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How to use a Gantt chart

Reading time: about 8 min

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A big project just landed on your plate, and it is up to you to make sure it goes off without a hitch. But that's easier said than done. You have to assign tasks, plan a timeline, and make sure everyone and everything stays on track. To accomplish this, you decide to use a Gantt chart.

Gantt charts for project management display tasks over time, creating a visual roadmap of the project's progress. Gantt charts make it easy to:

- Visualize the entire project from start to finish.

- Improve time management.

- Clearly communicate with your team.

- Increase transparency on the project's progress.

- Promote accountability and task responsibility.

- Avoid overloading team members.

Now that you know the importance of Gantt charts for project management, it's time to put it to the test. But before diving headfirst

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1. Determine tasks and subtasks

This first step takes the most time—but it's also the most important. To create effective and accurate Gantt charts, you need all of the pertinent information at the start of the project. So project managers need to proactively think about each and every step needed to complete the project before it even begins. That's a lot!

Trying to scope a project without this information is like knowing the best way to fit all the puzzle pieces together while they're still in the box. If a piece is overlooked or forgotten, the picture will be incomplete.
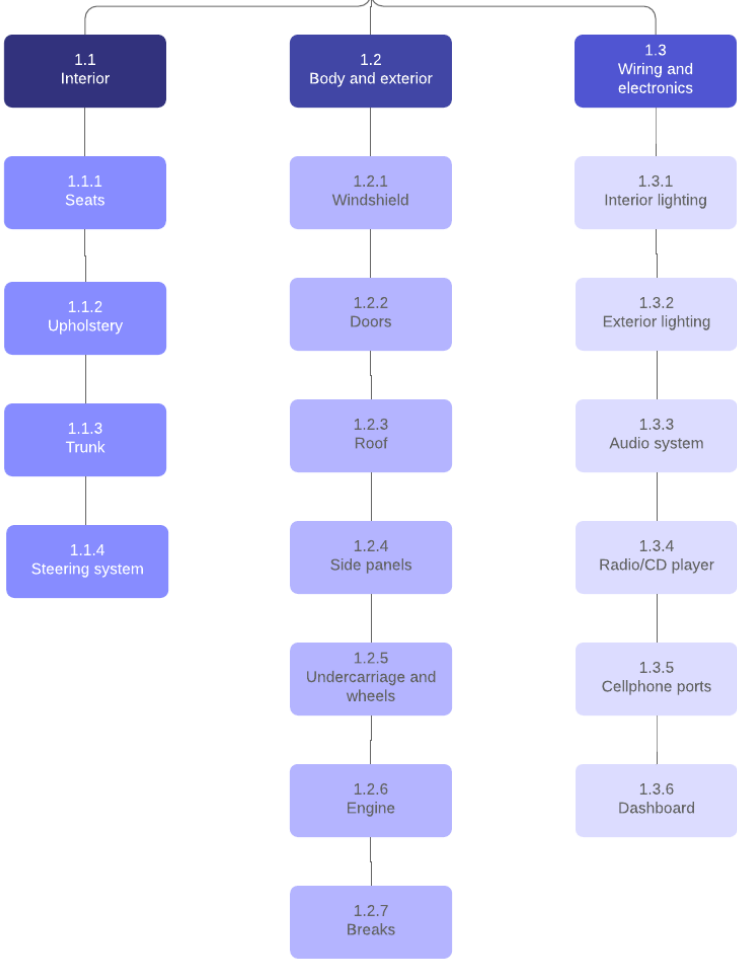
For example, imagine the project you were assigned was to build and deploy a new product. Numerous steps, from identifying objectives and determining the scope to finalizing the budget and writing code, are critical to the product's success. If you miss a key step, the project won't be completed on time, potentially missing stakeholder's deadlines.

A good way to get started is with a **work breakdown structure** that

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1.1 Interior	1.2 Body and exterior	1.3 Wiring and electronics
1.1.1 Seats	1.2.1 Windshield	1.3.1 Interior lighting
1.1.2 Upholstery	1.2.2 Doors	1.3.2 Exterior lighting
1.1.3 Trunk	1.2.3 Roof	1.3.3 Audio system
1.1.4 Steering system	1.2.4 Side panels	1.3.4 Radio/CD player
	1.2.5 Undercarriage and wheels	1.3.5 Cellphone ports
	1.2.6 Engine	1.3.6 Dashboard
	1.2.7 Breaks	

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- **Parallel tasks:** Can be worked on at the same time as other tasks. If possible, have as many parallel tasks as you can to save time and keep the project moving forward.

- **Sequential tasks:** Linear and need to be performed in a specific order.
    - **Finish to start:** Tasks cannot be started until a previous task is completed.

    - **Start to start:** Tasks cannot begin until a preceding task begins.

