TOPIC 8 | TIME MANAGEMENT

Plan with purpose, negotiate deadlines and communicate priorities clearly.

1 | Time pressure at work

A project manager says: *"Everything is urgent. We need the report today, a client update by noon and a new plan for next week."* What would you ask before you start working?

Discuss: What is the difference between being busy and being productive? Which task would you clarify first, and why?

2 | Essential time-management vocabulary

Study the terms and common business collocations.

TERM / EXPRESSION	УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ	COMMON BUSINESS USE
deadline	кінцевий термін	meet / miss / extend a deadline
priority	пріоритет	set / review priorities
workload	робоче навантаження	manage a heavy workload
milestone	проміжний етап	reach a project milestone
time slot	часовий проміжок	book / find a time slot
buffer time	резерв часу	build in buffer time
estimate	оцінювати тривалість	estimate how long a task will take
delegate	делегувати	delegate routine tasks
reschedule	переносити на інший час	reschedule a meeting
turnaround time	строк виконання	reduce the turnaround time
on track	за планом	keep a project on track
overdue	прострочений	follow up on an overdue task

A. Complete the collocations

1. We need to _____ a realistic deadline. 2. The team is still _____ track.

3. Could we _____ the meeting? 4. Please _____ how long the review will take.

Useful distinction: A deadline is when a task must be finished; a milestone is a point that shows progress towards a larger goal.

3 | Set priorities, not just a longer to-do list

Important tasks support a key goal; urgent tasks require attention soon. They are not always the same thing.

PRIORITY	WHAT IT MEANS	TYPICAL RESPONSE
Urgent + important	A critical issue or a genuine near-term deadline	Do it promptly; communicate impact.
Important + not urgent	Work that prevents future problems or advances goals	Schedule focused time.
Urgent + less important	Time-sensitive work with limited impact	Clarify, simplify or delegate when appropriate.
Neither urgent nor important	Work with little value and no real deadline	Reduce, defer or remove it.

A. A crowded Monday morning

You have just started work at 09:00. Read the six requests. Assign a priority category (1–4) to each, using the table above. Different answers are possible if you explain your reasoning.

TASK	REQUEST	YOUR CATEGORY
A	A registration error is preventing students from joining an event happening today.	____
B	A short progress report for your supervisor is due tomorrow at 15:00.	____
C	A colleague asks for feedback on a design that will be used next week.	____
D	You receive an optional meeting invitation with no agenda.	____
E	A safety checklist for tomorrow's event must be approved by 16:00 today.	____
F	You would like to organise your project files more clearly. No deadline has been set.	____

B. Decide and justify

Which **three actions** would you take first? Include at least one action that involves asking a question, updating someone or delegating.

C. Say it professionally

Rewrite this response to your manager in a constructive way: *"I cannot do all of this. There is no time."*

Decision rule: When priorities conflict, make the trade-off visible: explain the risk, suggest an order and ask for a decision if necessary.

4 | Use to-do lists and time blocking

TECHNIQUE	HOW IT WORKS	WHY IT HELPS
A useful to-do list	Write tasks as clear actions; add an owner, deadline and priority.	You can see what needs to happen next.
Time blocking	Reserve periods in your calendar for specific work.	Important work is less likely to be interrupted.
Buffer time	Leave some unscheduled time between demanding tasks.	Unexpected requests do not destroy the whole plan.

A. From vague tasks to clear actions

Turn each item into a clear action with a deliverable and, where possible, a deadline.

VAGUE TO-DO ITEM	ACTION YOU COULD ACTUALLY COMPLETE
“Presentation”	_____
“Emails”	_____
“Career event”	_____

B. Plan a realistic workday

It is 09:00. Your workday ends at 17:00. You have a meeting from 11:30–12:00, an interview from 14:00–15:00 and a lunch break from 12:30–13:00. Plan these tasks, allowing some buffer time:

- Send a status update (20 min; due 10:00).
- Prepare a client briefing (90 min; due 11:30).
- Resolve a registration problem (50 min; due 14:00).
- Review a proposal (60 min; due tomorrow).

TIME BLOCK	YOUR TASK / REASON
09:00–10:00	_____
10:00–11:30	_____
11:30–13:00	_____
13:00–14:00	_____
14:00–15:00	Interview – already booked
15:00–17:00	_____

C. Respond to a change

At 13:00, a customer problem requires one hour of immediate attention. What will you move, and what will you tell the people affected?

Planning reminder: A calendar is a plan, not a guarantee. Reassess the day when a significant new task arrives.

