

# The Tournament of Priorities: An exercise for choosing next steps

**Sometimes, it's hard to know what to do *right now*.**

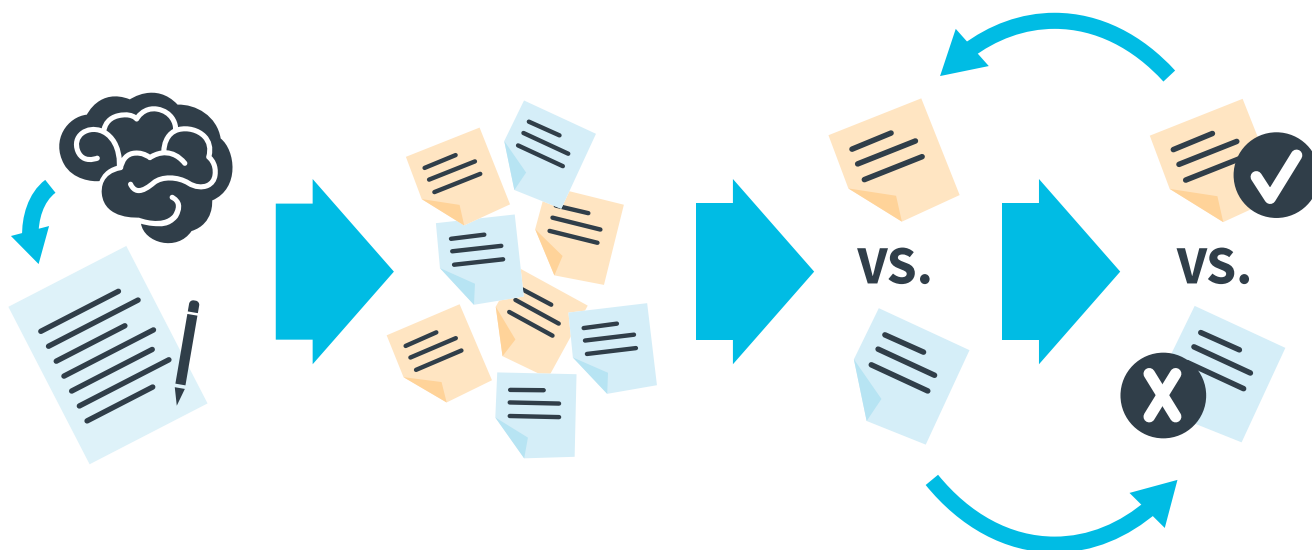
This is especially true when you're juggling many different responsibilities, aspirations, and goals: Every possible option can seem interesting or important.

**How do you know what to choose?**

When all the possible activities and tasks are piled up together in a giant mess, it can seem impossible to untangle. However, when compared directly, two by two, it's easier to parse out.

So we have a trick we like to use: **Line up your possible tasks and make them go to battle.**

If you've ever competed (okay, or bet money) in a sport with brackets, you'll get this idea. We call it **The Tournament of Priorities.**



## How to do the Tournament of Priorities

You can do this with:

- a piece of paper
- sticky notes
- a whiteboard or blackboard

### 1. Begin with a brain dump.

*What COULD you do?* Capture every possible task. Write until you're empty.

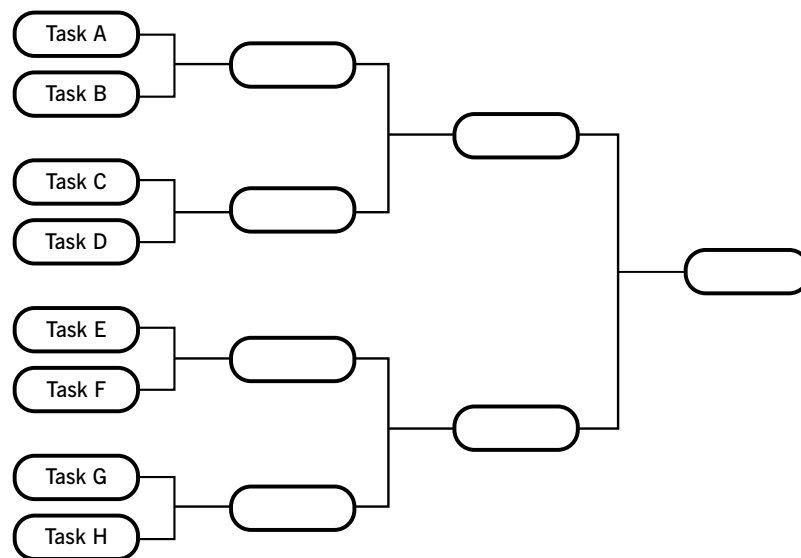
### 2. Separate out each thing you wrote down.

