

# Soft and Hard Lines

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An important productivity principle is the difference between soft and hard deadlines and understanding this principle can help you avoid a lot of the cramming, a lot of the crunch that happens during exams or midterms that most students face.

Now, the key is that hard deadlines are the deadlines that are set exterior to you. So, if you have an assignment that's due on December 12<sup>th</sup>, then that is a hard deadline. If you go beyond that, then you'll suffer a penalty or your professor will fail you potentially. If you have an exam on April 24<sup>th</sup>, then April 24<sup>th</sup> is a hard deadline for studying up for that course. You can't go past it.

Now, a soft deadline is a deadline that you enforce on yourself. There are no actual consequences for going over this deadline, but you enforce the deadline yourself. So, if you decide that for this April 24<sup>th</sup> exam, that you want to have all of the first half of units studied for by April 12<sup>th</sup>, then that's a soft deadline that you've made. Obviously, you could go past that and there would be no actual consequences, or no immediate consequences, but if you enforce those soft deadline as if they were hard deadlines, so you really make yourself stick to those soft deadlines, and you get in the habit of thinking of your soft deadlines as hard deadlines, that'll help you move forward a lot more.

So, we all understand that if we plan ahead and spread out our schedule and make those soft deadlines not so that you're constantly overwhelmed and crunched in these specific few weeks where everybody's seems to assign the same assignments or have the same exams, then our life would be a lot less stressful. The difficulty is in figuring out how you can apply that.

So, how can you actually make it so your soft deadlines are following through with the same intensity that you have for hard deadlines? And, the only way you can do that through is habit. So, what I typically do is, I have my calendar set and I'll write down the deadlines for any assignments, but what I'll also do, is for my particular assignments, for my particular tasks, I will put in the calendar right alongside them, "My particular deadlines." for those certain set of tasks. So, if I have certain things that I want to accomplish, I will put those into the calendar and then I funnel those into the weekly-daily goal system.

Now, part of the beauty of having a weekly-daily goal system in a calendar like this, is that from a visual check, there is no difference between the soft deadlines and the hard deadlines. If I actually examined a task, I could say, "Oh, okay. I can go past that on this." But, because it's in my weekly-daily goal system, because it is in my calendar in the same priority as the hard deadline, then I get used to thinking that this is when it needs to be done by. And, actually, if you have a lot of tasks and you put them in this system in this way, then you can actually catch yourself thinking that, "Oh, I really have to have this done." because your soft deadline feels like a hard deadline.

Now, the real advantage of this, because you might be saying to yourself, “Well, if I’m going to be stressing out over the soft deadlines, why don’t I just stress over the hard deadlines?” Now, the real advantage of this is because you get to choose your soft deadlines, you get a lot more flexibility with your schedule. So, normally, exams happen during Mid-Term time and Final Exam time and you’ll get lots of assignments, lots of work during very specific periods, and that results in a lot of stress. However, when you’re designing your schedule, you can design it so that you do a lot of work ahead of time.

Now, if the schedule is in the same system that you put the hard deadlines in, you’ll focus on it with a similar intensity. Now, you might not focus on it with the similar intensity in the beginning, but as you get used to it, as you get used to the habit of doing things on the soft deadlines, then it will become psychologically reinforced that you really need to get it done by this particular date.

So, try that for yourself. Try creating soft deadlines for all of the tasks so you can spread out the work, so it doesn’t crunch in at Mid-Term and Exam period, and then, put it in the same system that you record all of your actual deadlines, so that when you funnel it into, let’s say, a weekly-daily goal system, they’re indistinguishable and you don’t think to yourself, “Oh, well, I don’t really have to do this for an extra three weeks.” Because it’s in your system, you have to do it now and that spreads out the work, so you don’t ever have these crunches and these periods of extreme burnout and stress, because you didn’t plan ahead.