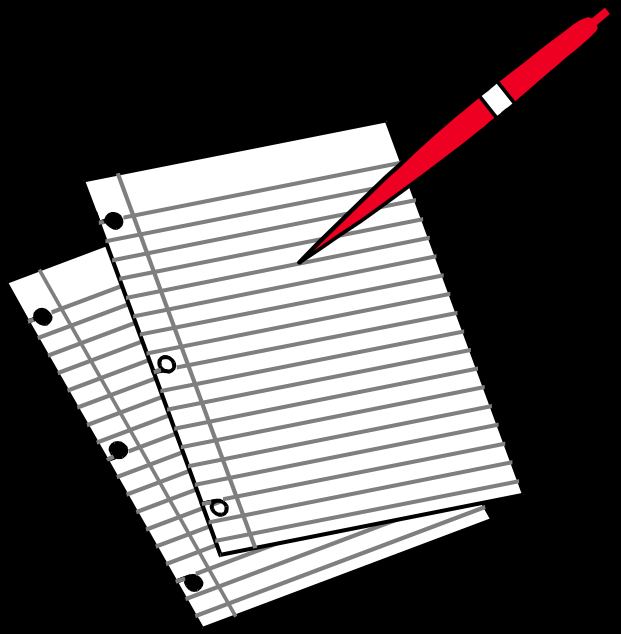
Project Management: Dissertation/ Thesis and Research Funding Proposals/ Grant Applications



Main aspects of presentation

- Why project management?
- Project managing your thesis
- Thinking through activities, timeframes and milestones
- Tools for planning
- Problems and challenges
- Conclusions

Activity: compile a plan for completing your Masters dissertation or PhD thesis

Why project management?

Project is “an organized undertaking that has a completed product/ outcome”

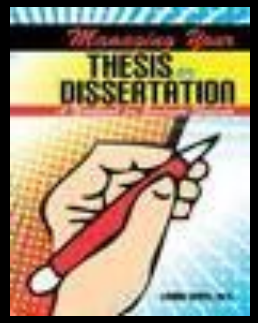
A project is a sequence of unique, complex, and connected activities having one goal or purpose and that must be completed by a specific time, within budget, and according to specifications. (Edgeman, nd)

If you fail to plan, PLAN TO FAIL

Project managing a thesis

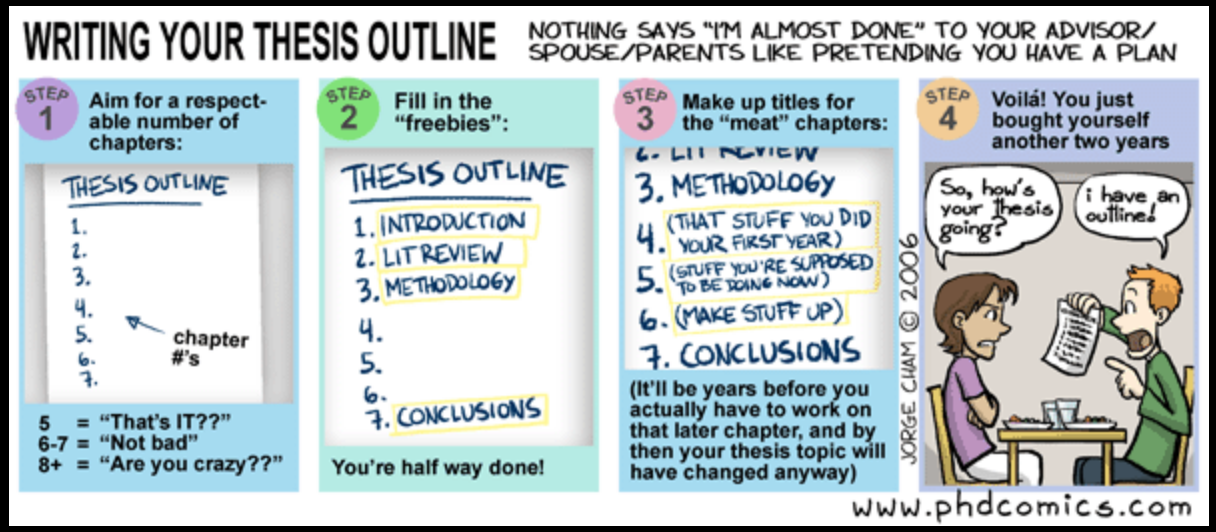
- Undertaking a PhD is risk prone like all other projects
- Need to balance competing demands
- But we understand the requirements of completing a PHD and therefore we can prepare for it
- The PhD is complex, over a long period (generally minimum of 3 years), unique and expensive
- Increases success/ completion rate – complete a task on schedule/ time
- Is a map and a guide
- Learning orientated