If you're using paper, you can cut the tasks out with scissors so you have individual slips of paper. If you're using sticky notes, you can write one task per note.

### 3. Pair up tasks into brackets.

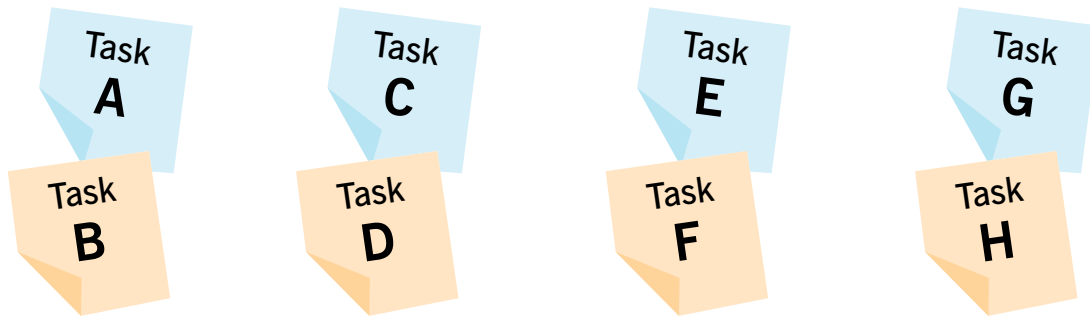
It doesn't matter which ones you pair up. Just grab them two by two and put pairs together.

If you're using paper or a whiteboard, it should look something like this:



The Tournament of Priorities: A tool for choosing next actions (cont'd)

If you're using sticky notes, you can put pairs of notes together, like this:



#### 4. Look at each pair and decide which thing should “win” right now.

The “winner” is the potential task that:

- you are MORE ready, willing and able to do right now; and/or
- is the most high-impact action; and/or
- helps get rid of the most irritating or crucial block.

For example:

**Action A:** Go shopping.

**Action B:** Make a healthy lunch.

You might decide that Action A wins out because your cupboard and fridge are empty.

Or you might decide that Action B wins out because you have a long meeting after lunch so you need to keep your energy up.

It doesn't matter, just pick one winner.

**Sometimes, the winner will be obvious. Other times, it won't.**

**If you're stuck, try rearranging a few pairs.**

All you're trying to do is get some initial task eliminations right now.

So knock out the losers and the weak fighters right away.

Remember, you're not comparing all the tasks. Just two at a time.

Task A versus Task B.

Task C versus Task D.

Task E versus Task F.

Task A doesn't go up against Task C or D just yet.

**5. For each “winner,” jot down a note about why you chose it.**

**Be curious about your reasons here. How did you decide which task to pick?**

This part isn't important for now, but will help you build a “decision database” for the future.

**6. Set aside your “losers” from Round 1.**

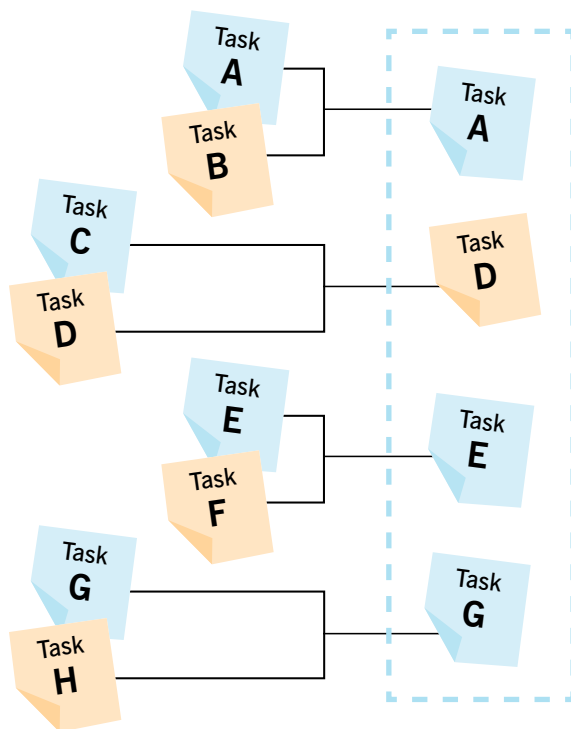
**These are the tasks that didn't make the cut.**

Don't throw them out. They aren't important right now, but they could be later on.

