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8-31-2023

## A New Adventure: Time Blocking & Time Tracking

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### Recommended Citation

Smith Schlinck, Olivia, "A New Adventure: Time Blocking & Time Tracking" (2023). *Library Staff Online Publications*. 21.

<https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/staff-online-pubs/21>

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### A New Adventure: Time Blocking & Time Tracking

Posted on [August 31, 2023](#) by [Olivia Smith Schlinck](#)

New school year, new organizational strategy!—that’s how the saying goes, right?

I’m one of those people who finds unending joy in starting a new organizational scheme. Particularly if there’s a pretty, [flowery](#), probably too-expensive paper planner involved. And at the beginning of the school year? \*chef’s kiss\*

Part of this, I’m sure, is because I love buying things. Especially pretty things. But at a basic level, I am in desperate need of structure and order. I’ve always had one of those *organized chaos* situations going on in my work life: a color-coded calendar, a dozen main-level folders with too many sub-folders (and sub-sub folders and so on), paper lists that are (supposed to be) copied over into digital lists, approximately five notebooks that I am using for notes of all kinds at any given moment, and so on. I think I come across as organized to people who know me. Except, perhaps, to my boss, who knows me too well and has peaked behind the curtain.

But still, I remain in desperate need of structure and order. I also have ADHD, which does not play well with many run-of-the-mill suggestions for organizing tasks and materials. *Write down important tasks in a list?* Done, but what happens when I lose that list? *Leave post-it notes with reminders?* After a day I get used to the existence of that note and will ignore it forever. *Set alarms and calendar alerts so you don’t miss meetings!* Do you know how easy it is to dismiss an alert and then forget about it?

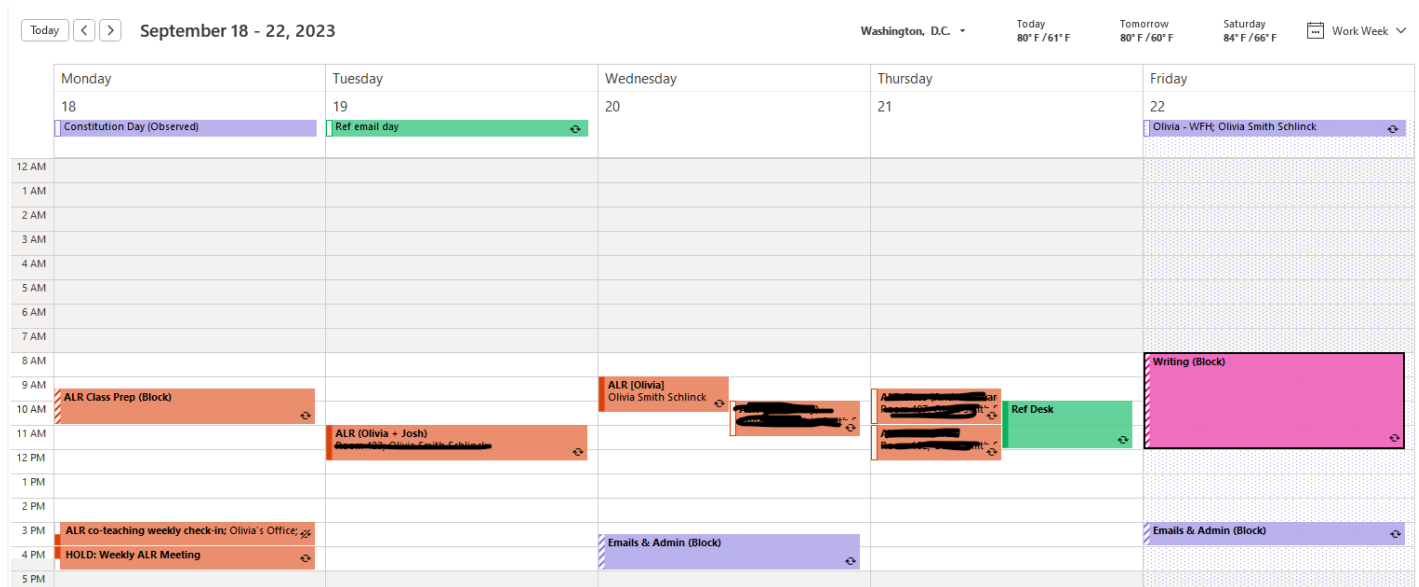
With the start of the academic year this past Monday, I’m embarking on a new effort to organize my calendar and my life. The chaos is getting to be a bit too much for me, and I’m tired of feeling like I’ve forgotten to do something all the time. My strategy is two-fold: time blocking and time tracking. (Revolutionary, I know).

