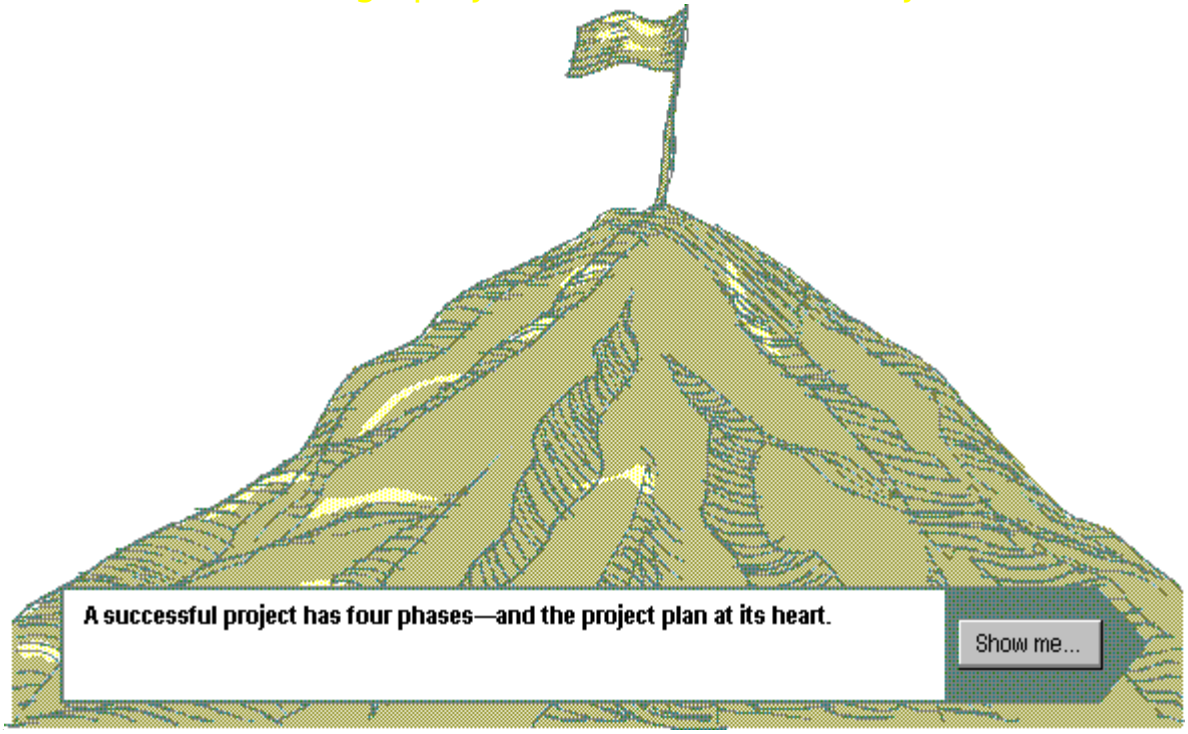
1. How do I manage projects with Microsoft Project?



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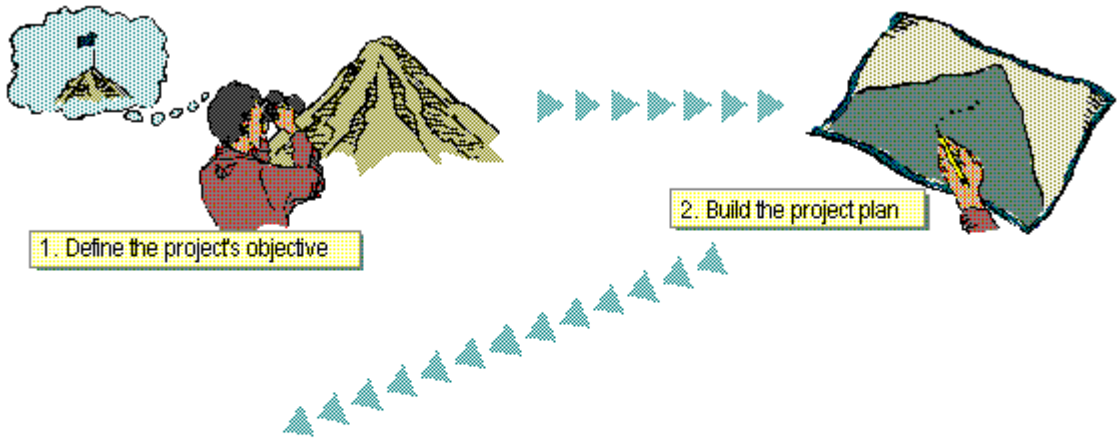

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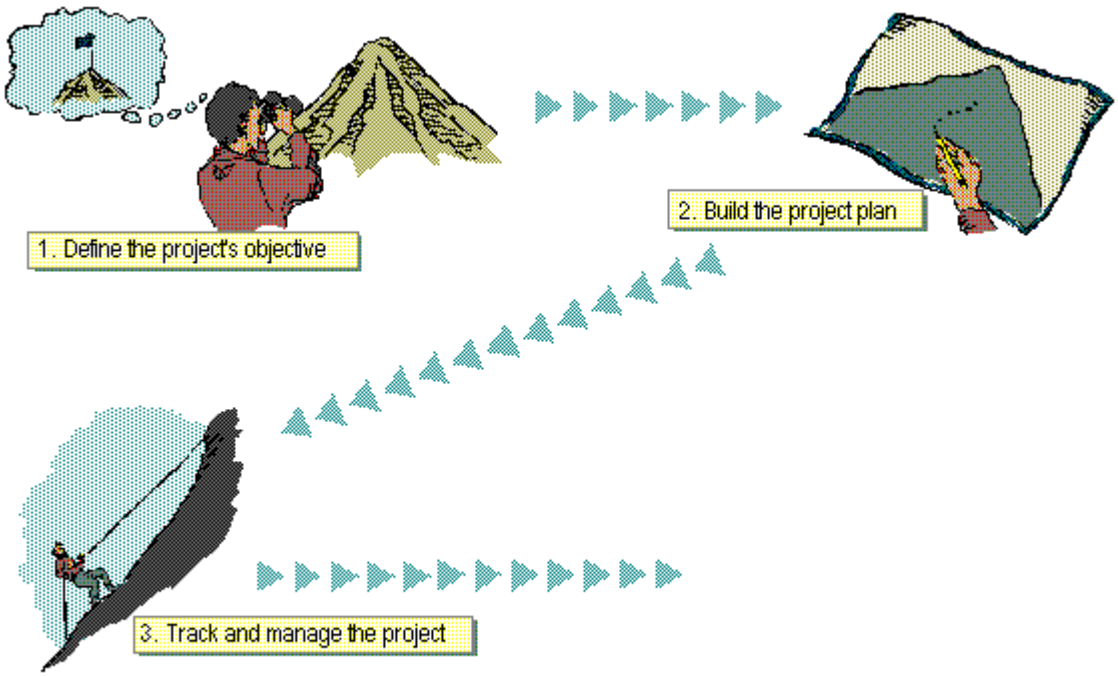

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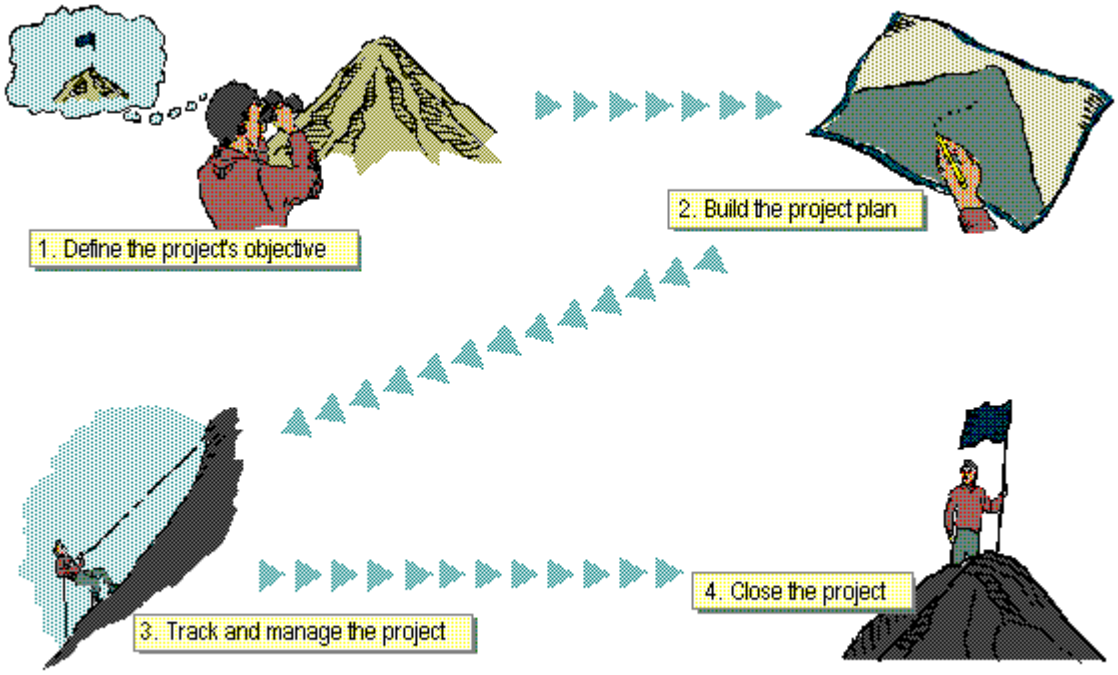

