

20. Systems Activity: The 2–4–8 Rule

This is a simple system of time management. It's based on the idea of a long-term project being like a bridge. Imagine a bridge built over a wide valley. What kind of bridge are you imagining? We would bet it has vertical piers holding it up. That's because everyone knows that something which spans a long distance needs regular structure to support it.

Now imagine that bridge as a long-term project – an essay that needs to be handed in to your teacher in two weeks or a coursework project that needs to be submitted in three months. The project is a long-term, long-distance project, so it needs a regular structure to support it. The 2–4–8 rule helps you build that solid structure, like vertical piers supporting a bridge.

1. The Short-Term Project: 'You've got two weeks to complete this'

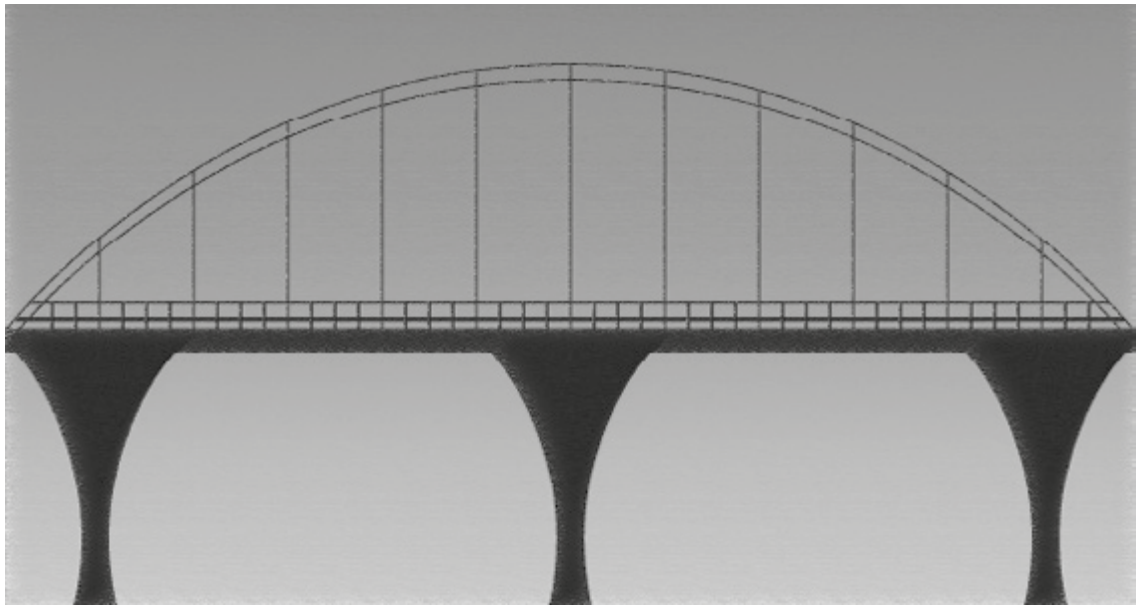
Many teachers might give you two weeks to complete a project. Here's how to use the 2–4–8 rule to respond:

- » **Target 1: two days.** Make a note of what you would like to achieve to get the project started – a side of writing, three hours of reading, some research, organising your notes or planning your piece. Set yourself a target of two days to complete this work.
- » **Target 2: four days later.** Make a note of where you want to be four days after that. Halfway through would be a sensible plan. Break the back of the task – get through the hard bit.
- » **Target 3: eight days later.** You're handing in the assignment today. It needs to be complete. Make sure you've finished early, gone through it and made any adjustments.

2. The Long-Term Project: 'This needs finishing by March'

Often coursework submissions come with more extended deadlines like this. If your deadline is a longer one, it's worth working backwards from targets like this:

- » **Target 3: eight months until submission.** In these early stages, you should be finding an example of what you're trying to achieve – for example, another student's coursework submission. Look it over and say to yourself, 'I want mine to look like this.' Make a list of what needs to be done by the end of the project. Get started on rough, early versions or drafts.
- » **Target 2: four months until submission.** Make notes of where you would like to be halfway through assuming it's going really well. By now you will have been working on early versions and fleshing them out. How many sections will be complete in rough form by this point? What will your word count be (if it's a written task)? What reading and research will you have done and incorporated by this point? What standard will you have achieved?
- » **Target 1: two months until submission.** If you've met your targets up to this point, you'll know very clearly what needs to be done to complete the project, and you can begin the final stages of the project in earnest. What groundwork do you still need to do? What reading needs to be completed? What notes do you still need to take and incorporate? How many words are left? How do you conclude and reference?



Delivery stage one:

Date:

To be complete:

.....

Notes:

.....

.....

Delivery stage two:

Date:

To be complete:

.....

Notes:

.....

.....

Delivery stage three:

Date:

To be complete:

.....

Notes:

.....

.....

Final Thoughts

Chunking large projects into smaller, more manageable tasks makes you feel less daunted about starting the project.

What projects are you currently working on that you could apply this strategy to? Make a list of these below:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....