

Systems Activity 6 – Have to, Ought to, Want to.

A lot of our systems activities are about time management. But what if we have mega-organised time management... but we're spending all our precious time *efficiently doing the wrong things*?

This is where attention management comes in. Attention management tools start by looking at how our time is being spent, but then ask us to consider whether we're doing the right things; the tasks with the biggest impact on our learning and our positivity. Attention management asks us to consider whether we've got a healthy balance of tasks that keep us at our best.

For example: if you worked through a super-organised week of prioritised tasks that were repetitive, boring and (crucially) had little impact on your learning and confidence, you might end up frazzled, exhausted and frustrated.

Instead, you should consider the following task. It asks you to reconsider the tasks you have to do, and encourages you to plan a week that:

- Allows you to do meaningful work,
- Encourages you to build for the future and
- Gives you space to connect with things that make you happy.

We're calling these three categories Have to, Ought to and Want to.

- The **Have to zone** reduces your anxiety and keeps you on track
- The **Ought to zone** gives you permission to set aside immediate challenges and build for the future
- The **Want to zone** keeps you positive, healthy and balanced.

So what's on your lists? Have a go at filling in the table below:

Have to... These things feel crucial and if ignored will keep me awake at night:	Ought to... If I just had time and a little headspace I'd do these helpful jobs/tasks:	Want to... If only I could design my life the way I want it, I'd have more time for:

If we're going to stay positive, we need to consider designing weeks that allow us to move between these three zones. Here are three possible approaches to consider. They each assume you can get ten things done per week, but you might be different so you'll need to plan accordingly:

The Hard Work Week – for churning through tasks and getting things done

- 7 have tos (choose the most important, or the ones with the biggest impact)
- 2 ought tos
- 1 want to

The Balanced Week – for staying on top and future-planning

- 5 have tos (again, choose the most important, or the ones with the biggest impact)
- 3 ought tos
- 2 want tos

The Self-Care week – for refocussing

- 3 have tos (as before, choose the most important, or the ones with the biggest impact)
- 4 ought tos
- 3 want tos

Are things in the right category?

Some of the more frazzled and stressed students we speak to mis-categorise. They fill the Have to column with things they don't really have to do. Watch out for this. It's worth considering your Have to list for a moment. Obviously, homework and other assignments need doing – there's no room for negotiation here. But are some of the other things *really necessary*? One student had a huge list of have tos, and when we suggested removing some, acknowledged that they weren't crucial but added, "I'd feel really guilty if I didn't do them."

It's a very reasonable and understandable response. But saying no to requests is perfectly fine. In the adult world of work, we're constantly negotiating what we have time to do and what work might be best given to someone else. It's not lazy to acknowledge you haven't got time to do something. And you'll have time to give back once your period of hard work slackens off.