5 | Turn intentions into SMART goals

A SMART goal helps a team agree what success means and when to review it.

ELEMENT	CHECK QUESTION	EXAMPLE
S – Specific	What exactly will change?	Improve responses to student enquiries.
M – Measurable	How will progress be checked?	Reduce the average reply time from 48 to 24 hours.
A – Achievable	Is it realistic with available resources?	Use one shared inbox and a weekly rota.
R – Relevant	Why does the goal matter?	Students receive important information sooner.
T – Time-bound	By when?	Within six weeks.

Complete goal: Within six weeks, reduce the average response time to student enquiries from 48 to 24 hours by using a shared inbox and a weekly team rota.

A. What is missing?

For each statement, name **two SMART elements** that need improvement and explain what extra information is needed.

1. “We will communicate better with our partners.”

2. “We will publish ten detailed reports tomorrow with no additional staff.”

3. “We will improve customer support by 25%.”

B. Write one SMART goal

Choose a project: organising a university workshop, improving a customer service process, or completing a group assignment. Write a goal and a sensible first milestone.

Goal:

First milestone:

How will you know if the plan is on track?

6 | Reading: When every task seems urgent

Original teaching text • Business case study

A small team, a fixed date

A university careers team had ten working days to launch an online event with three international employers. Mia coordinated the project, Daniel managed the website and registration system, and Sofia contacted speakers and students. The event date had already been announced, so changing it would have disappointed people who had booked time to attend.

At the first planning meeting, the team wrote a long to-do list. Everything looked equally important: confirm speakers, design promotional materials, test registration, prepare captions, update the website and answer student questions. They worked hard for two days but made little visible progress. Team members were switching between tasks and responding to every new message immediately.

A better picture of the work

Mia then asked the group to identify the tasks that could delay the event. They discovered that the registration page could not be tested until Daniel received the final event details from Sofia. They also needed speaker confirmation before publishing the programme. These dependencies were more important than the colour of the promotional banner, even though the banner had attracted several urgent comments.

The team agreed on three milestones: confirm speakers by Wednesday, test registration by Friday and complete a full rehearsal the following Tuesday. Each milestone had a named owner. Mia booked two focused work periods in her calendar and kept short gaps between them for unexpected requests. The to-do list now showed actions rather than broad topics: “Send the final speaker brief” replaced “Speakers”.

A difficult conversation

On Thursday afternoon, an employer requested a major change to the event programme. Sofia could update the programme, but doing so immediately would delay the registration test. Instead of simply promising that everything would be finished, she told Mia: “I can revise the programme by 12:00 tomorrow, but that would move the test to Monday. If Friday’s test is essential, could we agree on a smaller change for now?”

After checking the risks, the team approved the smaller change and kept Friday’s test. The revised programme could be completed later. Mia sent a brief status update explaining what had changed, what remained on track and who was responsible for the next steps.

The result

The registration test uncovered a technical problem, which Daniel corrected before the event. The rehearsal was completed on schedule, and the event went ahead as planned. The team did not finish every optional task, but it protected the activities that mattered most. Afterwards, Mia noted that time management had required three skills: deciding priorities, allowing for uncertainty and communicating trade-offs early.

Reading focus: Find one dependency, one milestone and one example of deadline negotiation in the case.

6A | Reading comprehension and useful language

A. True, false or not given?

Mark each statement **T**, **F** or **NG**. Find evidence in the reading.

_____ 1. The event date could easily be changed without affecting anyone.

_____ 2. The registration test depended on information from another team member.

_____ 3. All promotional materials were completed before the test.

_____ 4. Sofia proposed a smaller change to protect the original schedule.

_____ 5. The registration test found a problem before the live event.

B. Analyse the decision

1. Why was the banner less important than speaker confirmation?

2. What made Sofia's response more professional than simply saying "Yes"?

7 | Giving concise progress updates

PURPOSE	USEFUL EXPRESSION	УКРАЇНСЬКОЮ
Progress	We are on track to finish by Friday.	Ми встигаємо завершити до п'ятниці.
Completed work	The draft has been approved.	Чернетку погоджено.
Current risk	We may miss the deadline because…	Можемо не вкластися в термін, оскільки…
Dependency	We are waiting for confirmation from…	Очікуємо підтвердження від…
Next step	I will send the revised version by 15:00.	Надішлю оновлену версію до 15:00.
Clarification	Which task should take priority?	Яке завдання має бути пріоритетним?

