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Student Project Guide

Make It Happen! Student Project Guide

Ever wanted to organise an event that was so great it went viral? Or were you the one muttering 'Oops, should have thought of that before' as it all went disastrously wrong?

Well, here's how we can help. This guide will help you achieve whatever project you have in mind; whether it's making sure the school prom is on point, creating a year book so legendary that Year 7's are dreaming about being you, or raising bags of cash for the charity down the road.

Step by step we'll help you plan your project, making sure you're thinking about the right things at the right time. And we'll even throw in some help from professionals along the way.

While you're getting stuck in, we'll show you how you can use the skills you've gained and put them to good use in a career in project management – yes, people get paid to do this! Watch out for the top tips to guide you to success.

To supercharge your project, the Association for Project Management (APM) is also offering you the chance to get some mentoring from project professionals. Register your project ideas by emailing **ourproject@apm.org.uk** and connect with real life project managers who can help make your project an even bigger success.

For years, teachers have asked you to complete 'projects', but when was the last time you got to run one, from start to finish, being the boss of who does what when? Well now's your chance – so let's get started by choosing your team:

The sponsor The person, probably your teacher, who's got you reading this so that you'll run a project for them		**Project manager a.k.a. The Boss** The person who runs the project day to day, making sure you meet the project objectives	
The business The people who are going to benefit from your project		**The team members** The people that get things done! They are good at completing all tasks they are given, often to tight deadlines	

While you're gathering the team, it's worth thinking about what each person brings to the table. It's no good you all wanting to be the Boss, so make sure you have a good mix of talent and skills.

Professional project managers will all demonstrate strong skills like those listed on the next page. Do any strike a chord?

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Teamwork	Thrive on working together effectively to deliver your project on time, on budget and to a high quality
Leadership	Confidently communicate a vision to bring everyone together and inspire them to make your project a success. Take on board the views of others, but ultimately make decisions by weighing up the benefits, costs and risks
Conflict management	Spot potential conflict and address it before it affects the success of your project. This might be checking the project is on track according to your timing plan or budget, or smoothing over differences in opinions over what should be included or not. A level head is a must
Negotiation	Manage a discussion between two parties to reach an agreement that strikes a balance between everyone's needs
Communication	Make sure that everyone receives and understands the information they need

"I worked on a project where team members were located in various parts of the UK and one was abroad. We knew from experience that effective communication would be key, so we set up weekly team calls and a shared mailbox. Having easy access to information helped the project succeed".

Gareth Beauvoisin, HR Project Co-ordinator, BAE Systems

Here's where you can record your team's line up:

Project Team	
The sponsor – who are you doing the project for?	
The business – who is going to benefit from your project?	
The project manager a.k.a. The Boss	
The team members	

According to APM (and they should know their stuff as the chartered body for the project profession), there are four phases of delivering a successful project:

1. Concept (idea) → **2. Planning** → **3. Delivery/execution** → **4. Completion**

TOP TIP

Don't forget to collect evidence of your skills as you carry out your project – they'll come in handy when you write your CV and personal statement.

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1. Concept phase

Once you've got your big idea, you now need to build a business case for your sponsor to show them that your time and effort is being put to good use. If they're putting their hard-earned cash in to kick start your project, they're going to want to see a return.

We've provided a handy '**Business Case**' sheet at the back of this guide for you to record your ideas and get you started.

KEY WORDS

Business Case
A document providing justification of a project

"A project manager should always have a business case. The most important part of project management is not only understanding what you are doing, but how you want to get it done. By writing it down in a business case, everyone has the same idea of what the project is, and you have proof that they agreed it was the best idea."

