PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL LITERACY

Breaking Complex Tasks into Steps

Difficulty level: Easy

Practical and Financial Literacy

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Overview of the concept

This is how you tackle a job that feels too big, like a school project or cleaning a messy room. You break it into small steps and do one at a time, which turns a job you keep putting off into a list you can actually start. It is the same skill programmers and project managers use, because no big job is ever done in one leap.



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Worked examples

EXAMPLE 1

Q You have to write an essay about wolves. Where do you start?

SOLUTION

This is a break-it-down question: a job that feels too big is really several small jobs in a row.

Split it, in order: choose a topic, gather notes, plan paragraphs, write a draft, edit and proofread.

Each job is small enough to do in one sitting. If one is not, split it again.

Now start with the first small job, not the whole essay.

EXAMPLE 2

Q You have to revise for a science test. How do you break it into steps?

SOLUTION

List what the test covers, topic by topic.

Turn each topic into its own small job: make flashcards, then test yourself.

Finish by revisiting only the topics you missed, not everything again.

Re-reading what you already know is the long way round; the missed topics are the work.

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Practice questions

1 **Maya has to write an essay about wolves. List the steps she should follow, in order.**

A. 1. Gather notes. 2. Choose a topic. 3. Plan paragraphs. 4. Write a draft. 5. Edit and proofread.

B. 1. Choose a topic. 2. Gather notes. 3. Plan paragraphs. 4. Write a draft. 5. Edit and proofread.

C. 1. Choose a topic. 2. Plan paragraphs. 3. Gather notes. 4. Write a draft. 5. Edit and proofread.

D. 1. Choose a topic. 2. Gather notes. 3. Write a draft. 4. Plan paragraphs. 5. Edit and proofread.

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2

Leo is making a poster about space for class. What are the steps, in order?

A. 1. Gather facts and pictures. 2. Choose what to show. 3. Plan the layout. 4. Make the poster. 5. Check it.

B. 1. Choose what to show. 2. Plan the layout. 3. Gather facts and pictures. 4. Make the poster. 5. Check it.

C. 1. Choose what to show. 2. Gather facts and pictures. 3. Plan the layout. 4. Make the poster. 5. Check it.

D. 1. Choose what to show. 2. Gather facts and pictures. 3. Make the poster. 4. Plan the layout. 5. Check it.

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3 **A step in your plan still takes three hours. What should you do with it?**

- **A** Skip that step entirely.
- **B** Do the whole step in one go anyway.
- **C** Split it into smaller steps.
- **D** Start a different task instead.

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4 **Sara wants to plan a birthday party. Put her steps in order:**

- **A** 1. Send invitations. 2. List guests. 3. Choose food. 4. Plan games.
- **B** 1. List guests. 2. Plan games. 3. Choose food. 4. Send invitations.
- **C** 1. List guests. 2. Choose food. 3. Send invitations. 4. Plan games.
- **D** 1. List guests. 2. Choose food. 3. Plan games. 4. Send invitations.

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5

Tom revises by re-reading everything, even topics he knows well. What should he change?

A Revisit only the topics he missed, not everything again.

B Re-read everything twice.

C Stop revising altogether.

D Only revise the topics he already knows.

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6

Ana has to clean her messy bedroom. Break the job into small steps, in order.

A. 1. Pick up clothes. 2. Clear the desk. 3. Make the bed. 4. Vacuum the floor. 5. Take out the garbage.

B. 1. Pick up clothes. 2. Clear the desk. 3. Make the bed. 4. Take out the garbage. 5. Vacuum the floor.

C. 1. Make the bed. 2. Pick up clothes. 3. Clear the desk. 4. Take out the garbage. 5. Vacuum the floor.

D. 1. Take out the garbage. 2. Pick up clothes. 3. Clear the desk. 4. Make the bed. 5. Vacuum the floor.

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7

You have broken a big task into small steps, but you do not know which step to do first. What should you do?

A Start with any step at random.

B Do the last step first.

C Skip the steps and start anywhere.

D Put the steps in order, first to last.

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8 **Ben is training for a 5 km run. List his steps, in order.**

A. 1. Plan a training schedule. 2. Start with short runs. 3. Build up distance. 4. Rest the day before the race.

B. 1. Start with short runs. 2. Plan a training schedule. 3. Build up distance. 4. Rest the day before the race.

C. 1. Plan a training schedule. 2. Build up distance. 3. Start with short runs. 4. Rest the day before the race.

D. 1. Plan a training schedule. 2. Start with short runs. 3. Rest the day before the race. 4. Build up distance.

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9 You finish testing yourself for a science test and missed two topics. What should you do next?

- **A** Study those two topics, then test yourself again.
- **B** Re-read everything from the start.
- **C** Move on and forget the two topics.
- **D** Test yourself again without studying.

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10 True or false: breaking a big task into smaller steps makes it harder to start.

- **A** True
- **B** False

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ANSWER KEY

1. 1. Choose a topic. 2. Gather notes. 3. Plan paragraphs. 4. Write a draft. 5. Edit and proofread.

2. 1. Choose what to show. 2. Gather facts and pictures. 3. Plan the layout. 4. Make the poster. 5. Check it.

3. Split it into smaller steps.

4. 1. List guests. 2. Choose food. 3. Plan games. 4. Send invitations.

5. Revisit only the topics he missed, not everything again.

6. One possible option: 1. Pick up clothes. 2. Clear the desk. 3. Make the bed. 4. Take out the garbage. 5. Vacuum the floor.

7. Put the steps in order, first to last.

8. 1. Plan a training schedule. 2. Start with short runs. 3. Build up distance. 4. Rest the day before the race.

9. Study those two topics, then test yourself again.

10. False, it usually makes starting and finishing easier.

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