If you know where you are going, you are likely to get there!

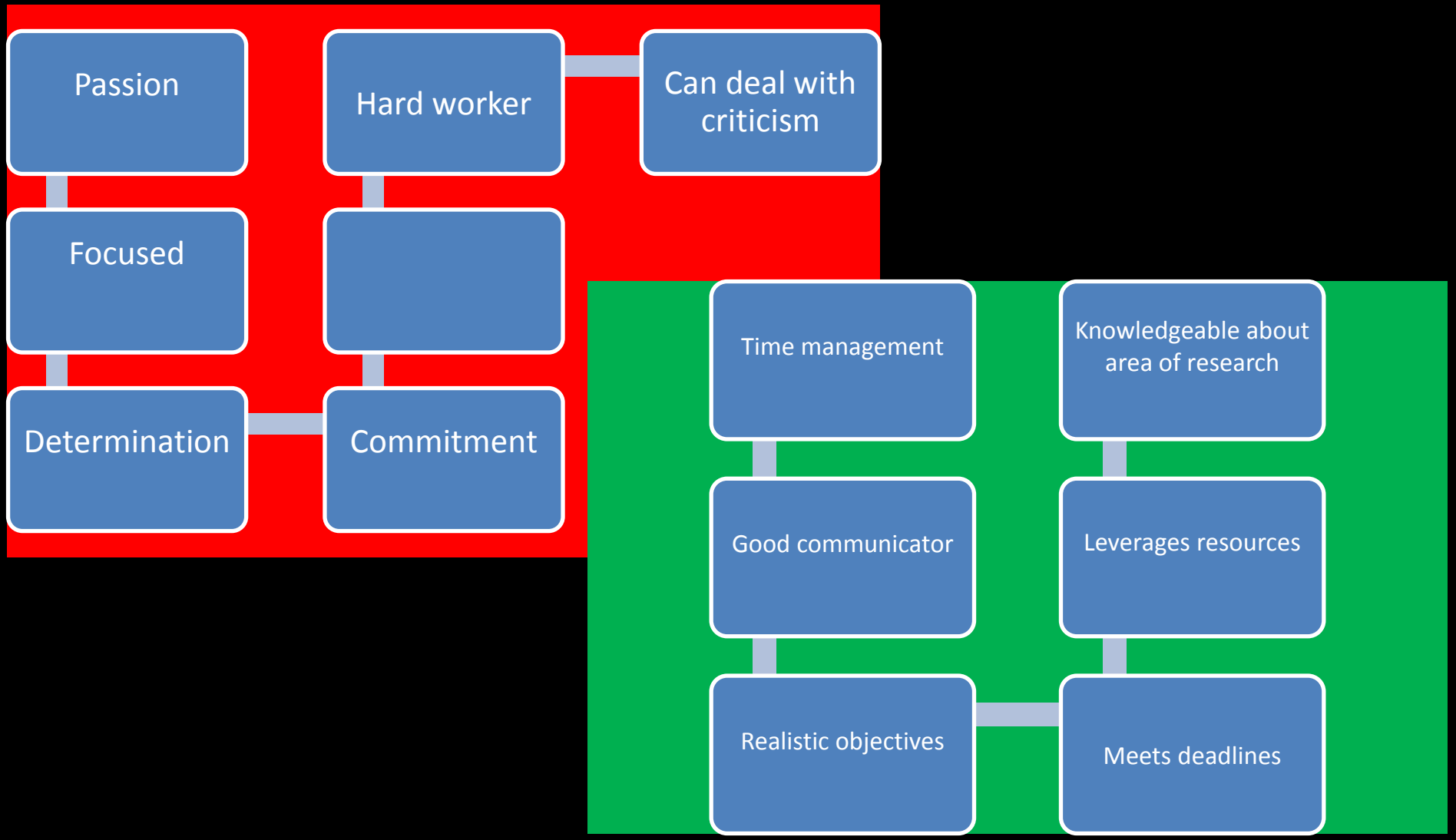


Some excuses for not planning

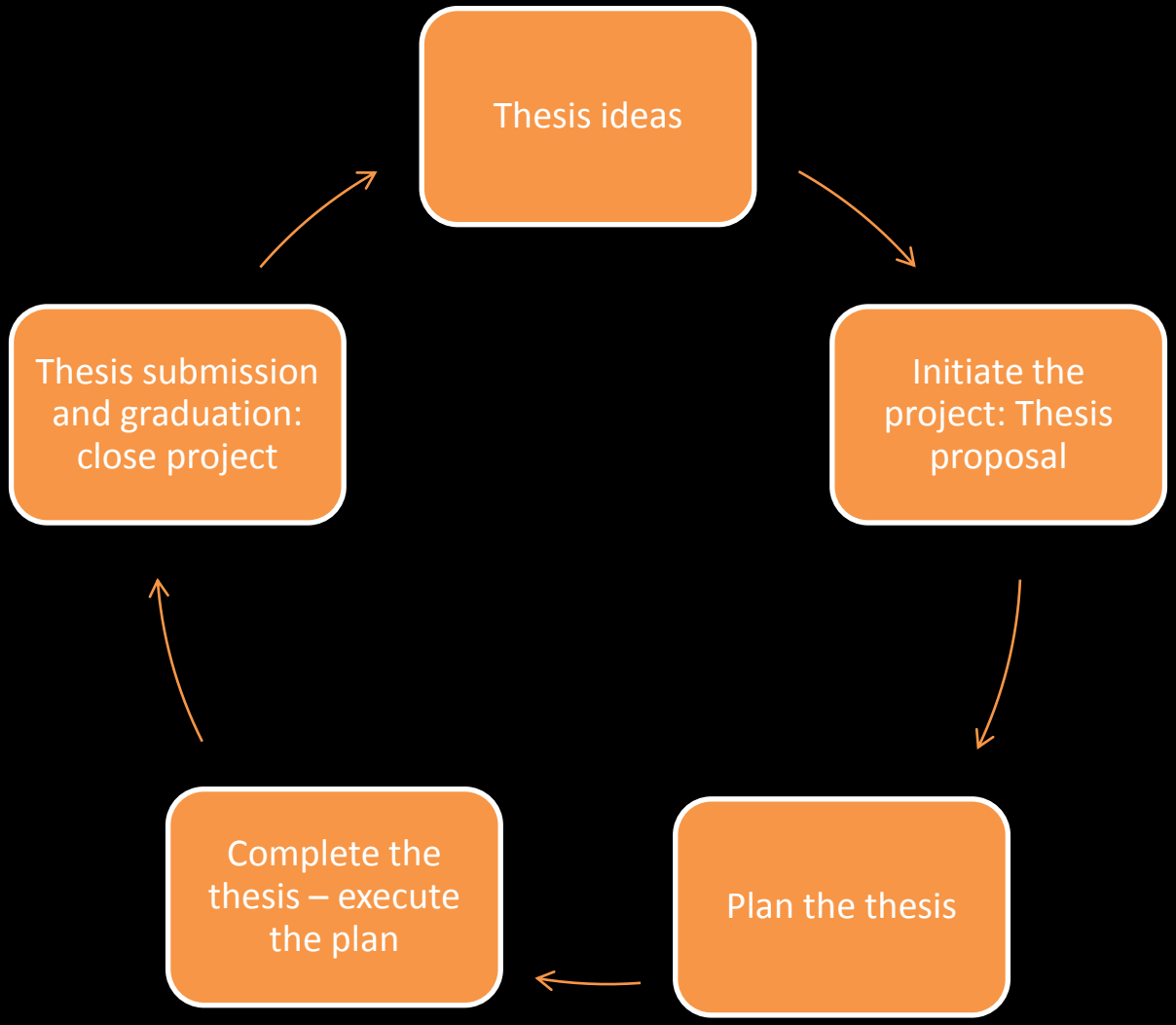
- My work is cutting edge research so I can't anticipate what will happen
- A schedule is too constraining for good research
- Planning is a waste of time – just get it done



