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Estimation Techniques

Top-down estimate

A top-down estimating technique assigns an overall time for the project and then breaks it down into discrete phases, work, and tasks usually based on your project’s [work breakdown structure (WBS)](https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/applying-work-breakdown-structure-project-lifecycle-6979).

If a client tells you the project has to be done within six months, a top-down approach allows you to take that overall timeline and estimate how much time you can take for each [activity](https://www.wrike.com/project-management-guide/faq/what-is-an-activity-in-project-management/) within the project and still complete it on time.

Bottom-up estimate

A bottom-up estimate is the reverse of top-down. Using this estimation technique, you start by estimating each individual [task](https://www.wrike.com/project-management-guide/faq/what-is-a-task-in-project-management/) or aspect of the project. Then you combine all those separate estimates to build up the overall project estimate.

Since each activity is being assessed individually, this type of estimate tends to be more accurate than the top-down approach. But it also takes more time.

Three-point estimating

Three-point estimating is a technique sometimes used for creating bottom-up estimates. Rather than assuming one duration for a task, you may assign three: optimistic, pessimistic, and most likely. These three numbers are averaged to create your actual estimate.

The [PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique)](https://www.wrike.com/blog/what-is-a-pert-chart/) method uses three-point estimating, but it takes a weighted average of the three points, with the ‘most likely’ guess carrying more weight