Time management games and activities for work: three paper exercises and a 60-minute plan

Useful time management games for work practise three things: finding the real deadline, estimating how long a task takes, and keeping time free for focused work. This kit has three paper exercises (a fictional inbox, four timed tasks and a fictional week of meetings) with answer keys, a 60-minute plan, a debrief and a one-week experiment card. It promises no productivity gain; people notice how they plan and try one change.

60 minutes | 4–24 participants | Online and adaptable in person

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The outcome

Each participant sorts a 12-message inbox against a key, compares four estimates with a timer, protects two 90-minute blocks while answering six requests, and writes a one-week experiment with a daily count.

Before the session

- For trainers, team leads and facilitators running a time management session for 4–24 adults at work, alone, in pairs and in groups of two or three.
- Print the six participant sheets per person. Keep the answer keys and filled examples for yourself.
- Have a count-up timer to show the room or share on screen for the six-minute task round.
- Accessibility: all sheets are plain text and can be typed in the Word file. Nobody shares their own calendar. Each person is compared only with their own estimate; anyone can pass or have a partner write.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

What is inside

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- Exercise 3: requests and response sheet
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- Filled example: estimate record
- Filled example: experiment card
- Facilitator section: run of show, reference tables, debrief and adaptations

Exercise 1: the inbox, Monday 2 November, 09:00

Fictional. You coordinate a training team and are at your desk 09:00–12:00, then away until Tuesday 09:00. Write A, B, C or D and any deadline you find. A: do this morning. B: book a time this week. C: pass it on or ask someone. D: reply in one line, or let it go.

After the key: matches ___ /12 hidden deadlines found ___ /6 morning items in A ___ /3 urgent-looking in A ___ /3

#	From and subject	Message	A–D	Deadline I found
1	Facilities desk: “Fire alarm test on Thursday”	The weekly alarm test moves to Thursday 10:00 this week. No action is needed.		
2	Finance assistant: “Quick question about the venue invoice”	Can you confirm the order number for the October venue invoice? Today’s payment run closes at 12:00. Anything later moves to December, and the venue then charges a late fee.		
3	Head of department: “URGENT: ideas for next year”	Please send me two or three ideas for next year’s programme. I will collect them at the planning day on Friday 20 November.		
4	A trainer in your team: “Laptop”	My laptop will not start. I run the induction course tomorrow at 09:00 and the slides are on it. IT need a ticket from a coordinator to swap it.		
5	Newsletter team: “Last call: send your team story”	Stories for the winter newsletter close on Friday 27 November. Any length is welcome.		
6	External trainer: “Contract for January”	The January course contract is attached for signature. I am holding the dates for you until Wednesday 4 November; after that I release them to another client.		
7	A colleague in another team: “Can you join our workshop?”	We would love you to come to our workshop on Thursday 5 November, 14:00 to 16:00, and say how your team runs onboarding.		
8	Your manager: “Catch-up”	Can you bring this term’s attendance figures to our one-to-one? I need them for the board pack, which closes on Tuesday at 17:00.		
9	IT service desk: “Action required: your password expires”	Your password expires in 14 days. Change it at any time before then.		
10	Course participant: “Thank you”	Thanks for organising the course. One question: is there a recording? No rush.		
11	Venue booking system: “Booking 4471 provisional”	Your provisional booking for room 2 on Monday 16 November is released automatically unless it is confirmed by 12:00 on Monday 2 November.		
12	A member of your team: “Rota for December”	Here is my draft of the December rota. Could you look at it when you have a moment? I would like to send it out by Friday 6 November.		

Exercise 2: the four tasks

Do not start until the facilitator says “Go”. Do the tasks in order. Each time you finish one, write the reading on the timer in the record below. Nobody compares your times with anyone else’s.

