SKILL BUILDING NO. 8
Get Organized

Plan for the long term. When you need to tackle a large project or have a big goal you want to accomplish, it can be helpful to understand the difference between a macro-view and a micro-view of the tasks involved. What must get done now, and what can wait? Understanding macro and micro can help us prioritize when there's too much to be done at one time.

Macro-level thinking is long-term and big goal-focused: completing a year of school, graduating, and qualifying to compete at a higher level. These things take focus on the long-term.

Micro-level thinking is the small steps that build a foundation towards the bigger goal. These close-up, detailed views are important because they help you make lists, check off to-do's, and make slow, steady progress.

When planning your long-term project, use these views to set milestones and keep yourself on track. Start with the macro view. **Use the 4-month planner in the back.**

1. Find today's date and mark it as your **starting point**.

2. Mark the **date your project is due** or when you want to accomplish your goal. Check how much time is between today and your deadline. This timeframe is what you have to work within.

3. **Add milestones** to the calendar between these two dates. Determining your milestones can be the hardest part of this process, so we want to introduce two strategies that can be helpful. (see next column)

A. **Work backward** — What is the last thing you need to do before your project is finished? (ex: term paper — editing and formatting, science project — presentation of findings.) How much time do you need to do it? Mark off that much time before your due date as your last milestone. Keep working backward to plan out the entire project. (ex: term paper — write the conclusion, science project — organize and evaluate the data collected).

B. **Put big rocks in first** — with this strategy, you will identify your biggest challenges in the project. What are you most concerned about? What part makes you the most unsure? Start with those items and give yourself as much time as possible for their milestones. Then move on to the next biggest challenge, and finish with the easy things.

Small things first

Big rocks first

4. If your milestones are too cramped or don't all fit, that is a sign you need to adjust. First, **change the things you can control**. What can you condense? What can you get help with? If you can't find something you can adapt, **communicate to others expecting this from you**. Who do you need to speak to now to avoid a missed deadline later? Can any dates be flexed?

5. With your milestones set, **start working on a list of things you must do for the first milestone**. This list is your micro view.

Add this list to your planner on your weekly sheets between now and that first milestone date. When you complete the first milestone, make a micro list for the second one and repeat until the project is finished!