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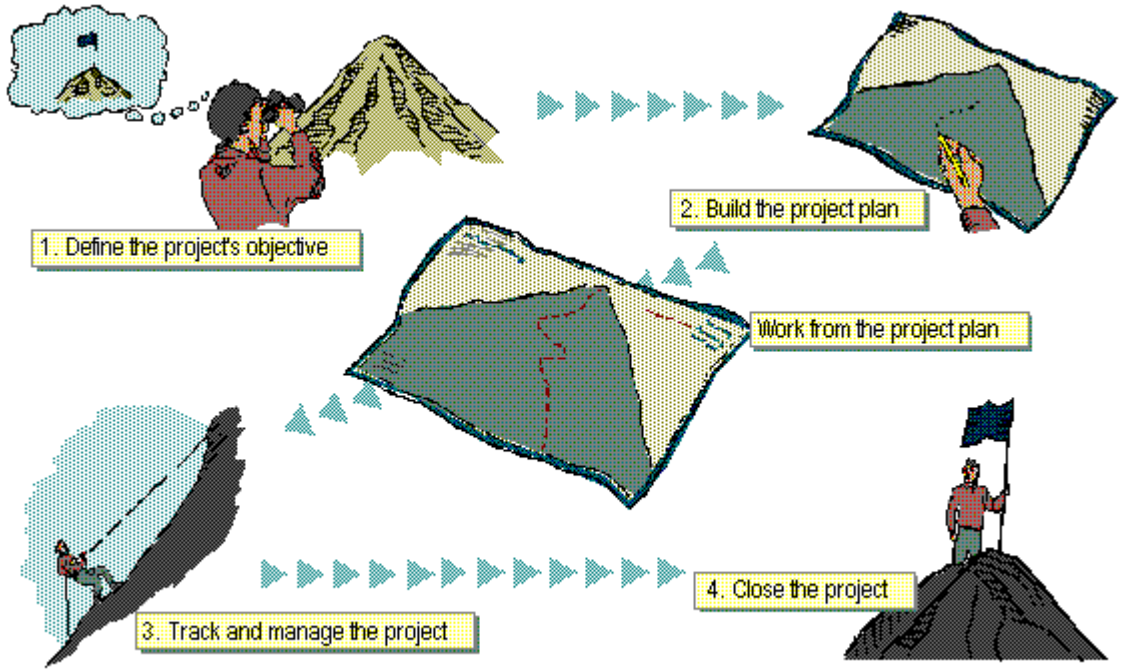


Click a caption for more information.

You can't hit the target if you can't see it. So, first, identify the objective. The objective should be measurable, define a definite end to the project, and include any assumptions about and constraints on the project. To prevent problems later, be sure everyone affected agrees to your definition of the objective.

Once you know where your project is going, you need to figure out the best way to get there. To do that, you'll gather project information such as a list of the tasks that need to be done and estimates for how long each task will take. Then, you'll enter the information into Microsoft Project. As you enter information, Microsoft Project creates a plan for getting your project done.

Once your project starts, it's up to your team to execute the plan. But you'll need to keep close tabs on their progress, because just as in a climbing expedition, you'll encounter problems you didn't

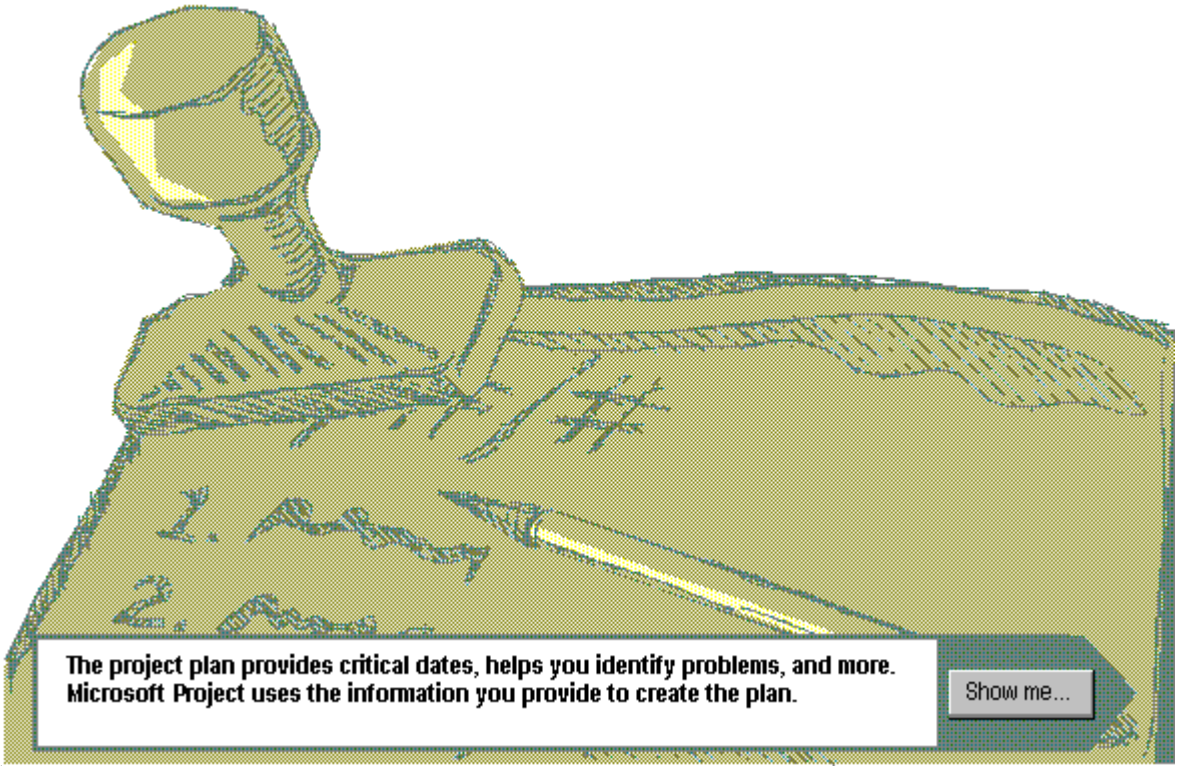
expect.

By using Microsoft Project to keep track of your progress, you can see the latest status of the project and identify and resolve early on problems that might affect its success.

Every project is a learning experience. No matter how well you planned at the beginning, by the end of your project, you'll find your map has changed from the original version. If you saved your original plan in Microsoft Project, you can make the most of your experience by using that information to compare your original plan with the way the project actually progressed.

The project plan is the heart of your project. It's an online model that tells what's going to be done, by whom, and when. Probably the most important part of the plan is the project's schedule, which includes the dates when each task will start and finish, how long each task will take, and the length and finish date of the project as a whole. The project plan may also include information about costs and about the use of project resources.

2. What project information do I enter?


The project plan provides critical dates, helps you identify problems, and more.
Microsoft Project uses the information you provide to create the plan.
Show me...

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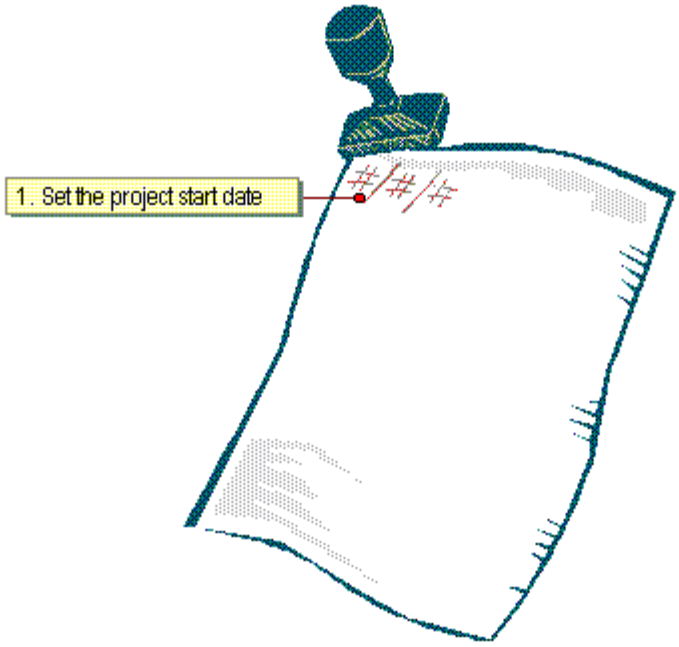