Task	What to do
1. Add up	Add up these twelve fictional expense amounts and write the total. 18.40 6.25 42.00 12.75 9.60 31.20 4.85 27.50 15.00 8.95 22.30 11.20
2. Find the clashes	Room 1, Tuesday 10 November. Write the numbers of every pair of bookings that overlap. A booking that ends when the next one starts is not a clash. 1) 12:00–13:00 Finance 2) 09:30–10:00 Interviews 3) 14:30–15:30 Induction 4) 08:30–09:30 Cleaning check 5) 11:30–12:00 Phone interview 6) 15:00–16:00 Supplier 7) 10:30–11:30 Team meeting 8) 12:45–13:30 Lunch talk 9) 09:45–10:30 Project group 10) 13:30–14:30 Coaching
3. Proof-read	Find the five mistakes in this fictional notice. Underline them or list them below. The induction course runs on Tuesday 17 November 2026 from 09:30 to 16:00 in room 2. Lunch is from 12:30 to 13:15. Please bring your laptop and charger. The course finish at 16:30, and the second day is on Thursday 20 November. Contact the coordinator by Friday 13 Novmber if you need any adjustments, or if you cannot atend.
4. Write a reply	Write a three-sentence reply to this fictional request: “Can you join a one-hour planning meeting on Thursday at 14:00?” Decline, give one reason, and offer another time or another way to help. Use the lines at the foot of the record sheet.

Exercise 2: estimate and timer record

Before “Go”, write your estimate in seconds for each task. During the round, write the timer reading each time you finish a task. Afterwards, work out the actual seconds (this reading minus the previous one) and divide by your estimate.

Task	My estimate (seconds)	Timer at finish (m:ss)	Actual seconds	Actual ÷ estimate	Answer check
1. Add up					
2. Find the clashes					
3. Proof-read					
4. Write a reply					

Task 4: my three-sentence reply (continue overleaf if you need more room)

Exercise 3: the week of 9 November

A fictional week for the lead of a small team. The items on this page are fixed and cannot move. Lunch, 12:30 to 13:00, stays free; on Thursday it is part of the off-site day. Mark your two focus blocks and any request you accept or move.

Rules: the working day is 09:00 to 17:30. You need two focus blocks of at least 90 minutes with no meeting inside, both finished by Thursday 17:30. Friday morning is for final checks before the report is due at 12:00.

Time	Mon 9 Nov	Tue 10 Nov	Wed 11 Nov	Thu 12 Nov	Fri 13 Nov
09:00	Team check-in	Team check-in	Team check-in	Team check-in	Team check-in
09:30					
10:00	Training you deliver		Department meeting	Off-site training day	
10:30	cont.		cont.	cont.	
11:00	cont.	Budget review		cont.	
11:30	cont.	cont.		cont.	
12:00				cont.	Report due at 12:00
12:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	cont.	Lunch
13:00	Project meeting	Interview panel		cont.	
13:30	cont.	cont.		cont.	
14:00		cont.		cont.	Team retrospective
14:30	One-to-one	cont.		cont.	cont.
15:00	cont.			cont.	
15:30			Client call	cont.	
16:00	Supplier call	Team workshop	cont.		
16:30	cont.	cont.			
17:00		cont.			

Exercise 3: requests and response sheet

Six fictional requests arrived this morning. One sheet per group. Answer each one: Accept, Move (propose a new time), Decline (offer an alternative) or Send someone. Write the one line you would send. Then write your two focus blocks and check them against the rules.

Card	The request	Accept, Move, Decline or Send someone	New time, and the one line I would send
1	A trainer in your team, Mon 15:30–16:00: A quick sync on the induction course. “Fifteen minutes would do. I need your answer before Wednesday.”		
2	Your manager, Wed 13:30–14:30: Quarterly figures run-through. “I need you for this. The finance team joins too, so the time cannot move.”		
3	A team lead in another team, Wed 11:00 –12:00: Planning chat. “Any time this week is fine. Thirty minutes would probably do.”		
4	A software supplier, Tue 09:30–10:30: Demo of a new booking tool. “We are recording the demo, and we run it again next month.”		
5	The operations team, Tue 15:00–16:00: Process review. “We need one person from your team. It does not have to be you.”		
6	A colleague, Thu 16:00–17:00: Farewell gathering for a long-serving colleague. “It would be lovely to see you there.”		