C. Your 30-second update

Give a short update about a real or imaginary project. Include: **completed work progress one risk next step + deadline**.

8 | Negotiate timelines without losing trust

A good response states what is possible, explains a genuine constraint and offers a workable alternative.

FUNCTION	POLITE BUSINESS ENGLISH
Requesting a deadline	Could you confirm when you need the final version?
Checking urgency	Is the deadline fixed, or is there some flexibility?
Explaining capacity	I can complete the review today, but not the full rewrite.
Suggesting an option	Would a summary by 16:00 and the full report tomorrow work?
Making a trade-off clear	If this task moves to the top, the other report will be delayed.
Confirming an agreement	Just to confirm, the revised deadline is Thursday at 14:00.

A. Make the message more professional

Rewrite each response. Be polite but specific; do not promise something you cannot deliver.

1. “No. I am too busy.”

2. “I will try. Maybe it will be ready sometime tomorrow.”

3. “That is not my problem. Ask someone else.”

B. Practise a negotiation

ROLE A – PROJECT LEAD	ROLE B – TEAM MEMBER
The client wants an updated 8-page proposal by 10:00 tomorrow. The client meeting cannot move. You also need an accurate budget table.	You are preparing the proposal. The full revision needs four hours; today you only have two. You could deliver a 2-page summary tonight or the complete revision by 15:00 tomorrow.

Agree on **one feasible plan**. Your conversation must include a question about priorities, a clear limitation, at least one alternative and a confirmed deadline.

C. Write a follow-up email (100–130 words)

Confirm your agreement with the project lead, the deliverables, owners and exact times. Use a helpful, professional tone.

Subject: Proposal revision – agreed next steps

9 | Cultural views on time and punctuality

Expectations about schedules differ between organisations, teams and individuals. Some workplaces value very precise start times; others allow flexibility. Avoid making assumptions about people based on nationality. Agree on expectations explicitly.

SITUATION	SENSIBLE BUSINESS RESPONSE
An international call starts at 09:00.	Join on time and check which time zone the invitation uses.
A deadline is described as “end of day”.	Ask for a specific date, time and time zone.
A team member regularly needs extra time.	Discuss dependencies, workload and realistic delivery dates.
A meeting is delayed by ten minutes.	Give a concise update and offer a new start time.

A. Remove ambiguity

Rewrite the messages so that international colleagues can act on them without guessing.

1. “Please send the figures by Friday.”

2. “Let us have a call tomorrow morning.”

3. “We should finish this as soon as possible.”

B. What would you say?

Scenario 1: You are joining a meeting five minutes late because a previous call is running over. Send one courteous message before the meeting begins.

Scenario 2: You receive a request labelled “URGENT”, but it has no deadline or explanation. Ask for the information needed to prioritise it.

Scenario 3: A colleague abroad says they will send a draft “in the afternoon”. Clarify the time zone without sounding demanding.

Key principle: Punctuality, clear deadlines and early updates are signs of respect. Ask about shared working norms rather than relying on stereotypes.

10 | Final challenge: protect the launch

It is **Wednesday morning**. A university careers team is launching an online internship event on **Friday at 15:00**. You are working in a team of two. You cannot extend the launch date.

WORK TO COMPLETE	ESTIMATED TIME	LATEST USEFUL DEADLINE
A. Confirm two speakers and final programme	60 min	Wednesday 16:00
B. Test registration and access links	90 min	Thursday 12:00
C. Prepare and approve the final announcement	75 min	Thursday 15:00
D. Rehearse the event and check captions	60 min	Friday 12:00
E. Create an optional social media graphic	90 min	Friday 13:00

The complication: At 11:00 on Wednesday, a speaker asks for a programme change. The change needs 45 minutes of work. On Thursday morning, one teammate will be unavailable for two hours.

A. Agree on a revised plan

Choose your top three priorities. Decide what can be delayed, simplified or delegated. Remember that some tasks depend on others.

PRIORITY / ACTION	OWNER	DEADLINE / UPDATE
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
What will you drop or simplify?	_____	_____

B. Give your project update

Role A: the project lead asks for progress. Role B: explain what is on track, the new risk and a realistic next step. Then swap roles and negotiate one deadline.

C. Self-check and independent practice

[ ] I set priorities. [ ] I made a realistic schedule. [ ] I explained a constraint.
[ ] I negotiated a deadline. [ ] I confirmed the next step and owner.

Independent practice: Track your tasks for one working or study day. Identify one time-waster, protect one focused work block and write a short progress update (70–90 words) using at least four expressions from this worksheet.