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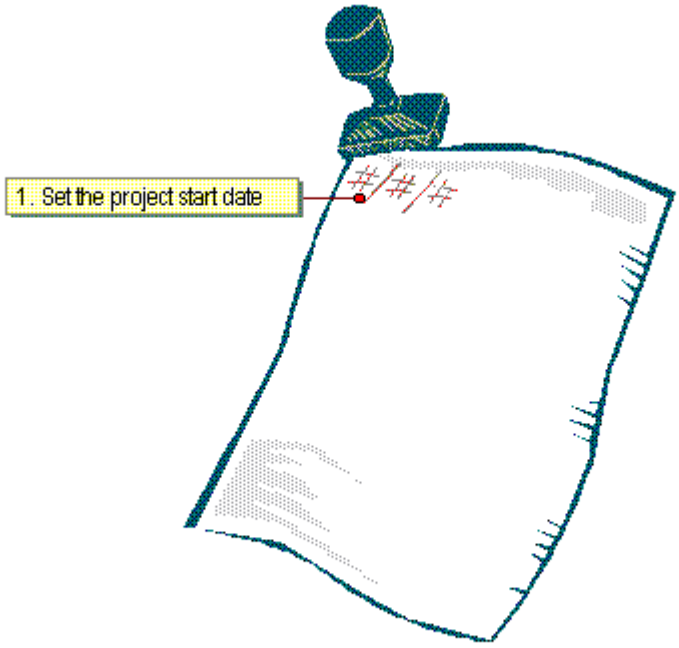

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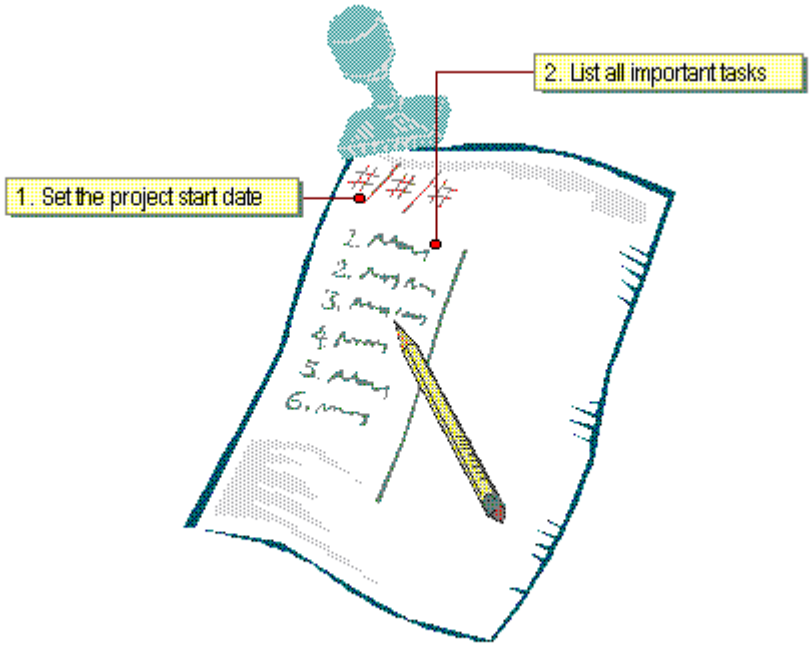

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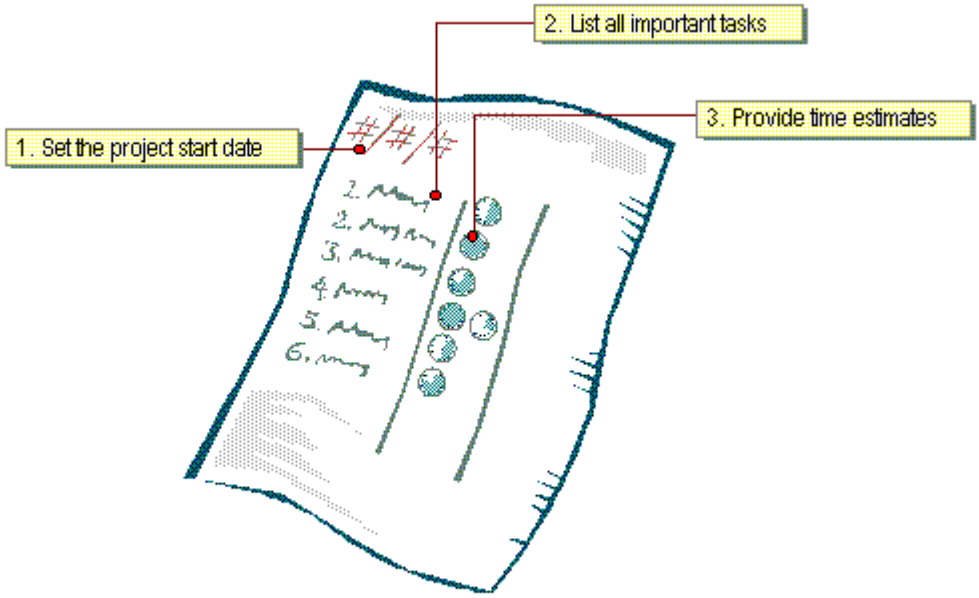

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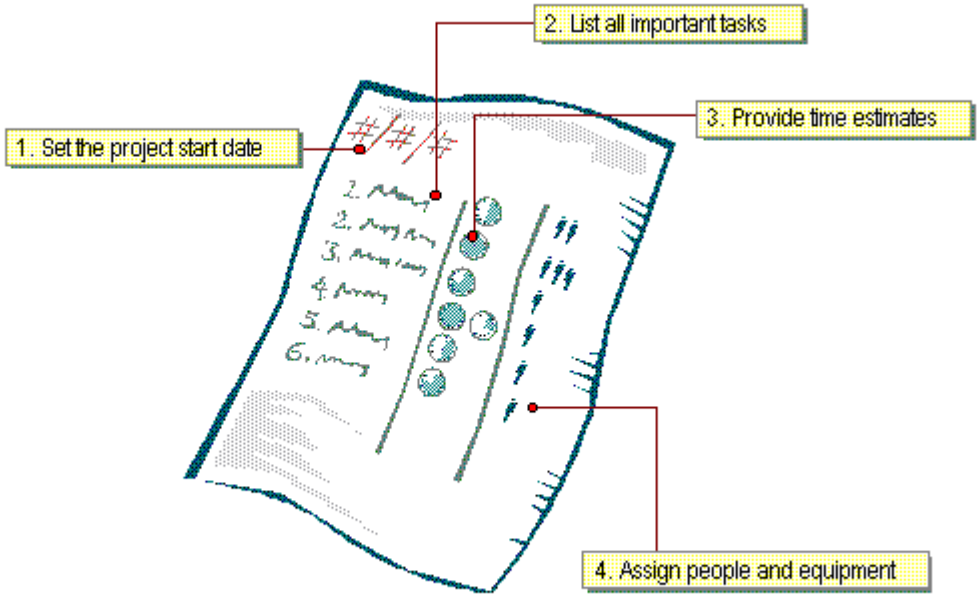

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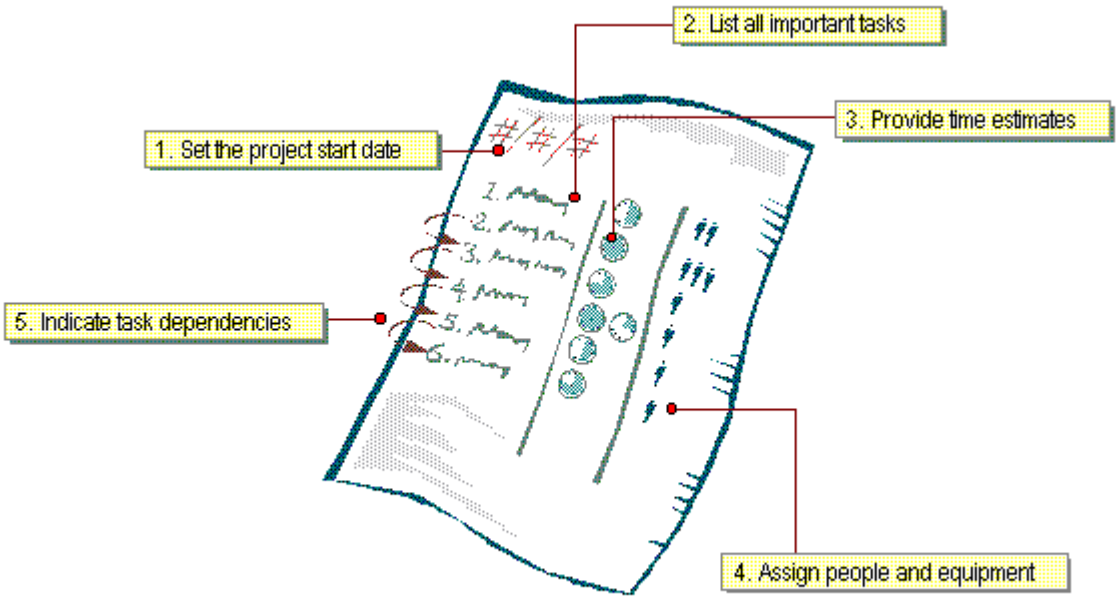


Click a caption for more information.