Focus block 1: day, start and end. Is it 90 minutes or more, with no meeting inside?

_____

Focus block 2: day, start and end. Are both finished by Thursday 17:30?

_____

One-week experiment card

Choose one experiment, or write your own, small enough to do on a busy day: 1 Read for the date. 2 Estimate first. 3 One protected block. 4 Counter-offer. 5 Sort at fixed times. 6 Tomorrow's three. Fill in the tally each day for five working days. Keep the card; nobody collects it.

My experiment: _____ Start date (a Monday): _____ Number I count: _____

Day	Did it (Yes or No)	Number counted	A note: what helped, or what got in the way
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

After five days: days done (of 5), and the total of the number I counted

_____

_____

What I noticed that I did not expect

_____

_____

Carry on, change or drop it? If I change it, the new version

_____

_____

Filled example: inbox answers

A fictional participant's answers, checked against the key. Matches the key or an also-workable choice: 9 of 12. Hidden deadlines found: 4 of 6. Morning items put in A: 2 of 3. Urgent-looking items put in A: 2 of 3. This person sorted by the subject lines first and missed the 12:00 payment run in message 2.

#	Subject	Choice	Deadline written	Key	Matches	Hidden deadline found
1	Fire alarm test on Thursday	D	–	D	Yes	–
2	Quick question about the venue invoice	B	–	A	No	No
3	URGENT: ideas for next year	A	20 Nov	B	No	–
4	Laptop	A	Tue 09:00	A or C	Yes	Yes
5	Last call: send your team story	D	27 Nov	D or B	Yes	–
6	Contract for January	B	Wed 4 Nov	B	Yes	Yes
7	Can you join our workshop?	C	–	D or C	Yes	–
8	Catch-up	B	–	B	Yes	No
9	Action required: your password expires	A	–	D or B	No	–
10	Thank you	D	–	C or D	Yes	–
11	Booking 4471 provisional	A	12:00 today	A	Yes	Yes
12	Rota for December	B	Fri 6 Nov	B	Yes	Yes

Filled example: estimate record

The same fictional participant's record from the timed round. Estimated 285 seconds in all; the timer read 365 seconds at the end. Actual ÷ estimate: 1.28. Three of the four tasks took longer than the estimate; the reply took a little less.

Task	Estimate (s)	Timer at finish	Actual (s)	Actual ÷ estimate	Longer than estimate	Answer check
1. Add up	90	2:10	130	1.44	Yes	210.00: correct
2. Find the clashes	60	3:25	75	1.25	Yes	3 of 3 found
3. Proof-read	45	4:40	75	1.67	Yes	4 of 5 found
4. Write a reply	90	6:05	85	0.94	No	Done

Filled example: experiment card

A fictional coordinator chose experiment 2, “Estimate first”, for the week starting Monday 16 November. Done on 4 of 5 days, 11 tasks estimated. Estimated 305 minutes, actual 350 minutes. Actual ÷ estimate: 1.15. At the end of the week they chose to carry on, and to add ten minutes to any estimate for writing.

Day	Did it	Tasks	Estimated (min)	Actual (min)	Difference	Note
Mon 16 Nov	Yes	3	95	120	25	The report section took 50 minutes, not 30.
Tue 17 Nov	Yes	3	60	70	10	
Wed 18 Nov	Yes	3	80	75	-5	Two short tasks were quicker than I thought.
Thu 19 Nov	No					Away at a course all day.
Fri 20 Nov	Yes	2	70	85	15	Interrupted twice by calls.

Facilitator run of show

1 Open and set the ground rules | 5 minutes

Two minutes: say what the session is. Say: “We will play three short paper exercises. Each one practises one habit: finding the real deadline, estimating how long things take, and keeping time free for focused work. Everything you will see is invented. Nobody needs to show their own calendar or inbox.” Three minutes: say what it is not. Say: “This is not a promise that you will get more done. If the real problem is too much work, that is a conversation about workload with your manager, and no exercise fixes it.” Agree that people can pass, write instead of speaking, and work at their own pace in the timed round.