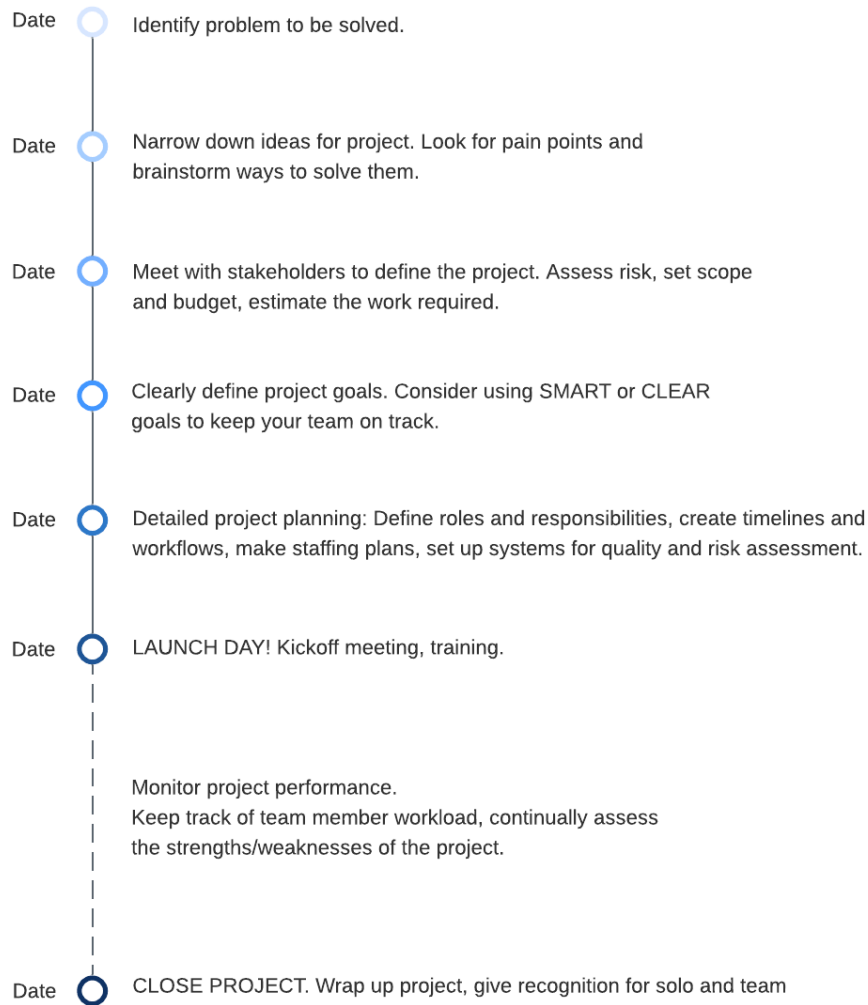   - **Finish to finish:** Tasks that cannot be completed until another task ends.

Tasks can be both parallel and sequential. For example, it is possible to identify key stakeholders and determine the project's scope at the same time. However, the first milestone—signing the project charter—cannot be completed until the stakeholders are identified and the project is scoped.

# 3. Create a timeline

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Date ○ Identify problem to be solved.

Date ○ Narrow down ideas for project. Look for pain points and brainstorm ways to solve them.

Date ○ Meet with stakeholders to define the project. Assess risk, set scope and budget, estimate the work required.

Date ○ Clearly define project goals. Consider using SMART or CLEAR goals to keep your team on track.

Date ○ Detailed project planning: Define roles and responsibilities, create timelines and workflows, make staffing plans, set up systems for quality and risk assessment.

Date ○ LAUNCH DAY! Kickoff meeting, training.

Monitor project performance.
Keep track of team member workload, continually assess the strengths/weaknesses of the project.

Date ○ CLOSE PROJECT. Wrap up project, give recognition for solo and team

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Alternatively, project managers use PERT charts to show task interdependencies before beginning a project. See how **PERT charts** compare to Gantt charts.
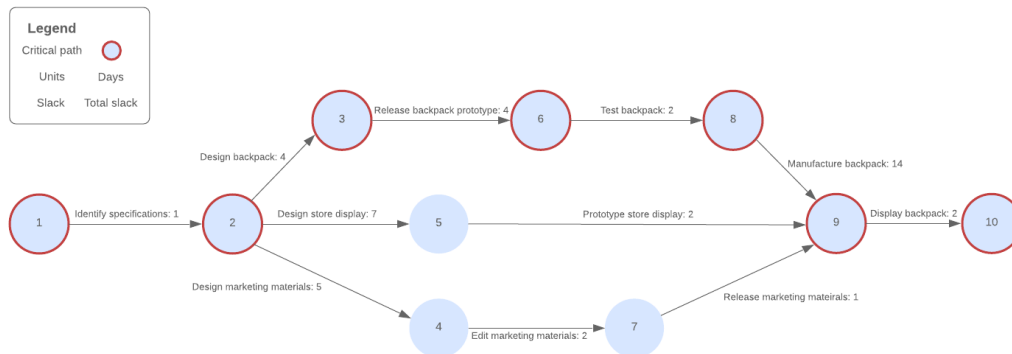
PERT chart example (Click on image to modify online)

4. Order tasks

Now it is time to organize the tasks in the correct order.