The project start date is the earliest date that any work can begin on your project. When you initially enter tasks, Microsoft Project schedules each task to begin on the project's start date. Later, you indicate whether the task must start later than that date.

As a general rule, a task should be less than 2 weeks in length. It should be large enough to be a significant chunk of work, but small enough that you can track its progress regularly and identify problems early. Enter tasks in the approximate order that you expect to do them.

For each task, you'll need to estimate how long the task will take to complete. This estimate is entered as the task's *duration*. Accurate durations are the backbone of your schedule. So it's usually best to have the person who will actually do the work provide the estimate.

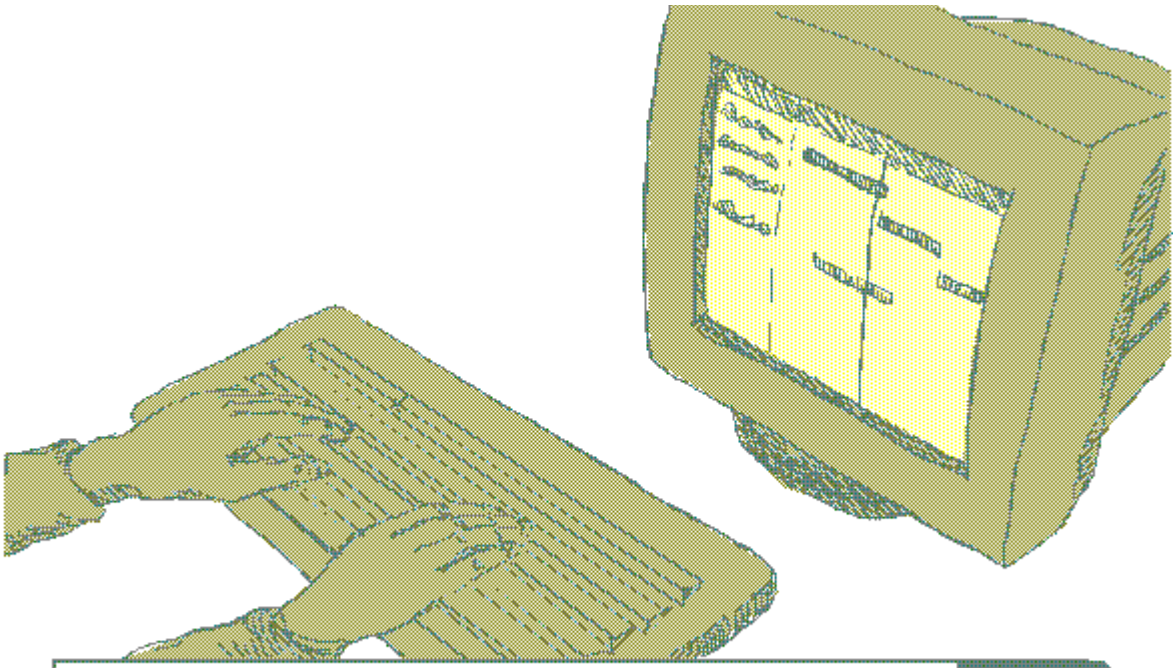
You tell Microsoft Project which resources will work on each task. A resource can be a single person or piece of equipment, or it can represent a set of people or equipment.

You don't have to assign resources in Microsoft Project, but your project plan will be far more accurate if you do. Microsoft Project factors resources into the schedule and provides information to help you better manage them, such as whether they will have to work overtime and how much each resource has cost to date.

Tasks usually happen in sequence: you prepare the walls, then paint them, and then hang pictures on them. To create a sequence, you link dependent tasks and tell Microsoft Project how they are dependent.

Usually, one task can't start until another task finishes, called a finish-to-start dependency. For example, you can't paint until you prepare the walls. Sometimes, the dependencies are more complex, such as when two tasks must start together. Microsoft Project lets you specify several types of dependencies.

3. Where do I enter my project information?



Microsoft Project calculates task start and finish dates, durations, and other values as you enter project information. So, you see the impact of your changes immediately.

Show me...

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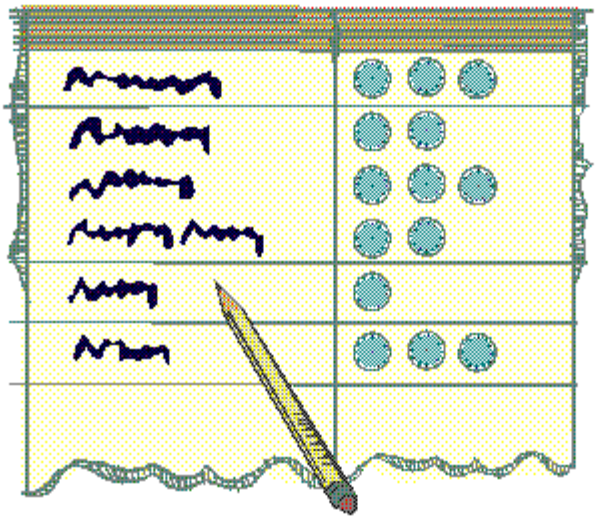

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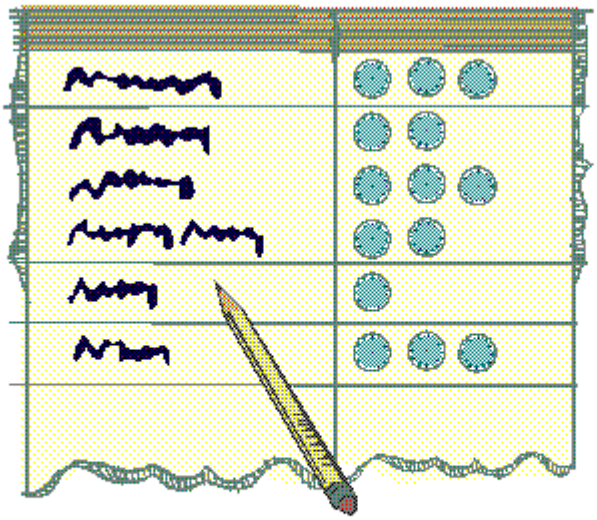

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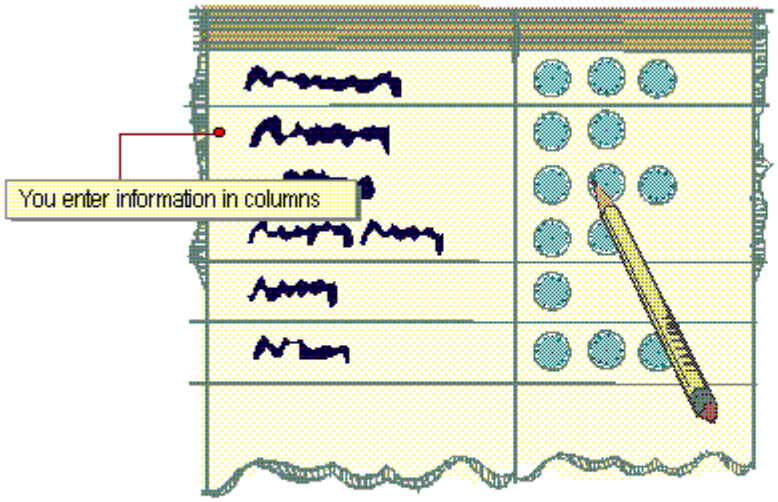

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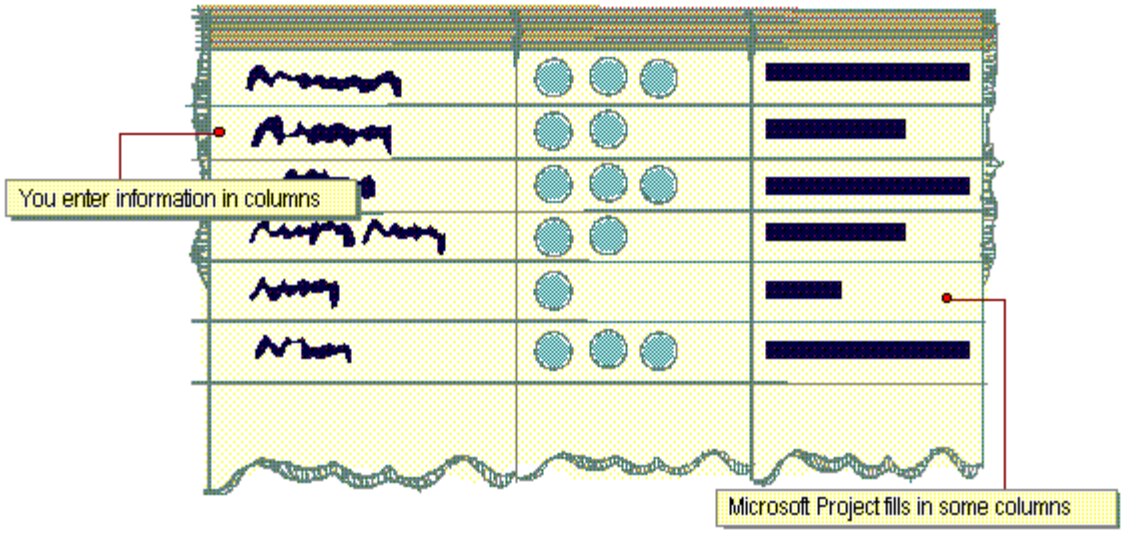