2 Exercise 1: inbox sort with hidden deadlines | 15 minutes

Two minutes: hand out the inbox sheet. Say: “It is Monday 2 November, 09:00. You are the coordinator of a fictional training team. You are at your desk until 12:00; then you travel to an event and read nothing until Tuesday 09:00. Put each message in A, B, C or D, and write any deadline you find.” Six minutes: everyone sorts alone, in silence. Four minutes: pairs compare and agree on any two messages where they differ. Three minutes: read out the key, one line per message, starting with messages 2, 4 and 11. Ask people to count their matches, hidden deadlines found and urgent-looking messages they put in A. Say: “The count is for you. It shows where your eye goes first, not how good you are at your job.”

3 Exercise 2: estimate, then check | 12 minutes

Two minutes: hand out the four tasks and the record sheet. Say: “Before you start, write how many seconds you think each task will take you. Nobody else will see your estimates.” Six minutes: start the count-up timer and say “Go.” People do the four tasks in order and write the timer reading each time they finish one. At 6:00 say “Stop.” Anyone not finished writes “not finished”. Four minutes: read the key for tasks 1 to 3, then ask people to work out the actual seconds for each task (this timer reading minus the last one) and divide by the estimate. Ask for a show of hands, or a number in the chat: “Who had at least one task that took longer than the estimate?”

4 Exercise 3: calendar defence | 15 minutes

Two minutes: hand out the week of 9 November and the requests and response sheet. Say: “You lead a fictional team. A report is due on Friday at 12:00 and you need two blocks of at least 90 minutes, with no meeting inside, both finished by Thursday 17:30. Six meeting requests have just arrived. Answer each one: accept, move, decline or send someone. Then mark your two blocks.” Nine minutes: groups of two or three work on one shared response sheet and write the one-line reply they would send for each card. Four minutes: read the key. Show that there are only three possible 90-minute stretches before Friday, and that any two of them work. Ask one group to read out the reply they wrote for card 3 or card 4.

5 Debrief across the three exercises | 7 minutes

Ask the four debrief questions, one at a time. Give 30 seconds of silent writing before each, then take two or three answers aloud or in the chat. Collect useful phrases, such as a good reply to a meeting request, on a shared list. Close the debrief with: “Which of the three habits would change most in your own week if you practised it for five days?”

6 Choose a one-week experiment and close | 6 minutes

Four minutes of private writing on the experiment card. Each person chooses one of the six experiments, or writes their own, and fills in the start date, what they will do each day and the number they will count. Say: “Pick the smallest version you will really do. Five days is enough to notice something.” Two minutes: each person says or types the name of their experiment, or passes.

Reference tables

Answer key: inbox sort

For the facilitator. Read it aloud one line at a time, starting with messages 2, 4 and 11. The reference is one sensible sort, not the only one; “also workable” is the other choice a good reason supports. Reference sort: three in A, four in B, one in C and four in D. Six deadlines this week appear only in the message body; three urgent-looking subjects can wait.

#	Key	Also workable	Deadline in the message	Looks urgent	Why
1	D	–	None	No	Information only. Note it, or let it go.
2	A	–	Today 12:00 (hidden)	No	A one-minute task with a real cost if it misses 12:00. The subject sounds casual.
3	B	–	Fri 20 Nov	Yes	The subject says urgent, but the date is more than two weeks away. Book an hour this week.
4	A	C	Tomorrow 09:00 (hidden)	No	You are away from 12:00, so the ticket has to go in this morning. Asking another coordinator to raise it also works, if you ask before 12:00.
5	D	B	Fri 27 Nov	Yes	Optional and weeks away. Let it go, or book a time if your team has a story.
6	B	–	Wed 4 Nov (hidden)	No	It needs reading and a signature, not a reply this morning. Book Tuesday morning, before the Wednesday release.
7	D	C	None	No	A one-line reply: offer your onboarding notes, or suggest a colleague (C).