Time blocking is simple: set aside chunks of your day or week for certain routine tasks. Until now, I’ve only really used my work calendar for scheduling meetings, relishing the free time blocks when they rarely materialized. I only ever blocked my calendar to complete some solo tasks under extreme deadlines, usually when grades or a draft were due.

Most time-blocking experts recommend blocking your entire work calendar, but the nature of my job doesn’t allow for that, so I’ve modified the advice a bit, blocking off a few hours here and there for some of the tasks I most often fall behind on.

First, I made a list of those tasks. I struggle with responding to emails, especially ones that my brain deems “not pressing” when they arrive. I teach Advanced Legal Research, and have a tendency of procrastinating class prep until hours before class begins, which leaves me feeling scattered. And I so rarely actually sit down to work on my own academic pursuits, like researching and writing the three works-in-progress taunting me from my folders.

So I blocked those: an hour and a half on Wednesday afternoons to catch up on emails, then another hour on Friday afternoons; an hour and a half for class prep usually on Monday mornings, with some shifting due to holiday closures; and four hours on Friday mornings for writing. All are set on my calendar, color-coded and repeating until the end of the semester, set up as “tentative” just in case some meeting comes along and needs to bump the block.



My time-blocked calendar for the week of September 18. Note that my calendar includes some classes that I don't teach, but I help administer, so they're on my calendar without a time obligation—I crossed them out in black.

I'm borrowing the second strategy—tracking my working hours—from law firm colleagues, who track their billables. I'm being less intense about the timing, tracking to the quarter hour instead of 6-minute increments, and also tracking *all* my work, since I don't have “billable” time.

I set up an excel spreadsheet for tracking that I'd originally intended to fill out throughout the day and then immediately failed, so I'll fill it out before I sign off each day instead. I created five task categories (AALL, Administrative, Instruction, Reference & Research, and Writing) and about two dozen sub-categories, plus a space to describe the task briefly.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Date	Day	Hours worked	Task Category (Drop-Down)	Task Sub-category (Drop-Down)	Task Description
1						
2	8/28/2023	Monday	3.5	Instruction	Instruction-Prep (1Ls)	Prepped slides and exercises for session #1
3			0.25	Instruction	Instruction-Admin (ALR)	Weekly co-teaching meeting with
4			0.75	Instruction	Instruction-Prep (1Ls)	Prepped slides and exercises for session #1
5			1.25	Instruction	Instruction-Teaching (1Ls)	Taught session #1
6			0.25	Instruction	Instruction-Admin (1Ls)	Emails for attendance, slide posting
7			0.5	Administrative	Admin-Emails	Answered various emails
8			1	Administrative	Admin-Organizing	Created time tracking spreadsheet
9	<b>Daily Total</b>		<b>7.5</b>			
10	8/29/2023	Tuesday	1.25	Administrative	Admin-Emails	Emails and messaging--prep to go home sick
11			1	Instruction	Instruction-Admin (ALR)	Fixing Canvas issues with adjuncts
12	<b>Daily Total</b>		<b>2.25</b>			
13	8/30/2023	Wednesday	0.5	Administrative	Admin-Emails	
14			0.5	Instruction	Instruction-Admin (ALR)	
15			3.5	Instruction	Instruction-Grading (ALR)	section
16			0.5	Administrative	Admin-Emails	Responding to hybrid work policy email and others
17			2	Instruction	Instruction-Grading (ALR)	section
18	<b>Daily Total</b>		<b>7</b>			
19	8/31/2023	Thursday	1	Instruction	Instruction-Admin (ALR)	Assisted adjunct with setting up tech in classroom
20			0.25	Administrative	Admin-Organizing	Planned workday

It's only been a few days since I started time tracking—plus, I was out sick for some of this week—but I'm already liking the system. It gives me a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day to see how much I got done, even if it feels like I did nothing. And I'm hoping to use this to get a better sense of when my "busy seasons" are, versus when I tend to have more downtime.

I'll admit that I'm mostly writing this post as a form of accountability: now all your RIPS Blog readers know about my endeavor, so I'm more likely to stick to it. Assuming I do, I'll let you all know how it's going periodically this academic year.

Have any of you tried either system, or any other ways to stay on top of things? I'd love to hear how they went!

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