**7. Pair up your “winners” from Round 1.**

**Round 2 is the same idea, but now it's winners vs. winners.**

Let's say that in the last round, you chose Task A and Task D. Now pair them up.



Repeat the “fight”.

If Task A “fights” Task D, which one wins?

**8. Choose your winners from this round, and assess your reasons again.**

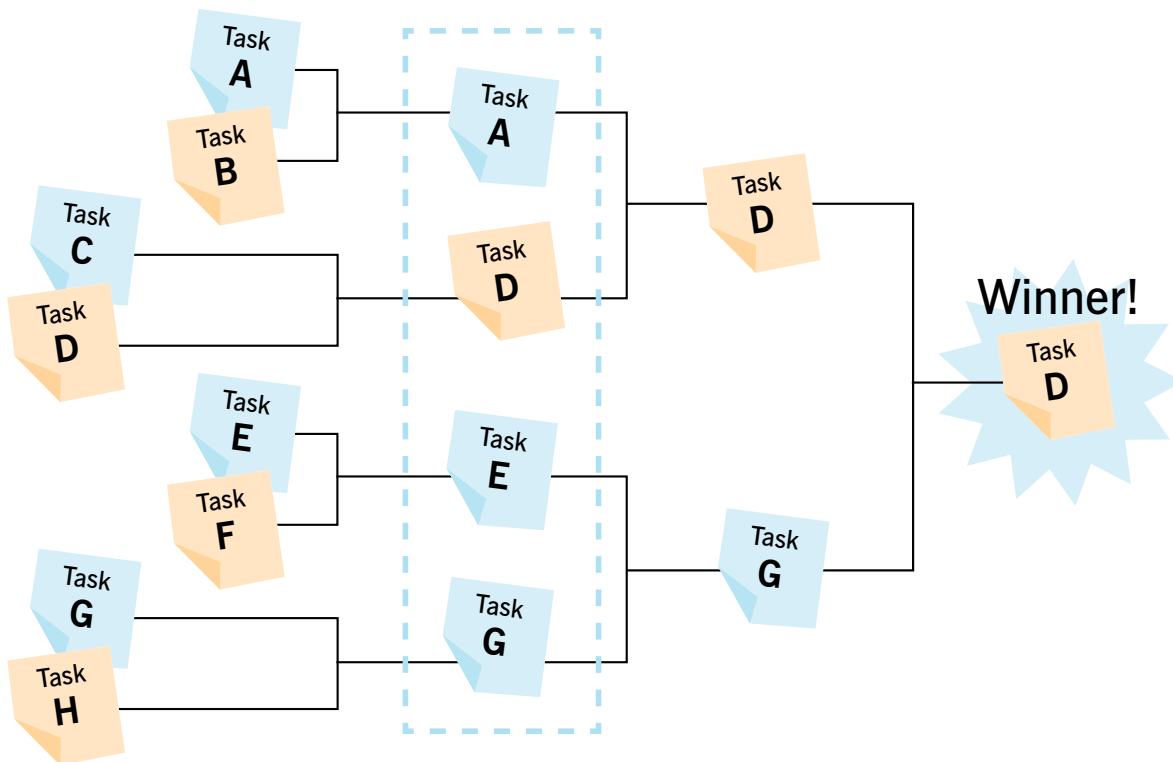
**Jot down a few more notes about why each task deserved to win.**

If you have lots of winners from Round 2, pair them up again.

**9. Repeat the process with the winners from each bracket, over and over, until you've narrowed things down to the last 2.**

**Pick a winner, and there's your next activity or task.**

Remember, you don't have to throw out your losers. Just keep them in the "holding tank" as possible things to do in future.



### Putting it into practice

Try this method whenever you're feeling overwhelmed or stuck, and repeat it as many times per day or week as necessary to move forward.

Over time, it will get much easier to determine your next actions, or plan your day out without the need for a Tournament of Priorities, because what truly serves your needs and goals will be more clear.