



Indiana Extension Homemakers Association® and Indiana Leadership, Education and Development



FIRST THINGS FIRST How to Prioritize

Many of us complain about not having enough time for the goals we want to accomplish. Perhaps understanding the difference between priorities and goals may be the key to achieving success. Let's start by defining priorities and goals.

A **Priority** is something one finds more important than other things and needs to be done or dealt with first. To help determine priorities ask yourself these important questions: What is most important and meaningful in your life today? What are you not willing to compromise or sacrifice in pursuit of something else?

A **Goal** is an aim or desired result. It is a future based end result or experience that you are working towards creating or achieving and has not yet been realized in the present.

Another way to look at the differences is by stating:

- Goals are what we need to accomplish.
- Priorities are those things that we need to take care of first before it is possible to accomplish the goals.

3 Approaches to Setting Priorities

Which one suits your personality?

Procrastinators - People who are procrastinators put off unpleasant tasks.

Procrastinators need to try tackling the biggest, hardest and least appealing task first every day. Once you have the difficult task completed, you will feel like a load has been lifted from your shoulders.

Accomplishers - People who thrive on accomplishment and need a stream of small victories to get through the day.

Perhaps you are a fiddler, someone who fills her or his time fussing over little tasks and needs those small accomplishments to move on. You are busy, busy, busy all the time but somehow, nothing of importance seems to get done. Sit down every night before you go to bed and write down the three most important tasks you have to get done tomorrow. In the morning, take your list and attack the first Big Task. Work on that task until it is done or you can't make any further progress. Then move on to the next task and then the final task.

Analyticals - People who are analytical need to know that they are working on the objectives most important at the moment.

Analyticals just can't relax unless everything is in order and planned. If you find yourself in this group, you will do well with making lists with the items most important listed first. Use stars, arrows, a numbered list, or your own system. Analyticals must be careful not to get bogged down with details that interfere with the ability to stay on track.



Prioritizing can be a challenge when you're working in a group, because each team member wants to have a say in what's most important. Sometimes we tend to focus on the end goal rather than the priorities that need to be accomplished to reach that goal. Remember the goal is the achievement you want to reach in the

future. The priorities are the steps to take to get there.

Try to think of a priority in your group that can lead to the goal. Maybe your club has a goal of gaining new members. What are 2-3 things you can do right now to achieve that goal? Once your group has reached a consensus, those are the priorities for obtaining your new members. you need to find new members. Remember priorities are important. Do not skip any priorities along the way. Letting members of your group select the tasks they feel most qualified to handle will help insure your chances for success.

Learning about priorities and goals will help you in a group or in your own personal life. Knowing how to prioritize your tasks is an essential skill, because all of us have demands on our time and attention. Not being able to manage those demands means that you'll likely spend your days feeling as if you're on a treadmill, trying hard but not achieving much.

In the end, setting priorities is an exercise in self-knowledge. You need to know what tasks you'll treat as a pleasure and which ones like torture, what tasks lead to your objectives and which ones lead you astray and going nowhere.

Learn to say no to people who try to make you change your agenda and priorities but be sure to allow time for interruptions and delays. Celebrate those accomplishments and create some space for relaxing. Congratulate yourself for setting priorities, achieving them and ultimately reaching your goal!



PURDUE UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE



FIRST THINGS FIRST

How to Prioritize

Lost at Sea – Individual Worksheet

Individual Instructions: You are adrift on a private yacht in the South Pacific. As a consequence of a fire of unknown origin, much of the yacht and its contents have been destroyed. The yacht is now slowly sinking. Your location is unclear because of the destruction of critical navigational equipment and because you and the crew were distracted by trying to bring the fire under control. Your best estimate is that you are approximately 1,000 miles south-southwest of the nearest island.

Below is a list of 15 items that are intact and undamaged after the fire. In addition to these articles, you have a serviceable rubber life raft, with oars, large enough to carry yourself, the crew, and several, but not all of the items listed below. The total contents of all survivors' pockets are a package of cigarettes, several books of matches, and five One-dollar bills.

Your task is to rank the 15 items below in terms of their importance to your survival. Place number 1 by the most important item, then number 2 by the second most important, and so on through number 15, the least important.