So what makes a good planner/ manager?



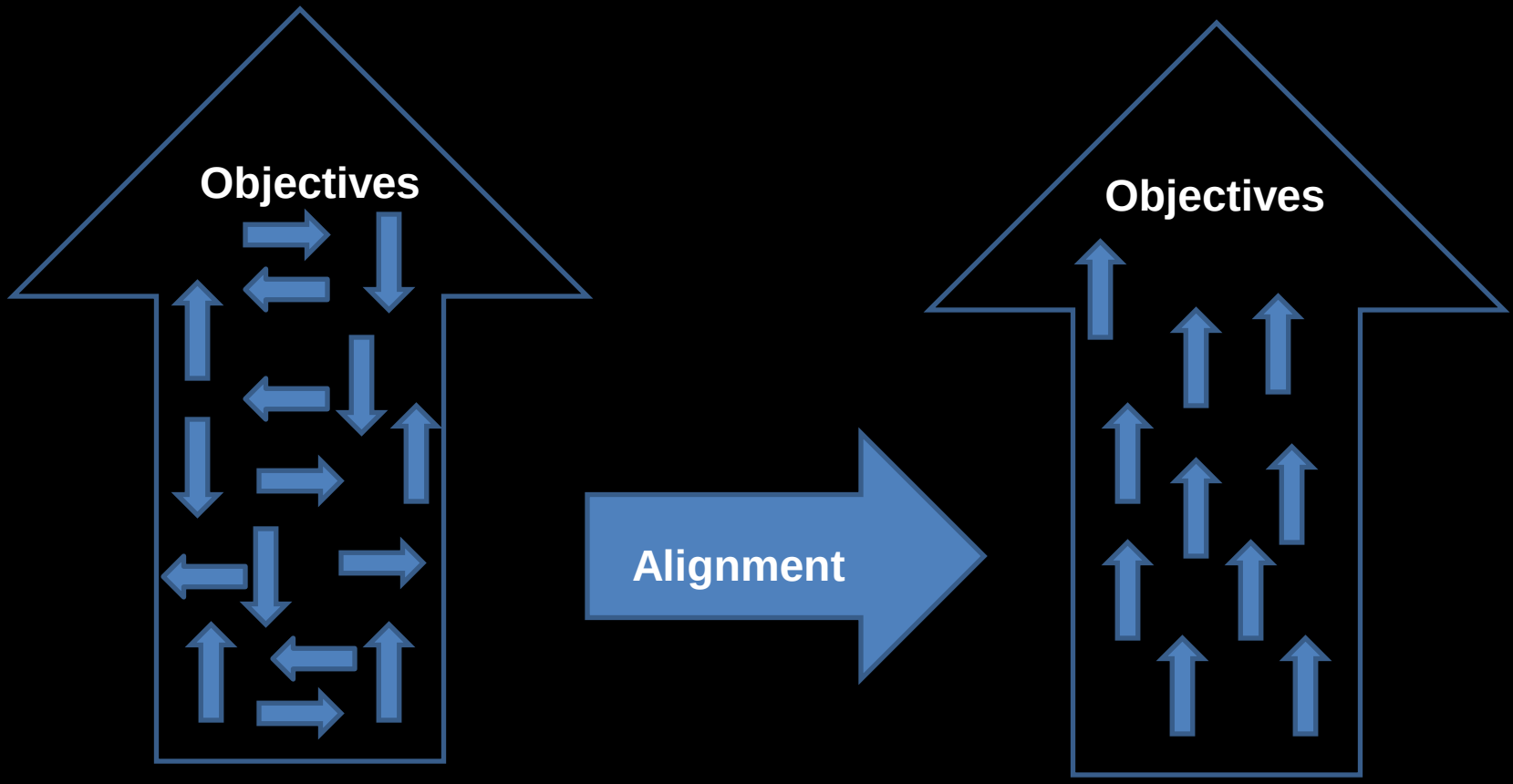
Thesis project cycle



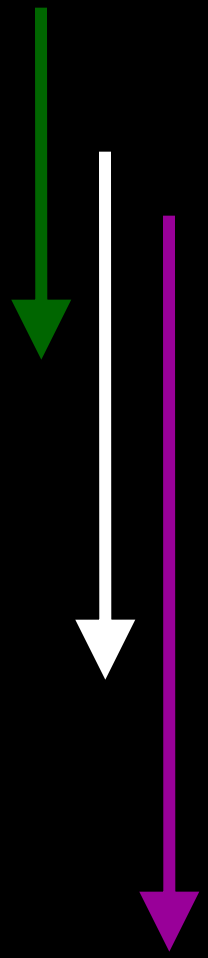
Key components

- Plan and be prepared!
- Promotes flexibility and adaptation
- Identifies key activities to ensure success
- Identifies resources needed/ costing
- Results/ outcomes based
- Knowledge management

Alignment of activities with overall research objectives



Key Phases of Project Management



Planning

- Formulate SMART results
- Set activities
- Select indicators (how do you know whether activities have been completed)
- Identify resources needed

Monitoring activities

- Monitor activities against timeframes

Review and revise

- Review activities and timeframes
- Revisit activities and timeframes (may require revisiting aims and objectives

Activities, timeframes, milestones and budget

- Is it realistic?
- Link budget and timeframe to key activities
- Identify funding sources
- Identify potential problem areas

ACTIVITY	TIME-FRAME	BUDGET/ RESOURCES
Literature review	8/3-8/5/2011	R500 (printing, books, articles) - Personal
Development of research instruments	15/3-15/6/2011	-
Data collection/ fieldwork	15/6-1/8/2011	R1000 (fieldworkers) - Grant R1000 (transport) - Grant R1000 (accommodation and subsistence) - Grant
Data analysis	15/7-30/8/2011	R500 (SPSS) - Grant R1000 (water testing) - Grant R500 (GIS data in shape file format) - Grant
Write-up	Continuous 30/8-26/9/2011	-
Submission	16/10/2011	-
TOTAL	**-**	**R5500**

A typical PhD thesis

Month/ year	Description	Outcomes
Feb – Dec 2016	Development of research proposal	Submission of proposal to university
Jan 2017 – May 2017 Continuous	Literature review	Completion of literature review chapters Ongoing through final write-up of thesis
June – Sept 2017	Development of survey instruments/ data collection techniques	Completion of methodology chapter Finalisation of research instruments
Sept – Dec 2017	Data collection/ fieldwork	Piloting Completion of fieldwork
Jan – March 2018	Data coding and inputting	Data cleaned and ready for analysis
April – Dec 2018	Data analysis	Completion of data analysis chapter/s
Jan – July 2018	Final write-up of theses	Submission of draft
Aug – Nov 2018	Finalise for examination	Submit for examination
Dec 2018	Graduation	Celebration and DR!

Some points to note

- Literature review is a continuous process
- Do not underestimate the amount of time it takes to revise when supervisor/s comment – revising is a time-consuming process
- Each descriptive component has specific activities that need to be considered, for example, fieldwork:
  - Compilation of draft surveys
  - Identifying and accessing communities
  - Logistical arrangements, etc.