Sorrel Gilbert, Project Manager, Sorrel Project Solutions

Business case – a guide

Set the scene	What is your project?
	Why do you want to do it?
	Why are your stakeholders (your sponsor) going to be interested in your project?
Understand what you need	**What are you going to do?** Give a quick overview of the step by step process you'll go through
	How much will it cost? Give a quick overview – you can give more detail later
	When are you going to work on the project? Think about planning time and any 'event' date in mind (where relevant)
	Where are you going to do it?
	Who will do the work?
Prioritise	What **must** you have to make your project work?
	What **could** you have: things that would be 'nice to have' if they don't affect anything else?
	What **won't** you have now but might like in the future if things change?
Communicate	**How will you communicate your project?** Think about who you will need to communicate with, how you'll communicate and when
Be a success	**What does success look like?** How will you know if your project is a success? Can you set any 'key performance indicators'?

TOP TIP

In business, key performance indicators (KPIs) are an important way of proving you've made an impact. By setting a baseline to measure your project e.g. number attending an event, sales made, you can easily see how successful your project has been – and then shout about it!

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2. Planning phase

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So, you've written your business case, but how will you really know how long your project is going to take or how much it's going to cost? Well, you're just going to have to make an educated guess! Project managers have to **estimate** what is going to happen in the future based on the best evidence they have, and then build their project plan around this. You'll need to update your estimates as you go through your project to make them as accurate as possible.

Take the stress out of planning your project by following these six simple steps; a similar process to what the professionals go through when they make a 'project management plan' (PMP). Use our handy planning templates at the back of this guide to help you on your way.

STEP 01 Scope	STEP 02 Risk Management	STEP 03 Schedule	STEP 04 Resourcing	STEP 05 Budget	STEP 06 Publicity

Step 1: Scope

It's now time to make a plan to bring your project idea to life. Professional project managers will set a **scope** for their project to make sure there is no 'scope creep' - deciding what you can and can't do during your project, so that no one gets carried away. It's worth having a quick look over your business case every now and then to help you keep focused and on track.

Step 2: Risk Management

Strange as it may seem, it's also important to plan for things that might go wrong. **Risk management** is essential as it can prevent sleepless nights worrying and even make your project better. Here's some handy examples of the types of risks that might affect your project:

What might happen?	How likely is it to happen?	What might be the impact of it happening?	Who should 'own' the risk?	What action should the 'risk owner' take?
▪ People don't buy tickets ▪ Your event clashes with the World Cup final ▪ Your event gets covered in the local press	▪ Low risk ▪ Medium risk ▪ High risk	▪ You don't make enough money to cover the costs of putting the event on ▪ No one turns up ▪ The press coverage paints your school / college in a negative light	▪ Who is going to be responsible for managing the risks? The project manager, the sponsor, or someone else?	▪ Plan regular checks of ticket sales, and carry out additional marketing if needed ▪ Look at rescheduling the event ▪ Write a press release draft to share with local press, ensuring you highlight the things you want them to write!

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Step 3: Schedule

Remember those exam revision timetables you spent hours making to keep your studies on track? Well, creating a schedule for your project will work in the same way and help you keep in control of your project. Professional project managers will use tailor made software such as Gantt charts to plot their projects, but you can write a simple schedule using a calendar. The important thing to remember is to plot **key milestones** during your project.

For example:

- When will your event take place?
- When will you need to have designed and made your publicity?
- When do you need to start selling tickets?

KEY WORDS

Key milestone
A key event selected for its importance to the project

"Under the pressure of strict timeframes, working as a team and ensuring effective communication is critical".

Christina McCormack, PA Consulting Group

Step 4: Resourcing

No one wants to waste time or money, so it's important you crack **resource management**. You will need to decide if you have enough of the right people to carry out your project, and that you know what everyone is going to do and what resources they will need. Communicating this clearly to your team will avoid any awkward conversations about who's doing what.