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Initiating	12	1/21/2019	2/2/2019		
1. Identify objective	4	1/21/2019	1/23/2019	Taylor	
2. Determine project feasibility	2	1/24/2019	1/25/2019	Taylor	1
3. Identify stakeholders	7	1/28/2019	2/1/2019	Megan	
4. Determine scope	3	1/29/2019	2/1/2019	Megan	1, 2
5. Sign project charter	2	2/4/2019	2/4/2019	Bryce	
Planning	15	2/5/2019	2/12/2019		
6. Create project plan	7	2/5/2019	2/8/2019	Taylor	5
7. Identify resources	6	2/8/2019	2/11/2019	Taylor	
8. Finalize budget	7	2/12/2019	2/12/2019	Megan	6, 7
Execution	14	2/13/2019	4/3/2019		
9. Research design	5	2/13/2019	2/18/2019	Sean	6, 7
10. Create mocks	6	2/15/2019	2/27/2019	Sean	9
11. Finalize mocks	8	2/28/2019	2/28/2019	Sean	10
12. Write code	16	3/4/2019	3/14/2019	Sam	11
13. Complete testing	7	3/12/2019	3/15/2019	Jade	12
14. Fix issues	7	3/14/2019	3/18/2019	Sam	12, 13
Deploy	0	3/19/2019	3/19/2019	Brady	14
15. Closure	16	3/19/2019	3/29/2019		
16. Analyze project performance	14	3/19/2019	3/27/2019	Taylor	15
17. Document project closure	3	3/21/2019	3/25/2019	Megan	
18. Conduct post-implementation reviews	2	3/21/2019	3/27/2019	Megan	
19. Review budget	7	3/25/2019	3/29/2019	Taylor	

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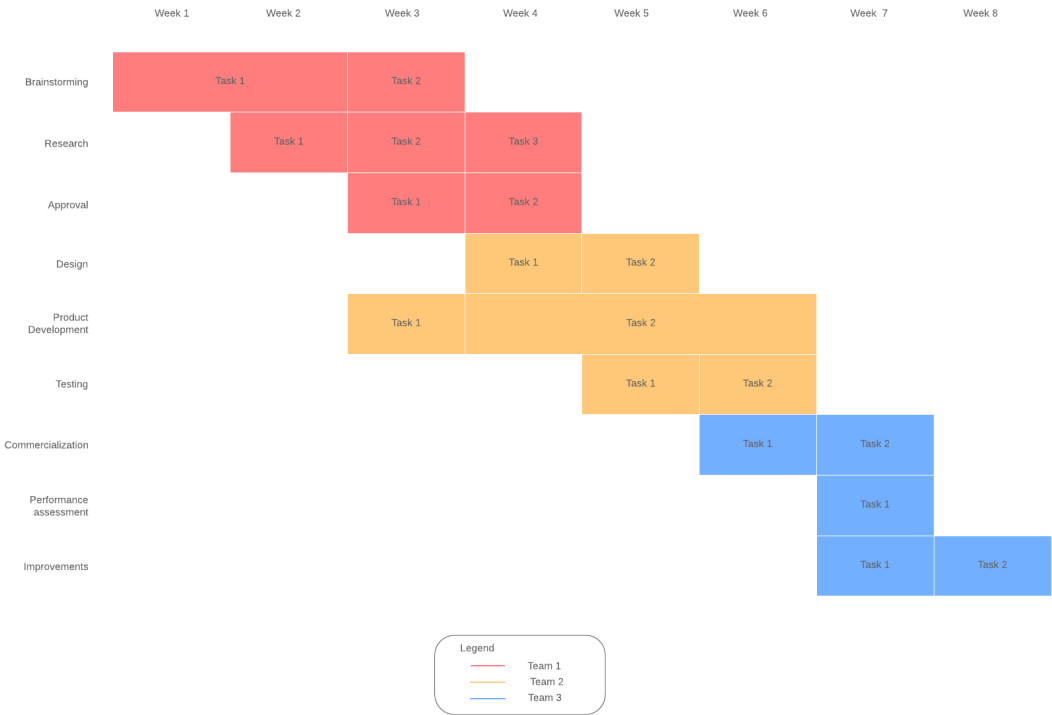
information

Basic Gantt chart (Click on image to modify online)