Activity:

Develop activity schedule for inclusion in your proposal

Please note: Institutional requirements

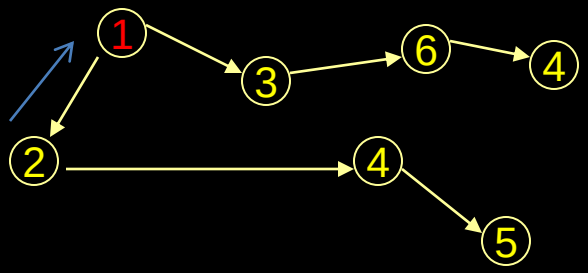
Tools for planning specific activities/ tasks and linkages: project scheduling

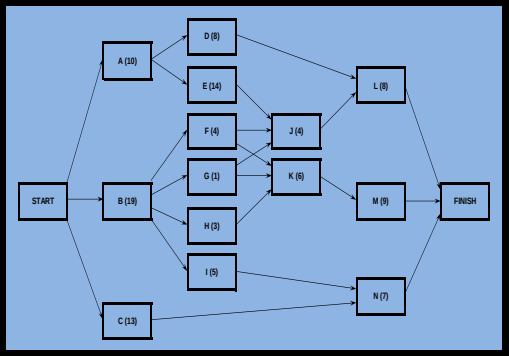
Weekly/ monthly/ yearly planner (can be adapted)

	1	2	3	4	etc
Writing completion goals: eg. complete section 1, write-up method, etc.					
Research goals: eg. plan fieldwork, attend research training workshop, etc.					
Tasks: eg. check references, check for ethical clearance, etc.					
Meetings/ consultations: supervisor meeting, community meeting, etc.					
Other commitments: wedding, teaching, etc.					
Notes: comments to provide extra information, eg. need to check on availability of community leaders					

Network Diagrams

Task	Predecessor	Duration (in months)
1. Research proposal		10
2. Literature review	1	12
3. Research techniques	1	3
4. Policy chapter	2	2
5. Conference presentation	4	0.2
6. Data collection	3	6
7. Data analysis	4	6



