By Bright Quill Team



Learning how to make a Gantt chart for a project is one of the fastest ways to look professional in front of a sponsor, a lecturer or a team. It's a simple bar chart. Every task becomes a horizontal bar on a timeline, so you can see what starts when, which tasks run at the same time and what depends on what. The chart takes a flat task list and turns it into a picture of the whole plan that anyone can read in under a minute. In this guide you'll build one from scratch, with a worked example, a six step process, a quick lesson on reading critical tasks, and the mistakes beginners should avoid. That's the whole point.

What a Gantt Chart Is and How It Works

A Gantt chart has a simple layout. Down the left side, each row is one task. Across the top is the calendar in days, weeks or months. Each bar starts at the task start date and ends at the task end date, so bar length shows duration. Bars in the same time window run in parallel. Bars that follow one another run in sequence. A diamond marks a milestone, a key event with zero duration like client sign off or launch day. An arrow between bars marks a dependency: one task can't start until another finishes. It's the default picture of a project schedule in most workplaces and most project management courses.

What You Need Before You Draw a Single Bar

Beginners open a charting tool first and start drawing. That's backwards. A Gantt chart is only as good as the information behind it, so prepare four inputs first. First, the task list: every piece of work, ideally taken from a work breakdown structure you've already built. Second, durations: a realistic estimate for each task in days, agreed with the person doing the work. Third, dependencies: for each task, what must finish before it can start. Fourth, milestones and the fixed end date. Check the list against the project scope once more. A

missing task gives everyone false confidence. With these inputs ready, you'll finish your coursework schedule far faster. Our business plans service sees the same pattern on client projects.

Worked Example: A Gantt Chart for a Website Project

Here's a complete example. A fictional website project for the Greenleaf Bookshop, running six weeks from 5 January to 13 February. Week 1: homepage design and product page design, five days each, running in parallel. Week 2: mobile layout design, five days, depending on the homepage design. Milestone A: design sign off at the end of week 2. Weeks 3 and 4: homepage build, shopping cart build and product descriptions, ten days each, with both builds depending on milestone A. Week 5: testing, five days, depending on all three. Milestone B: launch day at the end of week 6. You'll see three things jump out: weeks 3 and 4 are the busiest, testing is the gate to launch, and the design tasks can't slip once sign off is fixed.

How to Make a Gantt Chart for a Project in Six Steps

Step 1: list the tasks. Write every task with an action or deliverable name and a duration in days. Keep tasks between one and ten days of work. Anything bigger gets split. Step 2: order and link them. For each task, name what must finish before it starts. These links are the backbone of the chart. Step 3: choose the timeline scale. Daily columns suit short projects. Weekly columns suit most student and small business projects. Monthly columns suit multi month projects. Step 4: draw the bars. Place each bar at its start date with its full duration, working through the dependencies in order. Any tool works here: a spreadsheet, a free charting app, or a hand drawn grid for coursework drafts. Step 5: add milestones as diamonds at their fixed dates. Step 6: review the chart with the team. Ask each person whether their bars start on the right day and whether anything's missing. A chart the team has reviewed and agreed beats one built alone. It's worth the extra hour. Our business plans team reviews every schedule with the project team before delivery.

Read Your Gantt Chart Like a Professional: Critical Path and Float

Drawing the chart is half the skill. Reading it is the other half. Find the longest chain of dependent tasks from start to finish. That chain is the critical path, and it sets the earliest possible end date. If any task on it slips by two days, the whole project slips by two days. Tasks off the critical path have float, also called slack. It's the time they can slip before they become critical. In the example above, the design tasks and the homepage build sit on the critical path, while the product descriptions have float. Smart managers protect the critical path and use float as the shock absorber. They're different jobs. You can't do both with the same task. When a lecturer asks which tasks matter most, point to the critical path, not to the busiest week.

Five Gantt Chart Mistakes Beginners Make

Here's where beginners go wrong. First, vague tasks. Plan website isn't a task. Design homepage in five days is. Second, missing dependencies. If testing starts the same day the build starts, the chart lies. Third, confusing the Gantt chart with the work breakdown structure. The WBS lists what the project produces. The Gantt chart shows when it happens. Fourth, never updating the chart. A plan drawn in January and untouched afterwards is decoration, not management. Update it weekly with actual progress. Fifth, don't drown the chart in detail. A chart with two hundred tiny rows is unreadable. Group small items and keep the chart at the level the reader needs.

A Gantt chart is a picture of your promise: this work, in this order, by these dates. Build the task list first, link the dependencies honestly, mark the milestones, and update the chart every week. If your project management assignment needs a schedule that survives a strict marker, we'll build it with you through the contact page .

Key visual, in brief:

Example timeline bars: Research, then Design, then Build, then Launch, each starting after the previous begins.