy you need to give them.

- » **Step 1** – You start by listing all the tasks that you’ve got to do in the space below. Just empty your head of every task you can think of. Don’t move onto step 2 until you are confident you’ve included everything.
- » **Step 2** – This is where you prioritise the tasks. Put things on the left-hand side – high or extreme – if you need to work with lots of energy to get them done by the deadline. Put them on the right if you can kick back and leave it for a bit. Attach dates for submission and you’re really getting there. You’ll notice that there are a maximum number of tasks that you can include at the bottom of each column. For example, you can only have two tasks in the extreme column. It might be useful to use small sticky notes for each task, so that you can pull them off when you’ve completed.

### Step 1 – List All the Tasks in the Box Below

[illegible]

**Step 2 – Prioritise Your Tasks on the Table**

Extreme	High	Medium	Low	Idle
Max: 2 tasks	Max: 4 tasks	Max: 8 tasks	Max: 4 tasks	Max: 2 tasks
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.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
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**Final Thoughts**

Project management tools like this often work because they tell us what our next one or two tasks are. Even when our to-do list seems huge and overwhelming, as long as we know what's next, we're often OK. It means we can ignore the big picture for a little while and just concentrate on the next thing on the energy line.

Consider the following possibilities:

Are you burying an important job lower down the line – one you really need to get done? What is the one item on the list that you're dreading the most ... and is there a way you could get it started right now?

Could you take a task you're reluctant to start and replace it with three smaller jobs – the beginning, middle and end of the bigger task? You'll have more jobs on your Energy Line, but they'll each be easier to complete.

Try estimating the time it would take to complete each item on your list and write this next to the task. Then add up all the tasks and see how much time you've predicted this will take in total. You might be surprised – it might be four or five hours when you thought it would take much longer!

Each time you complete a task, consider transferring it to a 'done' list. As you see the list grow, you'll feel more and more positive about everything you've achieved.