#	Key	Also workable	Deadline in the message	Looks urgent	Why
8	B	–	Tue 3 Nov 17:00 (hidden)	No	The subject gives no date. The board pack closes on Tuesday, so book Tuesday morning.
9	D	B	Mon 16 Nov	Yes	Looks urgent, but there are 14 days. Do it when you next have two minutes.
10	C	D	None	No	Ask the trainer whether a recording exists, or reply in one line if you already know.
11	A	–	Today 12:00 (hidden)	No	An automatic message with a deadline today. Missing it loses the room.
12	B	–	Fri 6 Nov (hidden)	No	Polite and quiet, with a real date. Book half an hour before Friday.

Answer key: the four tasks

For the facilitator. Read out tasks 1 to 3 after the six-minute round. Task 4 has no key.

Task	Answer	How to check
1. Add up	210.00	Check each line of four, then add the three line totals: 79.40 + 73.15 + 57.45 = 210.00.
2. Find the clashes	1 and 8, 2 and 9, 3 and 6	Three clashes. 4 and 2, 9 and 7, 7 and 5, 5 and 1, 8 and 10, and 10 and 3 only touch, so they are not clashes.
3. Proof-read	Five mistakes	“finish” should be “finishes”; “16:30” should be “16:00”, as in the first sentence; 20 November 2026 is a Friday, not a Thursday; “Novmber” should be “November”; “atend” should be “attend”.
4. Write a reply	No key	Finished when you are satisfied with it. Three sentences: a no, one reason, an offer.

Answer key: calendar defence

For the facilitator. Once card 2 is accepted, only three free stretches of 90 minutes or more remain before Friday, and any two of them meet the rules. With the reference responses, Tuesday 09:30–11:00 and Wednesday 11:00–12:30 are free for the two focus blocks. Thursday 16:00–17:30 is the third stretch, free only if card 6 is declined. Monday has no free stretch over 30 minutes, and Wednesday 13:00–15:30 is broken by card 2.

Card	Reference response	New time	Why	Also workable
1	Accept	–	It fits a 30-minute gap that could never hold a focus block.	Accept and shorten it to 15 minutes.
2	Accept	–	Your manager and the finance team; the card says the time cannot move. This uses up Wednesday afternoon.	None.
3	Move	Wed 16:30–17:00	They said any time and 30 minutes. Moving it frees Wednesday 11:00–12:30.	Any other 30-minute gap: Mon 17:00, Tue 12:00 or Tue 15:00 if card 5 goes to someone else.

Card	Reference response	New time	Why	Also workable
4	Decline	–	The demo is recorded and repeated. Declining frees Tuesday 09:30–11:00.	Ask for the recording, or accept the repeat next month.
5	Send someone	–	Any member of your team can go. Brief them in two lines.	Accept if nobody else can go; it does not block a focus slot.
6	Accept	–	Your choice. With Tuesday and Wednesday protected, you can go.	Decline, and use Thursday 16:00–17:30 as a focus block instead of Tuesday or Wednesday.

Six one-week experiments

Each person picks one for five working days, or writes their own. Small and countable beats ambitious.

Experiment	What you do each day	What you count
1. Read for the date	Before you sort new messages, read each body for a date or a time, and write any deadline in your task list.	Deadlines you found in a message body
2. Estimate first	Write an estimate in minutes before three tasks a day. Note the actual minutes when you finish.	Estimated and actual minutes
3. One protected block	Book one 90-minute block on three days. Note whether it held and what interrupted it.	Planned and kept minutes
4. Counter-offer	Answer at least one meeting request a day with a shorter or later time, or a written alternative, where that would help.	Requests answered with an offer
5. Sort at fixed times	Sort your inbox at two set times a day instead of each time a message arrives. Note the times you kept.	Sorts done at the set time
6. Tomorrow’s three	At the end of each day, write tomorrow’s three must-dos, each with its deadline.	Days you wrote the three

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- In the inbox, which deadline did you find only by reading the whole message, and what in the subject line pulled your attention elsewhere?
- How far apart were your estimates and the timer, and which kind of task did you misjudge most: adding up, searching, checking or writing?
- In calendar defence, which request was hardest to answer, and what exact words would you send?
- Which of the three habits would change most in your own week, and what number would show you that it happened?