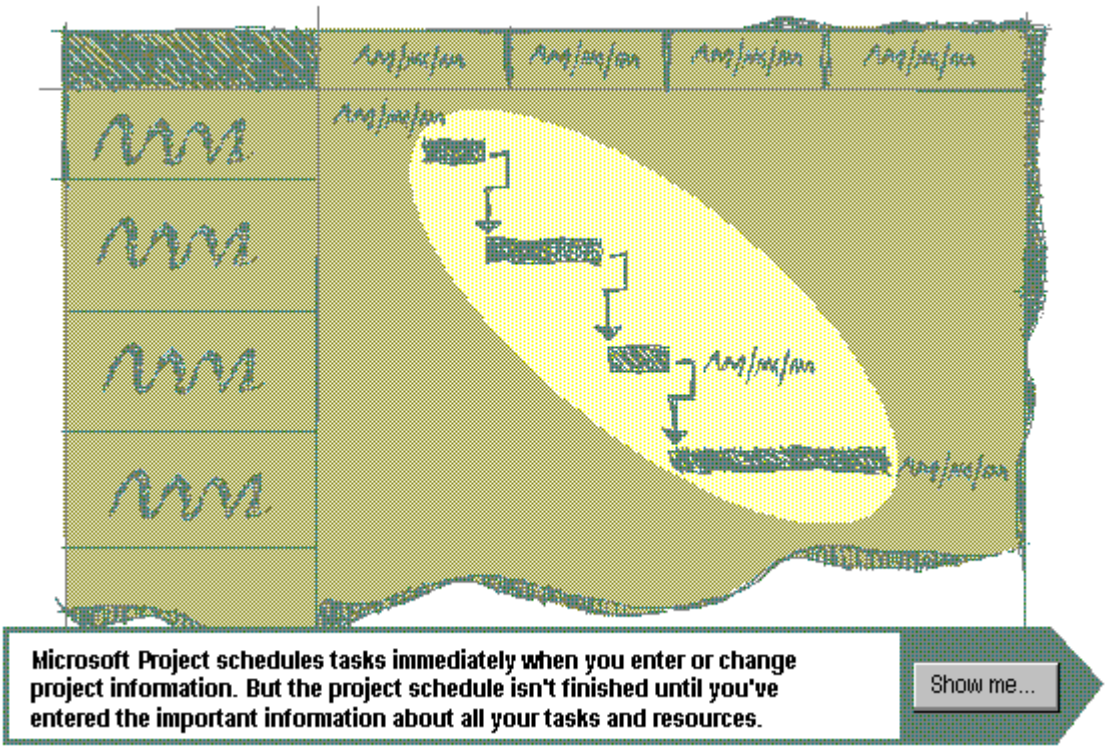
Click a caption for more information.

If you've used Microsoft Excel, you'll find Microsoft Project's sheets familiar. Sheets present information in columns and you enter project information in these columns. For example, you might enter 4 days in the Duration column for the task "Paint the walls."

You can enter and edit some of the information in Microsoft Project, for example, task names. Microsoft Project calculates and enters other information. Some information is calculated and editable. Microsoft Project calculates the information, but you can edit it by entering a different value.

Microsoft Project continually updates the information it calculates as you enter or change information that affects it. For example, Microsoft Project calculates durations as you enter other task information, such as the resources assigned to tasks.

4. How does Microsoft Project create my schedule?



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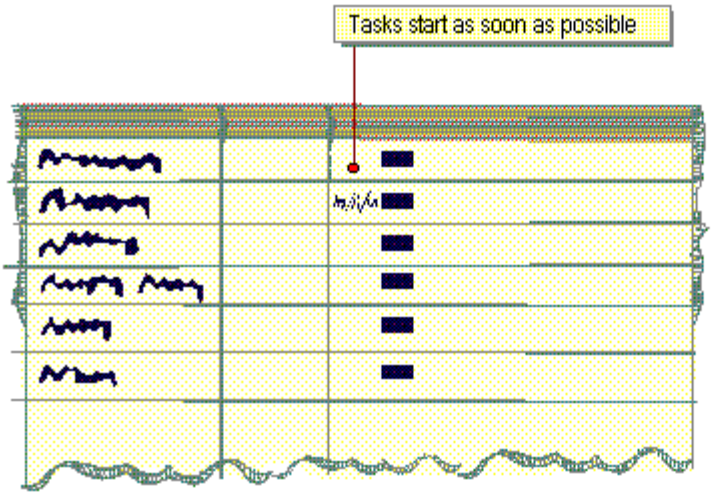

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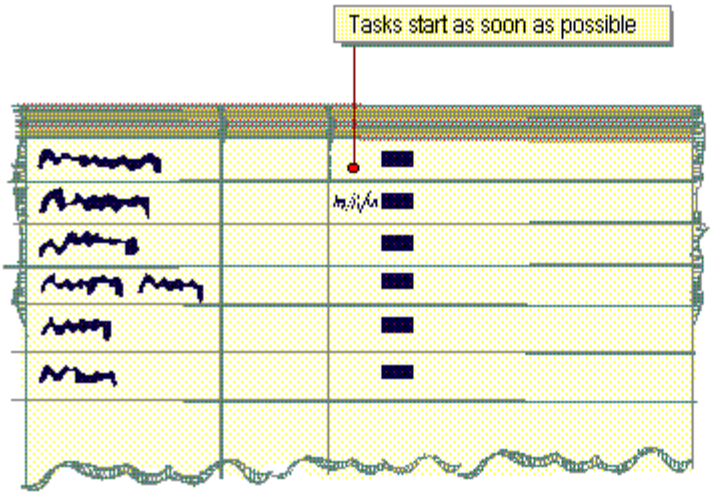

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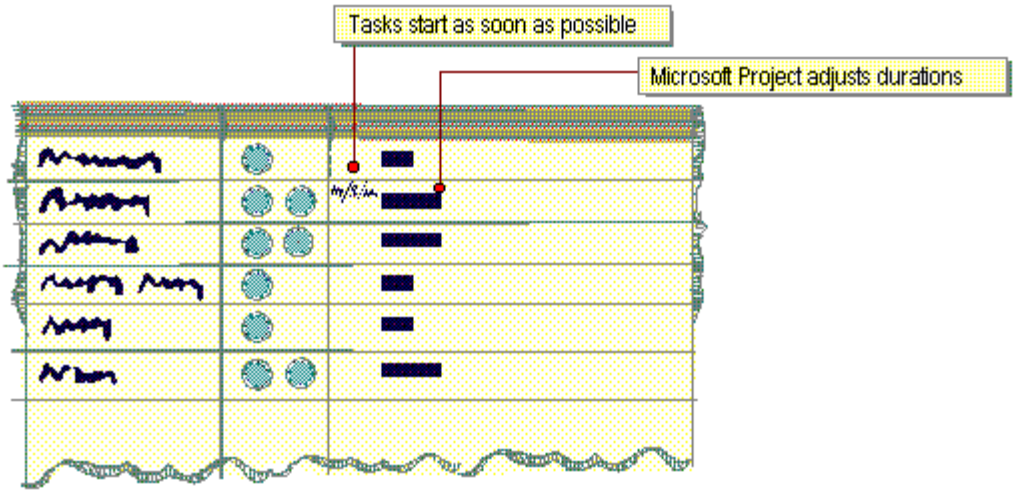

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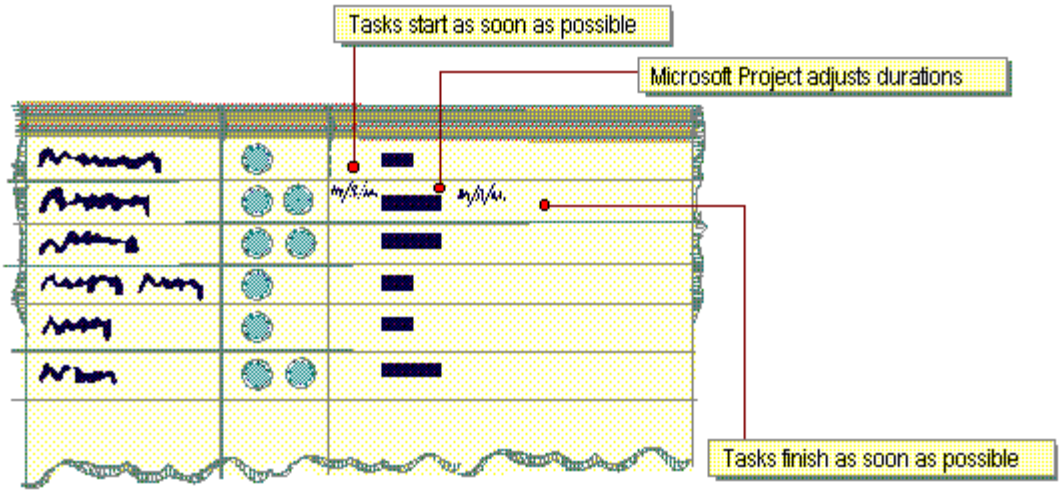