Step 5: Budget

Let's get down to the nitty gritty bit of the planning – the budget. Here's where you need to plan what money you'll have coming in and out, so you can monitor things before it's too late and you run out of cash.
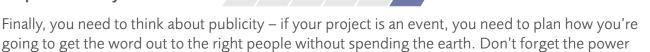
TOP TIP
Checking your budget on a weekly basis will make sure you don't get a nasty surprise half way through your project! Keeping on top of your budget will help you to take early action and make changes to avoid any risks to your project.

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Step 6: Publicity

STEP 01 › STEP 02 › STEP 03 › STEP 04 › STEP 05 › **STEP 06**

Finally, you need to think about publicity – if your project is an event, you need to plan how you're going to get the word out to the right people without spending the earth. Don't forget the power of your mates and your social media channels before spending loads on printing posters.

To gain real momentum, it's worth thinking about planning a press release and sharing it with the local newspapers to get your message out. No one likes getting spammed, so do your homework and make sure your press release is written to appeal to the journalist that you're sending it to.

TOP TIP

Keeping a copy of your event's press coverage will be a great way of evidencing your delivery of this project for your CV and personal statement.

Don't forget to:

Get sharing	Create a Facebook or Instagram campaign for your project as a free and simple way of sharing information about your project
Get personal	Where you can, find the names of journalists and personalise your communication to them. If your email feels like a mass outreach email it's just going to get deleted. You need to know who you'll send it to, what they write about and why your project will interest them
Keep it simple	Your press release needs to catch the attention of busy journalists! It needs to be less than a page, with a clear hook and only include the main information
Create the story	Don't leave it to chance - describe your project the way you want others to see it. Use quotes from your sponsors or the business (your customers) to bring it to life

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3. Delivery / execution phase

So, enough of the planning - this is where you put your plans into action and '**Make It Happen!**' If you've followed our advice through the first two phases, your project should run nice and smoothly. However, the more complicated your project, the more you will need to monitor and control what is going on so that things don't get out of control.

Here are some top tips from APM:

- **Manage the issue:** Inevitably there will be some problems you'll face as your project gets underway, but most of them you'll be able to solve with a bit of clever thinking. Carefully managing any risks you identified at Step 2 should prevent these risks from turning into issues, but sometimes issues will arise that mean you'll have to get help from your sponsor. Writing down the issue and communicating it clearly will mean you're most likely to successfully solve it.

"I was in charge of a broadband Internet project for a theatre, and in order to deliver this project, I had to settle a conflict about where the cables were laid between the properties & facilities department and the telecommunications company. I offered a meeting with a high profile manager of the telecom company and the theatre manager, where both sides were able to present their arguments. I set out a common goal, and we began to look for a solution that suited everyone, keeping everyone on topic. After two hours of negotiations, we managed to find a solution."
Gennadii Miroshnikov, Training Zone Project Manager, Oasis Learning

- **Monitor what's going on:** Is everyone working the way they should be? Is everything getting done? Check your schedule and budget regularly to keep everything on track and of a high quality.

- **Take control:** If things seem like they're getting out of hand, here's some ways you can take back control:

  - Re-plan the project
  - Re-schedule the activities
  - Re-prioritise the work
  - Give more / better resources to the activity – but don't forget this will affect the costs
  - Ask someone else to do the work – but this may also increase costs
  - Reduce the quality – this might make it cheaper and quicker, but your sponsor might not be happy
  - Do less – by reducing the scope, you're more likely to achieve something, but you might not deliver the project you've promised

- **Write it up:** Make your sponsor happy by keeping them up to date with what's going on through a regular **project report.**

TOP TIP

Remember, risks are things that **might** happen, and issues are things that have happened. Keeping an issue log will make sure that things aren't forgotten, and show what steps were taken to resolve it

4. Completion phase

You've made it happen! Your project is complete and, by all accounts, was a resounding success. But for professional project managers, the story doesn't end here. You will always have odds and ends to sort out before you've reached closure and your sponsor is totally happy.