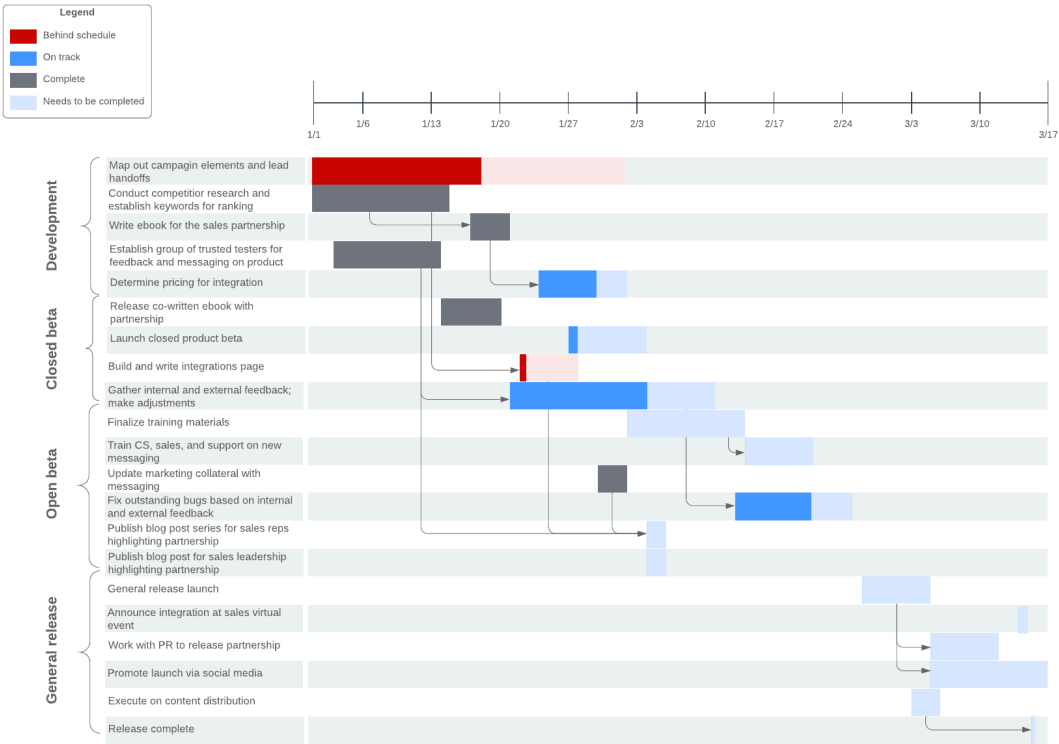## Detailed template: Provide your team with all of the information in one location

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Progress bar template: Easily track your project's progress and stay on course

Gantt chart with progress bar example (Click on image to modify online)

If you would rather start from scratch, Lucidchart makes the process

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creating these visuals from scratch, learn **how to make a Gantt chart in Excel**.

Need to import data? No problem! Whether you are creating your own or using a Gantt chart template, Lucidchart integrates with Google Sheets and Excel to make importing data simple and easy.

6. Assign tasks, resources, and progress to team members

Once you have the Gantt chart ready to go, it's time to assign tasks and start the project.

With Lucidchart, you can share your Gantt chart template with your entire team in one location. Everyone can see task assignments, others' progress, and potential parallel tasks that they could be working on.

When assigning tasks, link additional resources using the comment and note features in Lucidchart. These features will improve transparency and give team members all of the tools necessary to stay

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progress and evaluate your team's work.

As the project moves forward, it will evolve and change. Update the chart as needed and be sure to assess the project along the way.

Gantt charts aren't set in stone—use them to your team's advantage to strategically execute the project. Similar to creating the timeline, inflexible Gantt charts can cause stress, hinder performance, and throw the project off course. Adapting to necessary changes and reflecting those changes on the Gantt chart will keep the project moving forward.

Gantt charts make it easy to see the entire project: its timeline, all required tasks, and the team members assigned to each task.

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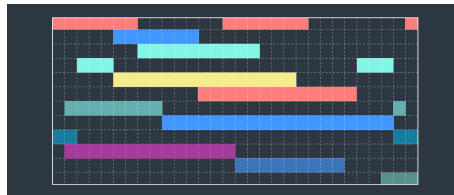
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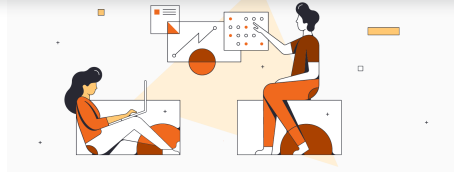Find something insightful...

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8 templates for project managers

In this blog post, we will share eight templates that project managers can use...

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7 alternatives to Gantt charts

Gantt charts come with a series of fatal flaws that leave many managers...

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