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Using the NICE Method to Break Tasks Down

By **Ombuzz** on January 2, 2025

Feeling overwhelmed by your to-do list? You're not alone. Between work, family, and personal life, it's easy to feel like you're constantly spinning your wheels without making real progress. I realized that tackling one nagging task could actually help me make progress on another. To that end, I invested in Headway, an app that provides bite-sized summaries of books, hoping to replace mindless scrolling with meaningful learning. I was aiming to finally make a dent in the stack of books on my nightstand. Serendipitously, the first book summary the app suggested when I "rolled the dice" – Feel Good Productivity by Ali Abdaal – ended up providing a valuable framework (the NICE method) for tackling another big project: creating a Coursera course.

I wasn't familiar with Dr. Abdaal before this, but his approach to productivity, especially his NICE method, has really resonated with me. The method focuses on breaking down tasks into manageable, actionable steps. And since it's the New Year, I figured—what better time to tackle some big goals for 2025? Goals like finishing a Coursera course. Here's how I'm using NICE to simplify this (and other) big goals and how you can do the same:

NICE: A Framework for Breaking Down Big Projects

The NICE method stands for Near-term, Input-based, Controllable, and Energizing. Here's how I'm applying it to my own goals for the year and how you can use it for your own projects:

NEAR-TERM: FOCUS ON IMMEDIATE, ACTIONABLE STEPS

It's easy to get lost in the idea of a "big project" without knowing where to start. For my Coursera course, I've found that breaking it down into near-term tasks makes it feel far more manageable. Instead of thinking about the entire course from start to finish, I asked myself: What can I do in the next week or month to move this forward?

Examples of near-term tasks:

- Outline the course structure (modules, lessons, assessments).
- Decide on the tools and resources I need (recording software, slide decks, etc.).
- Set goals for this week, such as finishing the first module's content.
- Create a timeline with mini milestones, such as completing one module per week or drafting the course introduction by next Friday.

These steps allow me to focus on immediate action without feeling like I need to have everything figured out all at once. This is the power of the near-term: you're focusing on what you can do now so you can get started right away.

INPUT-BASED: FOCUS ON THE EFFORT YOU'RE PUTTING IN

Now that I have my near-term tasks in place, I can shift my focus to the input—not

the final product, but the work and effort I'm putting into building it. This shift is freeing because it removes the pressure of perfection and keeps me focused on the work itself.

Examples of input-based tasks:

- Writing the content for each module (I don't aim for perfection, just progress).
- Recording a few videos or audio segments to get the ball rolling.
- Researching supplemental resources to make my course richer.
- Designing course assessments or quizzes.

I know that this will all evolve, but by focusing on the effort I'm putting in now, I'm staying productive and learning as I go.

CONTROLLABLE: FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

When it comes to big projects, it's easy to get distracted by things you can't control. I can't predict how my course will be received or how many individuals will enroll, but I can focus on the quality of the content I create and how I approach the process.

Examples of controllable tasks:

- Ensuring that the course content aligns with the learning objectives.
- Recording or re-recording content to meet my standards.
- Creating clear and understandable assignments and quizzes.
- Getting feedback from colleagues or experts to improve the material.

These are the aspects I can control, and focusing on them helps me stay grounded. Instead of stressing about things outside of my control, I put my energy into creating something that I can be proud of.

ENERGIZING: STAY MOTIVATED WITH TASKS THAT EXCITE YOU

No matter how much I want to accomplish, there's no denying that some tasks are more exciting than others. And that's okay! For big projects like my Coursera course, I make sure to balance the more routine tasks (like editing or writing outlines) with energizing tasks that fuel my passion and keep me motivated.

Examples of energizing tasks:

- Designing visually appealing slides and course materials.
- Recording the introduction video, where I get to share my excitement about the course.
- Collaborating with others to brainstorm engaging ideas for interactive course components.
- Engaging with potential participants or getting feedback on what topics they'd love to discuss.

Balancing energizing tasks with the more routine ones helps maintain motivation and build momentum. I look forward to the fun aspects of creating the course, and that enthusiasm carries me through the less exciting parts.

Wrapping It Up: How You Can Use NICE to Tackle Your 2025 Goals

The NICE method is a practical, no-nonsense approach to getting big projects done. Whether it's completing a long-term project like a Coursera course, starting a

new initiative at work, or tackling a personal goal, breaking it down into near-term, input-based, controllable, and energizing tasks makes everything feel more achievable.

By focusing on what you can do now (near-term), putting in the necessary effort (input-based), concentrating on what's in your control (controllable), and staying motivated with what excites you (energizing), you'll not only achieve your goals but also enjoy the process.

So, as we move into 2025, I encourage you to think about the big projects or goals you've set for yourself. Break them down into small, actionable steps today. Taking these small steps now will set you up for success, and your future self will be grateful for the progress you've made.

What strategies do you use to simplify your big projects or goals? Share your favorite methods or tools in the comments—I'd love to learn from your experiences.

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