

## Diminishing the Unimportant

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by Jaime Richardson



This week I took a saw to my beautiful new writing desk.

I received it as a gift last year, and it's only flaw was that it stood three inches taller than it should have for me to use comfortably. Not wanting to develop carpal tunnel and break the rules of good ergonomics, I let the desk collect various sorts of this and that, but never used it for writing. I had planned to trim the legs off when I had a chance and my husband could help. But as I procrastinated, fear of cutting off too much began to nag at me. I had visions of cutting one of the legs too short, then having to cut them all to match, eventually ending up with four stumps holding up a board.

So there it stood, covered in textbooks and clutter for week after week.

Then, for some unknown reason, I had a stroke of wild determination. I marched downstairs, grabbed a ruler and a saw, measured the proper amount and began cutting. Within a quarter of an hour, the desk was cleared, sawed, sanded, and standing upright at the perfect height. What I thought was a huge project requiring two people ended up taking a mere fifteen minutes.

The desk experience reminded me of a concept I read about in *The 4-Hour Work Week* by Timothy Ferriss. In it, he explains Parkinson's Law, which states "a task will swell in (perceived) importance and complexity in relation to the time allotted to its completion" (Crown 2007). Because I had given myself unlimited time to fix the desk, it grew in my mind into a virtually insurmountable task.

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I have started applying this concept to other areas of my life. Take, for example, the laundry. I used to try and fold small piles of it daily. Though I didn't need much time for this task, it grew in importance because I had given it the high-and-mighty title of Daily Chore. All day, I would fret about folding it, and put it off until the next day when the pile became that much more frightening.

Now, using Parkinson's Law, I clean the clothes throughout the week, and when the pile becomes the size of a small mountain, I fold. I give myself one hour and no more (fast music helps). Now, my least favorite chore has become less daunting. It only crosses my mind during the hour I allot for it. I have made it less important by giving it less attention and less thought.

Now I have more time to do other things, like writing at my perfectly sized desk.

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**Jaime Richardson** - *As a mother of three, Jaime Richardson is always looking for new and beautiful ways to bring order to her life. Visit her blog at [sophistimom.com](http://sophistimom.com).*