



# Establishing Priorities: Priority Matrix Guide

When trying to help your over-scheduled child reduce the amount of activities in which she is involved, it is important to begin by understanding that she's not just *saying* "...but mom, they're ALL important!" She really believes that to be true. To many students, all activities and commitments are equally important. In other cases, parents and kids can disagree about what is essential or nonessential. From the parent's perspective, the college-essay writing workshop may be *slightly more* important than the robotics club that is just for fun. Yet from a student's perspective, the two activities are of completely equal importance. The best way to win *this* battle is with empirical data, as opposed to opinion.

## Using Data to Establish Priorities

One way to use data in order to set (and mutually agree on) priorities is to use a tool called **The Priority Matrix**. This tool allows students to make decisions based on facts and not emotions or feelings associated with the various activities in which they are involved. The goal is to make an objective assessment of what matters most.

### How to create a Priority Matrix:

What to do	What it looks like (an example)																																																	
1) Make a master list of all activities in which your child is involved. Include any and all activities that take up your child's time, including homework and any part-time jobs or volunteer work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jazz</li> <li>● Homework</li> <li>● Chorus</li> <li>● Cello</li> <li>● Robotics</li> <li>● Soccer</li> </ul>																																																	
2) Create a table with 1 more row and column than the number of items on your list. So, if you have 6 items on your list, you would need to create a table with 7 rows and columns. Enter each commitment (one per row and one per column) into the row and column headings. <b>Important: keep the same order top to bottom and left to right.</b>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Jazz</th> <th>Homework</th> <th>Chorus</th> <th>Cello</th> <th>Robotics</th> <th>Soccer</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <th>Jazz</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <th>Homework</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <th>Chorus</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <th>Cello</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <th>Robotics</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <th>Soccer</th> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Jazz	Homework	Chorus	Cello	Robotics	Soccer	Jazz							Homework							Chorus							Cello							Robotics							Soccer						
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3) Place an 'x' at every intersection where two of the same commitments meet. So, in the box where "homework" meets "homework", place an X.

You'll notice the Xs slant down diagonally on the chart.



	Jazz	Homework	Chorus	Cello	Robotics	Soccer
Jazz	x					
Homework		x				
Chorus			x			
Cello				x		
Robotics					x	
Soccer						x

4) Complete the chart by marking the "winning" activity in each box. In the example here, if you look down the second column, you'll see that when comparing Jazz to Homework, Homework wins, but when comparing Jazz to Chorus, Jazz wins.

Use questions to help decide:

- Which is more important to you?
- Which is more likely to have an impact on your future?
- Which brings you more joy?

No ties allowed!

	Jazz	Homework	Chorus	Cello	Robotics	Soccer
Jazz	x	HW	Jazz	Jazz	Jazz	Soccer
Homework	HW	x	HW	HW	HW	HW
Chorus	Jazz	HW	x	Chorus	Chorus	Soccer
Cello	Jazz	HW	Chorus	x	Robotics	Soccer
Robotics	Jazz	HW	Chorus	Robotics	x	Soccer
Soccer	Jazz	HW	Chorus	Soccer	Soccer	x

5) Count up the number of times each activity or commitment appears on the entire chart and place that number in parentheses next to its corresponding title in each row.

	Jazz	Homework
Jazz (7)	x	HW
Homework (10)	HW	x
Chorus (5)	Jazz	HW
Cello (0)	Jazz	HW
Robotics (2)	Jazz	HW
Soccer (6)	Jazz	HW

6) Now list the commitments in order of frequency of appearance.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Homework (10)</li> <li>2) Jazz (7)</li> <li>3) Soccer (6)</li> <li>4) Chorus (5)</li> <li>5) Robotics (2)</li> <li>6) Cello (0)</li> </ol>

## Debriefing the Matrix

Now that you have some data to work with, talk with your child about what you both see. Some guiding questions may include, but are not limited to:

- Does how you are currently using your time match up with what you see here?
- What does this mean about how you might spend your time differently?
- What changes might this mean for your daily or weekly schedule?

Try to end the discussion with some commitments to change. For example, this student may decide to devote some extra time to his or her homework routine by beginning a half hour or so earlier, and decide to pick up cello (which was at zero!) next year. While playing the instrument may be a very worthy use of time indeed, this year just may not be the right year to start that endeavor given the other commitments at hand.

The saying “there just aren’t enough hours in the day” exists for a reason. As adults, it can be a challenge to “trim the fat” from one’s schedule. For teens, this exercise could go a long way in helping them to gain some perspective in order to make an otherwise quite difficult decision!