



The Problems With Large Assignments: How to Allow for the “Sanity Zone”

Major assignments that span several weeks may pose a problem, but breaking them down into steps makes estimation easier. An essay, for example, could break down like this:

- Choose preliminary topic and do bibliographic search to make sure enough information is available to do the paper.
- Have topic approved by instructor.
- Do research.
- Organize and categorize research material and create an outline.
- Write rough copy. Get input from faculty, TA, writing services.
- Revise rough copy.
- Do references and footnotes.
- Print final copy.

Estimate how long each step will take and total the estimations. Then add a safety margin or “**sanity zone**” to allow for unexpected things to happen. This sanity zone will depend on your comfort and understanding of the subject; 50% of the initial estimate is a good rule if you are not familiar with the subject.

Next, divide the total (estimation + sanity zone) by the number of weeks you have to do the project. For example:

Estimated time for assignment: 10 hours + 5 hours (50%= sanity zone) = 15 hours

15 hours ÷ 3 weeks = 5 hours/week

You would then put approximately five hours for this assignment on your task list each week for the next three weeks.

What big project do you have coming up?

How can you use this technique to help accomplish the assignment?

How many hours do you need to spend on it?

When should you start?