Carrying out a **post-project review** of the positives and negatives means you can learn from what happened during your project to improve for the future. Whilst project managers create a report to detail the lessons learned following a project, we'll let you off by just thinking about the following:

KEY WORDS

Post-project review

A review of your project with the aim of producing lessons learned for future improvements

What was positive about the planning of your project?	**What was negative about the planning of your project?**
What were the real successes?	**What would you do differently in the future?**

By planning and delivering your project, you have done exactly what professional project managers do every day. For more information about a career in project management, check out some success stories in the **Make It Happen! Case Study Guide** and at **apm.org.uk**.

And don't forget to share your project stories with **#APMstories** and connect with other inspirational young people starting their own project management journey, as apprentices and graduates in APM's ambassador network.

Make It Happen! competition

As part of **Make It Happen!** you could snag yourself a half-day mentoring session from a real project management professional. Just fill in the competition entry form found in the templates, letting them know all about your amazing project ideas, and email it to **ourproject@apm.org.uk** to win a half-day mentoring session with APM members that will take your project management to the next level!

Make sure to send your email before **Friday 22 June** to be in with a chance of winning.

1. Concept templates

Business case - Use this to explain why your project idea is a good one

What is your project?	
Why do you want to do it?	
Why are your stakeholders (your sponsor) going to be interested in your project?	
What are you going to do?	
How much will it cost?	
When are you going to work on the project?	
Where are you going to do it?	

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Who will do the work?	
What must you have to make your project work?	
What should you have: things that are desirable but not essential?	
What could you have: things that would be 'nice to have' if they don't affect anything else?	
What won't you have now but might like it in the future if things change?	
How will you communicate your project?	
What does success look like?	

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2. Planning templates

Use the six stages outlined on pages 5 - 7 of this guide to help you plan your project:

Step 1: Scope　　　　STEP 01 > STEP 02 > STEP 03 > STEP 04 > STEP 05 > STEP 06

What is your project going to do?	What things will not be covered by your project?

Step 2: Risk Management　　　　STEP 01 > STEP 02 > STEP 03 > STEP 04 > STEP 05 > STEP 06

What might happen?	How likely is it to happen?	What might be the impact of it happening?	Who should 'own' the risk?	What action should the 'risk owner' take?

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Step 3: Schedule

You might want to use a spreadsheet, calendar or even download a free Gantt chart template to plan your project but for now, record your key milestones here:

Milestone	Start date	Deadline

Step 4: Resource Management

Who is going to do what, and what resources will they have?

Team member	Action	Resources	Deadline

Step 5: Budget

	Total
Overall budget agreed:	

	Cost per item	Number of items	Total
Event related costs: List the items you will need for your event e.g. DJ, presenter, clothing for fashion show			
Venue costs: List the items you will need for your event e.g. tickets, furniture (buy/rent), decorations, food, drink, A/V equipment, other tech requirements			
Publicity costs: List the costs associated with your chosen publicity method(s)			

	Total
Overall expenditure (Total from each column)	
Overall profit (Overall budget minus overall expenditure)	

Step 6: Publicity

Publicity method	Who is responsible?	How much will it cost?	Key deadlines	What will it achieve and how will it benefit the project?

Make It Happen!
Competition entry form

No matter what project you are planning there is always room for improvement, and what better way to take your project to the next level than having help directly from the professionals? Simply fill in this entry form and email your project ideas to **ourproject@apm.org.uk** for your chance to win a half-day mentoring session with some real-life project managers!

Make sure your entries reach us before **Friday 29th June** for your chance to win!

Student Name:

Age:

School Name:

School Address:

Post code:

Teacher, parent or guardian's name:

Email:

Tel:

(Details will only be used to contact you should your student be successful.)

I give permission for the above-named student to enter the Make it Happen! competition

Signature:

What project are you planning? ....
....
Tell us what makes your project special: ....
....
....
....
....

List 3 ways you would like APM to help you take your project to the next level...

1. ....
....
2. ....
....
3. ....
....