Adapt the session

- For 4 to 6 people, work as one group for the pair and group parts: compare the inbox sorts together, and fill in one response sheet for calendar defence. Keep the individual parts (the sort and the timed round) individual.
- For a 40-minute version, run the opening (4 minutes), the inbox sort (12: brief 2, sort 5, key 5, with no pair comparison), calendar defence (14: brief 2, groups 8, key 4), a short debrief (4) and the experiment card (6). Send the four timed tasks as an optional follow-up.
- Online, share each page on screen and send the PDF pages beforehand. Use a count-up timer in a shared window for exercise 2, breakout rooms of two or three for exercise 3, and the chat for answers. Cameras are optional; the response sheet can be a shared document.
- For people who prefer not to speak, or who write slowly: every answer can be written or typed in the editable Word file, a partner can write for someone, and anyone can pass. In the timed round, a task that is not finished at 6:00 is simply marked “not finished”; the round compares each person with their own estimate only.
- To write your own inbox for a specific team, keep every message fictional, write twelve of them, hide six deadlines in the body only, give three a subject that looks urgent but can wait, and write the key with reasons before the session. Do not use real messages or real colleagues’ names.

After the session

Within one working day, send the six one-week experiments and a copy of the experiment card. Suggest that people start on the next Monday and fill in the tally each day. After the week, spend five minutes at the next team meeting or session asking two questions: “What did you notice?” and “Will you carry on, change or drop it?” Answers are optional and nobody hands in a card. Do not use the experiment cards or the exercise counts to judge performance; they are notes for the person who wrote them. If several people say the real issue is the amount of work, raise workload with the people who can change it.

Questions people ask

What are good time management games and activities for work?

Short exercises that make people use a skill and then check the result work best with adults. This kit has three: an inbox sort where six deadlines are hidden in the message bodies, an estimate-then-check round where people time four small tasks against their own guesses, and a calendar defence puzzle where two 90-minute focus blocks must survive six meeting requests. Each one has a fictional printable sheet and an answer key.

Is there one right answer to the inbox sort and the calendar puzzle?

No single right answer, but there are checkable facts. The inbox key gives a reference sort with reasons and an “also workable” choice, and the deadlines in the messages are fixed. The calendar puzzle has exactly three free stretches of 90 minutes before Friday once the manager’s meeting is accepted, and any two of them meet the rules. The discussion of reasons matters more than the count.

Does this kit use the urgent and important matrix?

Not directly. A widely used approach sorts tasks on two questions, how urgent and how important they are. The inbox sort here asks a more practical question first: when is the real deadline, and where is it written? Several messages that look urgent can wait, and several quiet ones cannot. To rank a team’s list of work by impact and effort, use the prioritization matrix kit instead.

How is this different from the goal setting worksheet?

The goal setting worksheet helps one person plan a single work goal over weeks, with a baseline, a finish line and review dates. This kit is a group session about the day-to-day: reading for deadlines, estimating time and protecting focus time, ending in a five-day experiment rather than a goal. They work well together: a goal from the worksheet often needs the protected blocks practised here.

Will this make my team more productive?

This kit makes no such promise and has not been independently evaluated. It gives people a structured way to notice how they sort, estimate and protect time, and to try one small change for a week. If people are overloaded, the useful next step is a workload conversation with someone who can change it, not another exercise.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the fictional inbox with space for answers, the four timed tasks with the record sheet, the week of 9 November, the six requests with a response sheet, the one-week experiment card, three answer keys, three filled examples and the 60-minute facilitator plan. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, an Excel workbook with the session plan, an inbox checker, an estimate record that calculates the actual times and ratios, a calendar check for focus blocks and a one-week experiment log, and a CSV of the session plan.

Use and sharing

Free to use and adapt in your own training sessions, including paid client work. Do not resell or redistribute the unmodified download as a standalone product. Share the resource page instead.