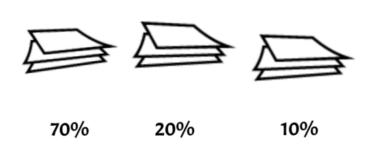# 70-20-10

What is 70-20-10?

70-20-10 is a strategy that can help manage workload. It works particularly well for those with ADHD but is helpful for anyone juggling multiple tasks or projects.

How it Works

Step One

Choose **three** upcoming tasks. Usually, these would be the assignments with the closest due dates, but they could also be the longest or most difficult. The learner should decide this for themselves, considering their individual circumstances.

Step Two

Prioritise the three tasks from most to least important. Spend 70% (or most) time on the first priority task, 20% on the second most important task, and 10% on the least important. Again, this prioritisation is up to the student.

Step Three

Tasks move in and out of the *Window of Action* as they are complete. As each task is completed and/or the available time is up, the next task replaces it. For example, the task with a previous focus of 20% is now a higher priority, so this is now focused on 70% of the time. Similarly, a new task has now come into the *Window of Action*. NB:

It is not always possible to complete tasks in the available timeframe, but they can be moved to a future study session.

Step Four

After each task has been attended to, stop and reflect on the feeling of achievement, look ahead to future tasks, and start again at Step One. Resist the temptation to allow future tasks to interrupt the flow of the work currently being attended to!

70-20-10 is flexible as it applies to any chunk of time, e.g., minutes or proportion of time: 70mins, 20mins, 10mins, OR 70% of 1 hr, 20% of 1 hr, 10% of 1 hr, etc.

Balance is the key!

A Note About Timers

Using a timer can help ensure the balance and priority of tasks is correct and provide opportunities to reflect, but it can also create stress. Sometimes it may be appropriate to continue longer with a task if you are in a state of 'flow' but other times, stopping is necessary because the next task is urgent. Be aware also of whether the timer helps with focus or induces anxiety.

70-20-10 in Practice

In addition to the time breakdown, students can begin to recognise the *types* of tasks that are more appropriate at each stage of the process. Here are some of the examples of tasks that could be undertaken at each stage of a written assignment:

70
- write draft
- consult a learning advisor
- proofread, edit, rewrite as necessary
- complete final copy
- APA referencing

20
- search for literature related to topic - books, journals, articles, etc.
- make notes or brainstorm about key information
- write a bulleted outline of main points and subpoints
- clarify any new issues or problems raised at this stage
- record sources consulted/enter in EndNote (if using)

10
- read task instructions - highlight key words
- read marking rubric - highlight key information
- ask for clarification about task from tutor or learning advisor
- set up a template or outline in Word, PowerPoint, etc.
- consider/refresh knowledge using course notes, videos, speaking to others
- think about possible literature sources to consult

Benefits of Using 70-20-10

- Minimises black and white (all or nothing) thinking
- Builds empowerment as the student decides what to focus on and prioritise
- Improves metacognition and self-awareness, e.g., why am I prioritising Task 1 over Tasks 2 or 3?
- Avoids dopamine drain related to pressure, guilt, regret, feeling overwhelmed, etc.
- Teaches prioritisation
- Minimises fear-based procrastination as projects have already been started by the time they appear in the *Window of Action*
- Allows for individual creativity, e.g., how and when this technique is applied
- Provides early insight into potential 'pinch points' such as unclear or conflicting instructions. This allows the student to take action before things become urgent, thus reducing stress and anxiety.
- Can work well with other systems, e.g., Eisenhower Matrix, which helps prioritise tasks according to urgency and importance

Further Thoughts

This system can be easily combined with other self-management systems such as:
- a study timetable
- dividing tasks into sub-tasks
- sequencing of sub-tasks
- study-work-whānau balance
- to-do lists
- types of tasks, e.g., emails, phone calls, creative thinking

NB
If combining with other systems, learners with ADHD or learning difficulties are advised that overly complex, boring, or guilt-inducing systems will limit the effectiveness of 70-20-10.

Background to 70-20-10

70-20-10 was developed by a tertiary Acadmic Learning Advisor with ADHD to help manage her own study-work-life balance. Having found it useful, she realised that this technique would also be beneficial for the students she was supporting, so she began sharing it with them. Students and tutors alike have since reported success using this technique.