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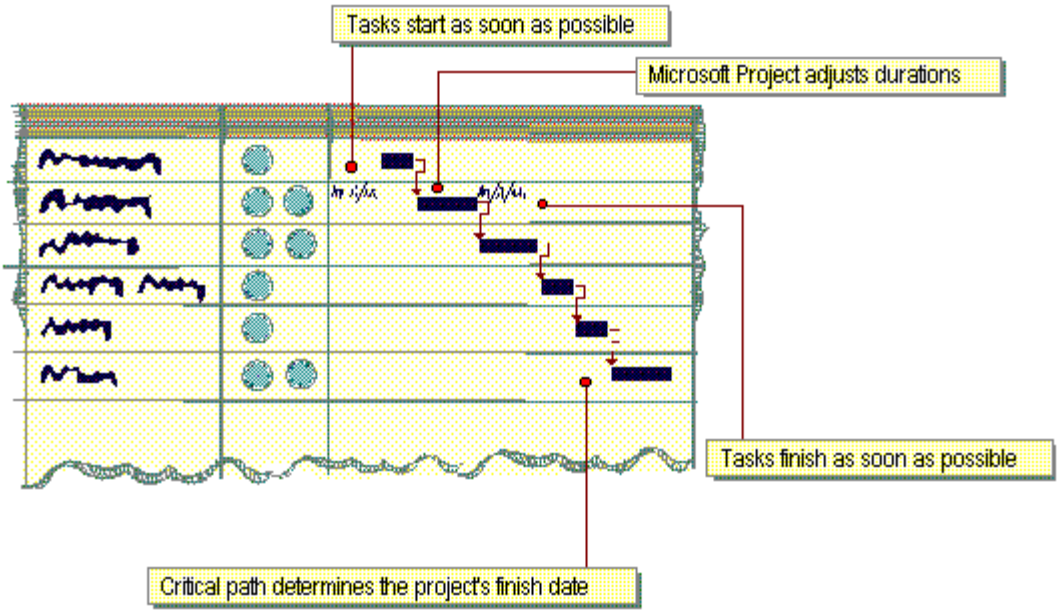


Click a caption for more information.

Usually, Microsoft Project calculates the date when each task will start, scheduling tasks as close to the project's start date as possible. Some of the factors that influence when a task can start include:

- Dependencies, such as the task cannot start until another task finishes.
- Constraints you've placed on the task, such as requiring that it start on or before a specific date.
- Days when work isn't done at your organization, such as weekends.

Microsoft Project calculates task durations with the formula *duration=work/resources*, where:

- *Duration* is the actual amount of time to task completion.
- *Work* is the effort required to do the task.
- *Resources* are the number and allocation of resources to the task.

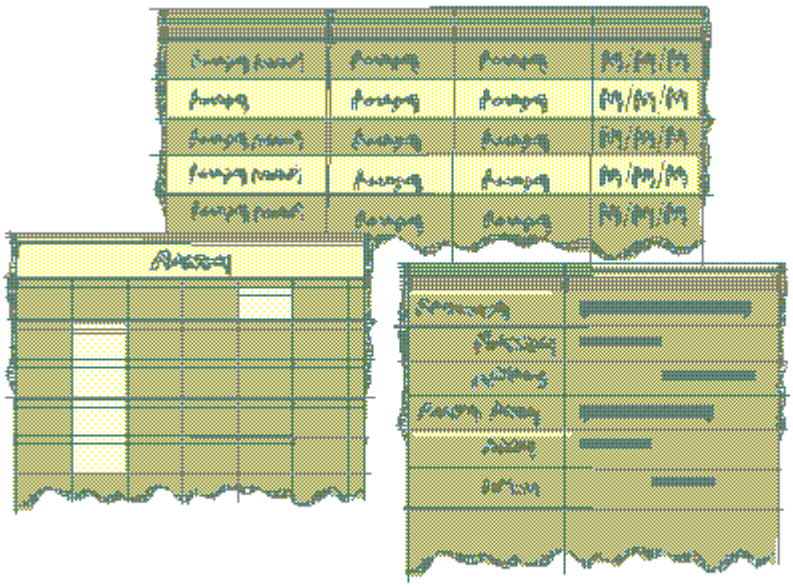
Initially, you estimate a task's duration. Microsoft Project then adjusts it based on the resources assigned and the work they're doing. For example, if you change the two full-time people assigned to a 2-day task so they work only half-time, Microsoft Project changes the task's duration to 4 days.

Microsoft Project usually calculates the finish date for each task. A task's finish date is influenced by:

- Its duration, because the duration determines how long the task will take to complete once it's started.
- Constraints you've placed on the task, such as requiring that it finish on or after a specific date.
- Days when work isn't done at your organization, such as weekends.

The critical path is a series of dependent tasks that must be done on time for the project to finish on time. The critical path determines the length of your project and when it will finish. If any task on the critical path is delayed or takes longer than expected, it will delay the project's finish date. Shortening or eliminating tasks on the critical path can make your project finish sooner.

5. How do I display project information?



Microsoft Project stores more information than you can effectively see at one time. So, at any given time, you display just the project information you need to work with, temporarily hiding the rest.

Show me...

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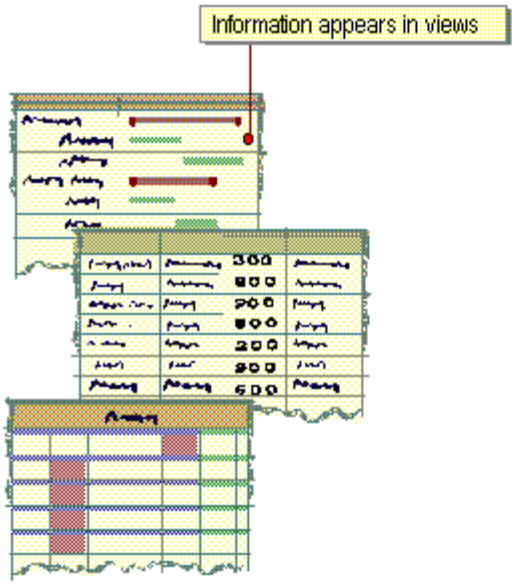

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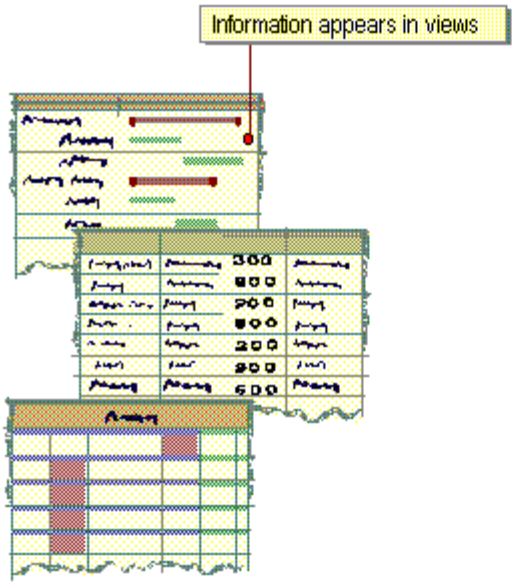

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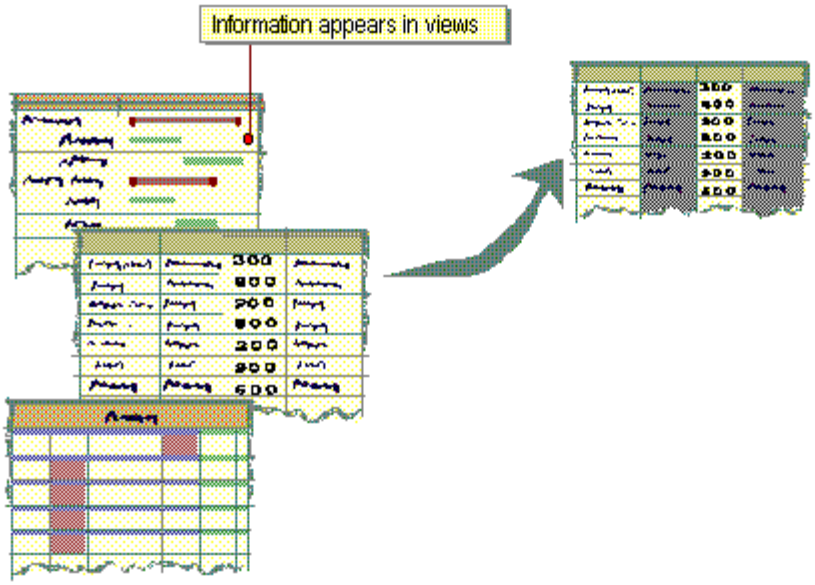