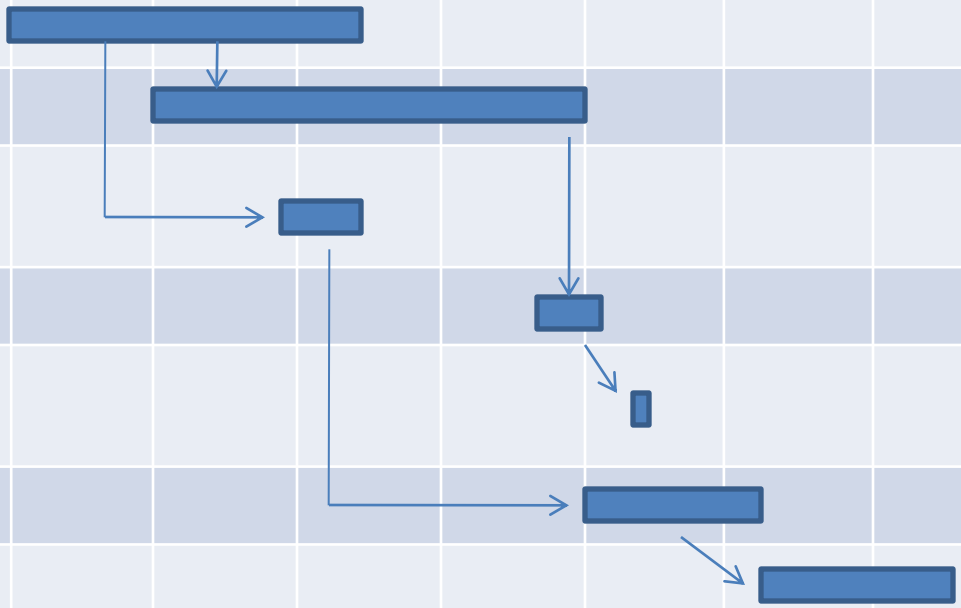


Scheduling Techniques

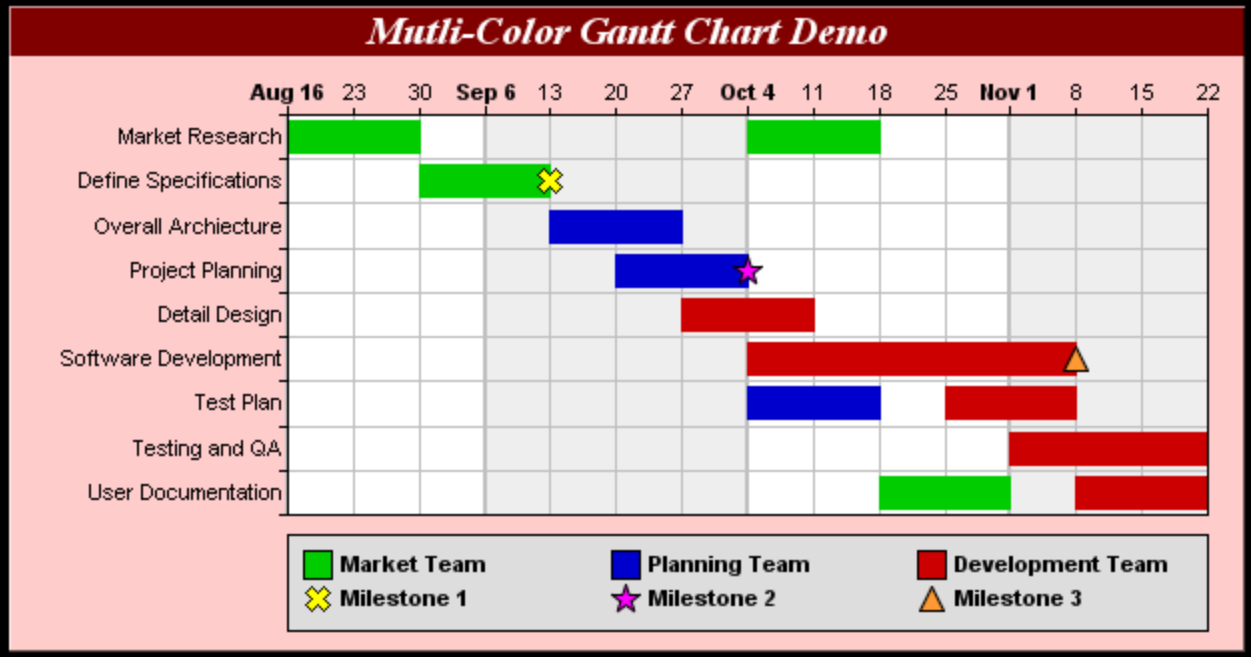
- PERT – Program Evaluation and Review techniques
- CPM – Critical Path Method

Gantt Chart

Task	Duration (in months)								
	1-4	5-8	8-12	13-16	17-20	21-24	24-28	29-32	33-36
1. Research proposal									
2. Literature review									
3. Research techniques									
4. Policy chapter									
5. Conference presentation									
6. Data collection									
7. Data analysis									



Example of Gantt Chart with multiple aspects



Problems and challenges

- Problems linked to the topic
  - Inappropriate topic choice
  - Lacks focus
  - Inappropriate choice of methods
  - Unrealistic objectives
- Engaging with supervisor/s
  - Agree on timeframes and activities
  - Communicate clearly
  - Have realistic expectations
  - Respond to feedback and communicate regularly

Time and resource-related challenges

- Time
  - Poor use of time
  - Inadequate time allocated
  - Procrastination/ displacement
  - Include time for supervisor input, drafts, etc.
  - Set priorities
  - Political context (balancing work and personal commitments)
- Resources
  - Limited funding
  - Underprepared fieldworkers/ research assistants

What do you do when problems arise?

- Detecting and predicting problems
- Think ahead and manage risks
- Action delayed is action abandoned
- Embrace change
- Be decisive!
- Take a break if you need it

Conclusions

- Give yourself plenty of time to plan
- Stick to aim and objectives to focus activities
- Get input and feedback from colleagues, supervisor/s, experts, etc.
- Review and revise

THANK YOU!