- _____ Sextant
- _____ Shaving Mirror
- _____ Five-gallon Can of Water
- _____ Mosquito Netting
- _____ One Case of U.S. Army C Rations
- _____ Maps of the Pacific Ocean
- _____ Floating Seat Cushion
- _____ Two-gallon Can of Oil/Gas Mixture
- _____ Small Transistor Radio
- _____ Shark Repellent
- _____ Twenty Square Feet of Opaque Plastic
- _____ One Quart of 160 Proof Puerto Rican Rum
- _____ Fifteen Feet of Nylon Rope
- _____ Two Boxes of Chocolate Bars
- _____ Fishing Kit

Developed for IEHA by the i-LEaD State Board.

Sources: i-LEaD materials developed by Purdue University
The 1975 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators





FIRST THINGS FIRST

How to Prioritize

Lost at Sea – Group Worksheet

Group Instructions: This is an exercise in group decision-making. Your group is to employ the group consensus method in reaching its decision. This means that each group member *must* agree upon the prediction for each of the 15 survival items before it becomes a part of the group decision. Consensus is difficult to reach. Therefore, not every ranking will meet with everyone’s approval. As a group, try to make each ranking one with which all group members can at least *partially* agree. Here are some guides to use in reaching a consensus.

1. Avoid arguing for your own individual judgments. Approach the task on the basis of logic.
2. Avoid changing your mind if it is only to reach agreement and avoid conflict. Support only solutions with which you are able to agree at least somewhat.
3. Avoid “conflict-reducing” techniques such as a majority vote, averaging, or trading.
4. View differences of opinion as a help rather than a hinderance in decision-making.

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Presenter Instructions

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How to Prioritize

Lost at Sea – Instructions

Distribute the *Lost at Sea Individual Worksheet* to participants. Read the instructions for the *Individual Worksheet*. Then have each member rank the items individually.

Next, divide into small groups. Distribute the *Lost at Sea Group Worksheet*. Read the instructions for the *Group Worksheet*. Have the teams rank the items using the group sheet. Emphasize that each member of the group must agree with the ranking.

Discuss briefly – was it easier to determine the priorities individually or in a group. Did your priorities match or differ from others in the group?

Read and explain the answers and rationale from the “experts”.

Lost at Sea – Answer and Rationale Sheet

According to the “experts” (U.S. Merchant Marines) the basic supplies needed when a person is stranded in midocean are articles to attract attention and articles to aid survival *until rescuers arrive*. Articles for navigation are of little importance. Even if a small life raft were capable of reaching land, it would be impossible to store enough food and water to subsist during that period of time. Therefore, of primary importance is the shaving mirror and two-gallon can of oil/gas mixture. These items could be used for signaling to air-sea rescuers. Of secondary importance are items such as water and food, e.g., the care of Army C rations.

A brief rationale is provided for the ranking of each item. These brief explanations do not represent all of the potential uses for the specified items but, rather, the primary importance of each.

- 1. Shaving Mirror:** Critical for signaling air-sea rescuers.
- 2. Two-gallon Can of Oil/Gas Mixture:** Critical for signaling. The oil/gas mixture will float on the water and could be ignited with a dollar bill and match.
- 3. Five-gallon Can of Water:** Necessary to replenish loss by perspiring, etc.
- 4. One Case of U.S. Army C Rations:** Provides basic food needs.
- 5. Twenty Square Feet of Opaque Plastic:** Utilized to collect rainwater, provide shelter from the elements.
- 6. Two Boxes of Chocolate Bars:** A reserve food supply

7. **Fishing Kit:** Ranked lower than the candy bars because there is no assurance that you will catch any fish.
8. **Fifteen Feet of Nylon Rope:** May be used to lash equipment together to prevent it from falling overboard.
9. **Floating Seat Cushion:** If someone fell overboard, it could function as a life preserver.
10. **Shark Repellent:** Obvious
11. **One Quart of 160 Proof Puerto Rican Rum:** Contains 80% alcohol – enough to use as a potential antiseptic for injury, but of little use otherwise. Drinking it will cause dehydration (and a BAD hangover).
12. **Small Transistor Radio:** Of little value since there is no transmitter.
13. **Maps of the Pacific Ocean:** Worthless without additional navigation equipment. It does not really matter where you are. What counts is where the rescuers are,
14. **Mosquito Netting:** There are no mosquitoes in the Pacific Ocean.
15. **Sextant:** Without tables and chronometer, the sextant is relatively useless.

The basic rationale for ranking signaling devices before life-sustaining elements (food, water) is that without signaling devices there is almost no chance of being spotted and rescued. Furthermore, most rescues occur during the first 36 hours, and one can survive without food and water during this period.

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