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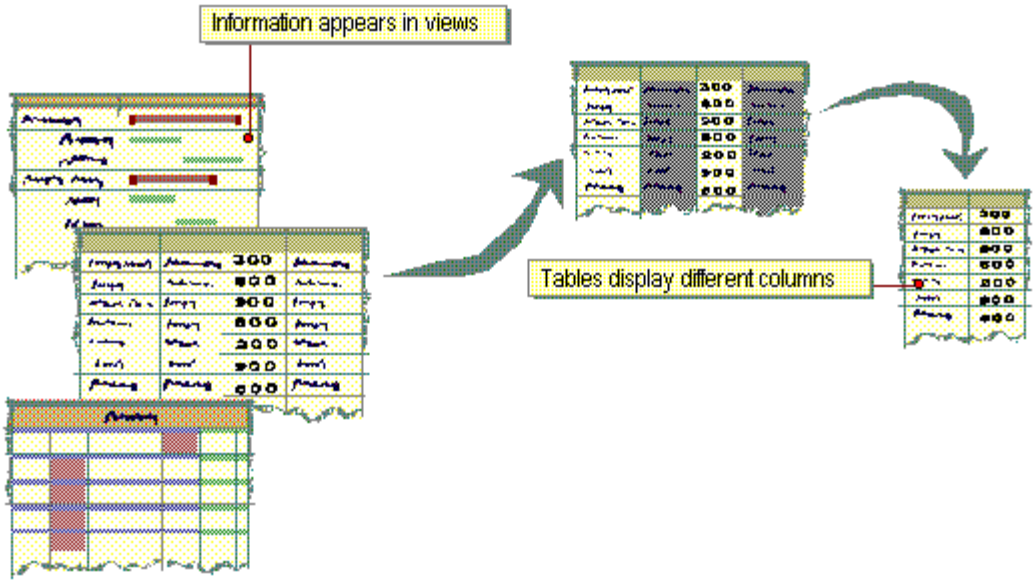

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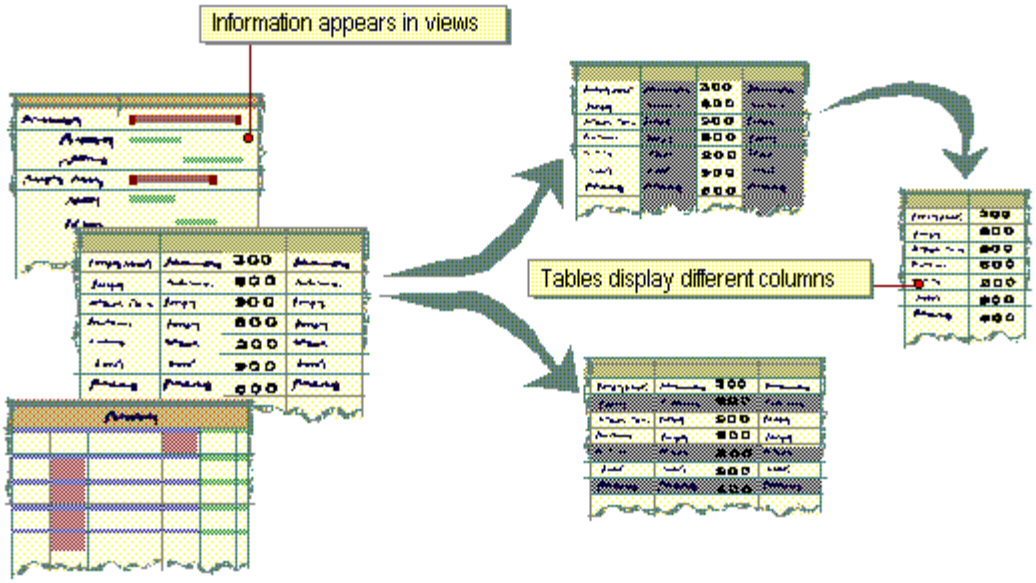

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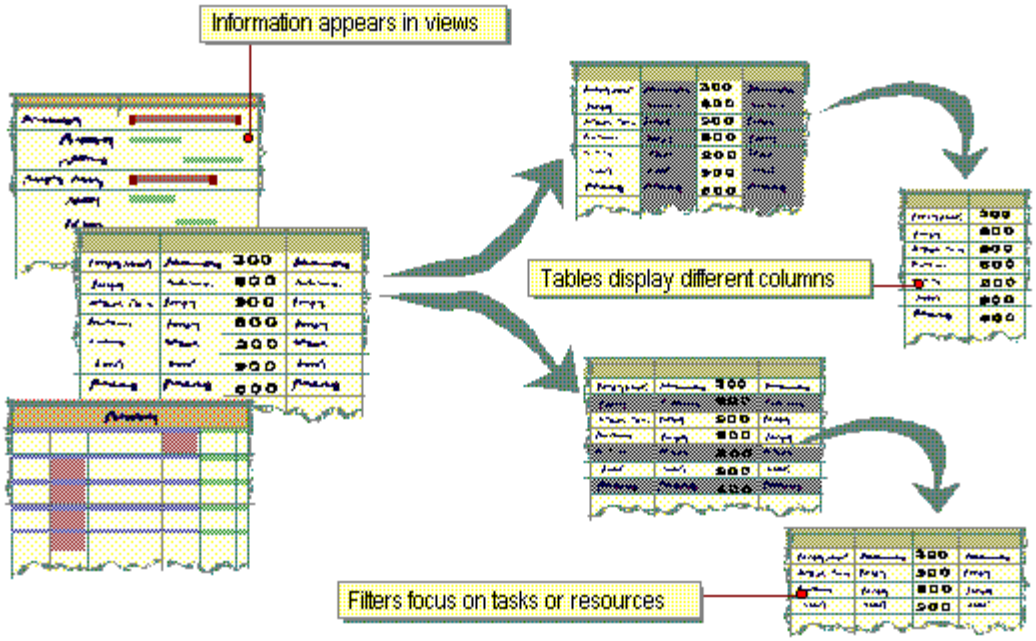


Click a caption for more information.

Views present different types of project information in easy-to-interpret formats. In most views, you can see, enter, and edit information. Views use a combination of the following formats:

- *Charts* that graphically represent tasks, resources, or other information.
- *Sheets* that display information in columns and rows.
- *Forms* that give details about a task or resource.

You'll use the Gantt Chart view most often, because it presents the most important information about tasks in a sheet that's easy to edit and as a bar chart that's easy to scan.

Tables control the set of columns displayed in a sheet view. Microsoft Project applies a default table to each view, but you can change the table to see different information.

For example, the Entry table in task views displays basic information about tasks. To view cost information, apply the Cost table, which displays cost columns, including fixed costs and total costs.

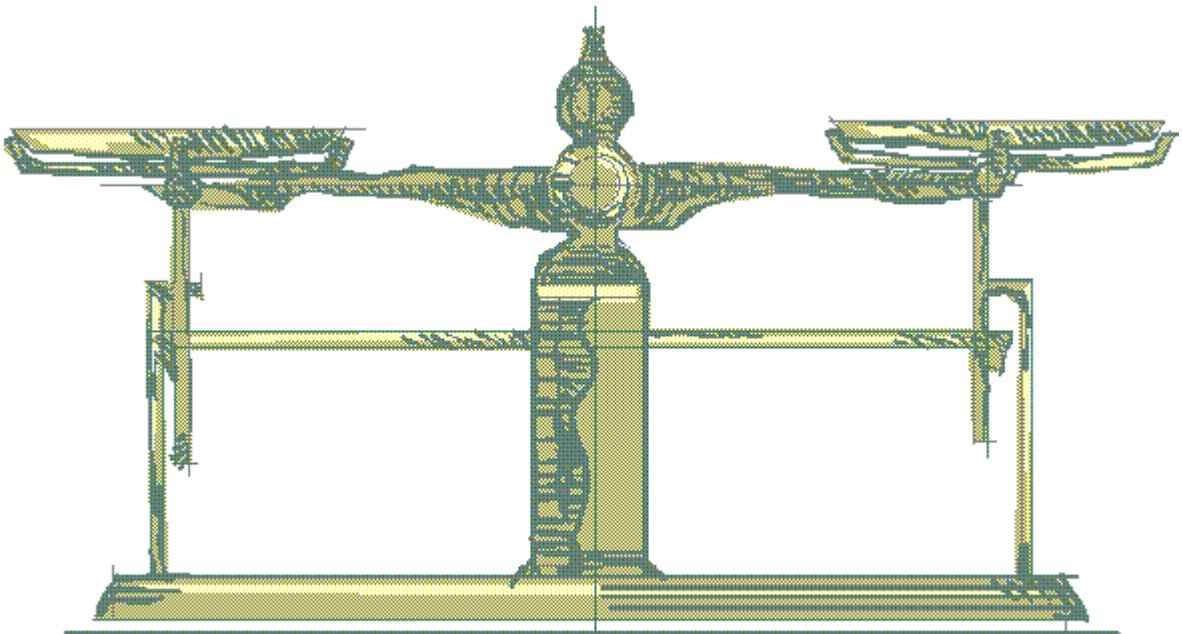
Note that changing the table doesn't delete any information. It just displays a different set of project information.

Filters focus the view on specific tasks or resources by defining criteria that tasks or resources must meet in order to be displayed in the view.

For example, you might filter the Gantt Chart view so that only the tasks assigned to Joe are displayed or so that only the tasks due to start after October 15 are displayed.

Note that applying a filter doesn't delete any information. It just temporarily hides some project information.

6. How do I fine-tune my project plan?



When problems arise, fine-tune your plan until you're satisfied that you can complete your project successfully. Keep in mind the three key factors...

Show me...

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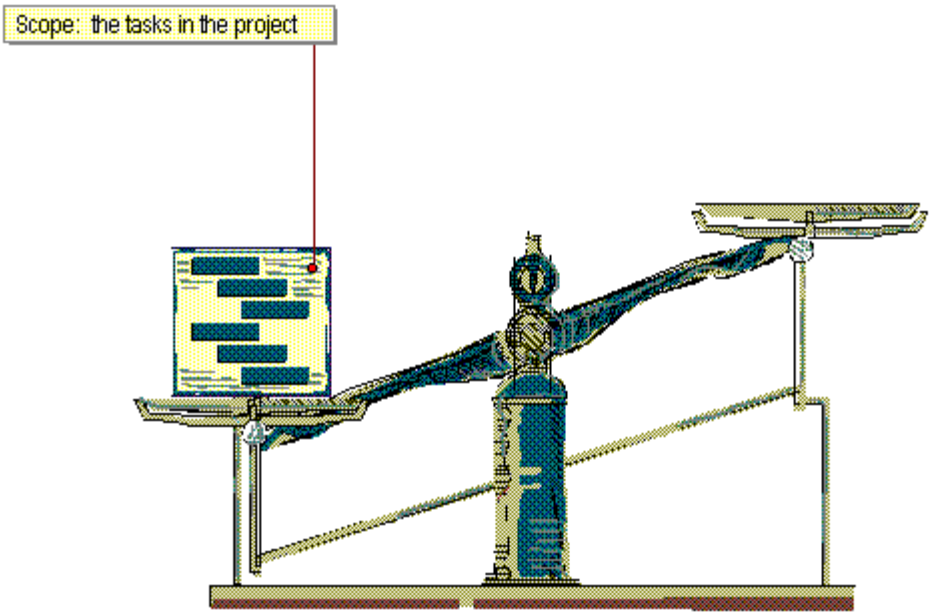

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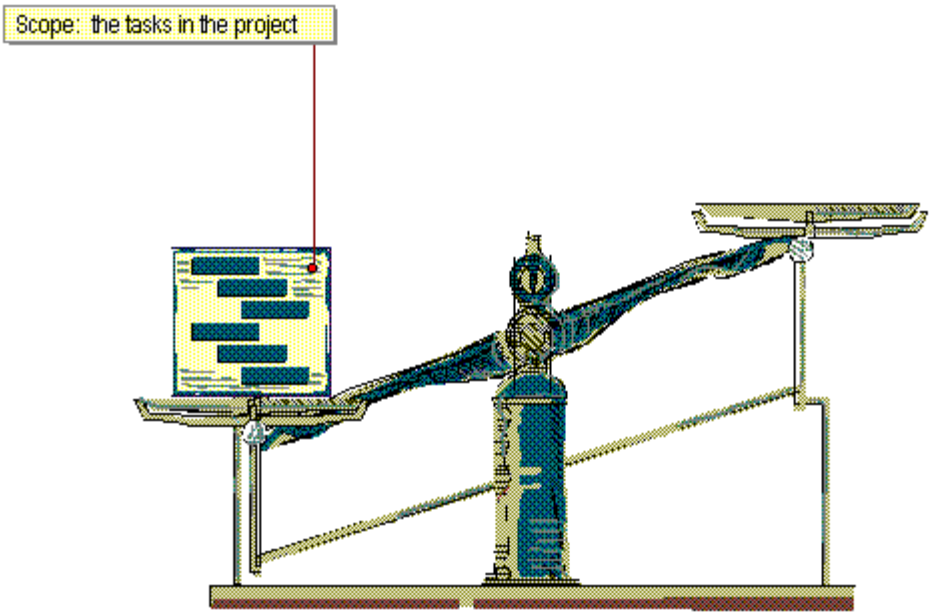

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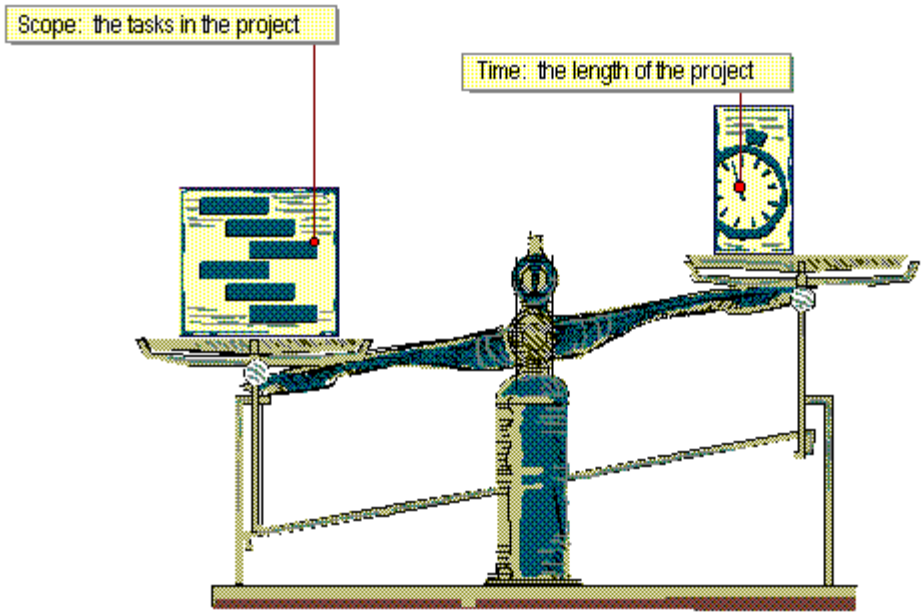

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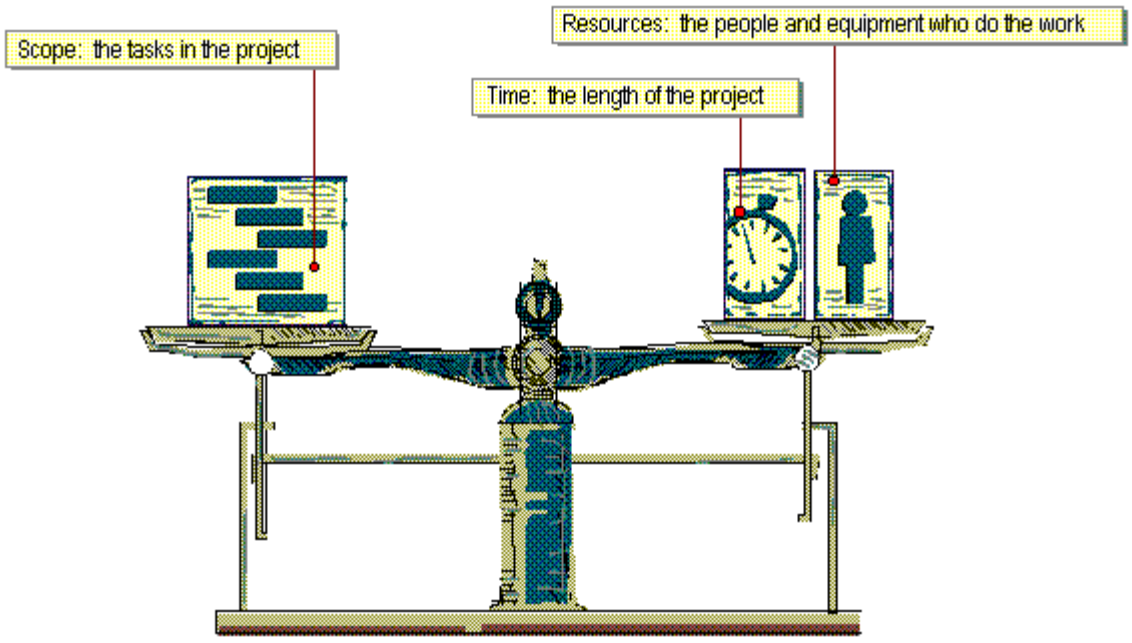

Click a caption for more information.

Your remodeled bedroom is the result of all the tasks you and others do to create it. These tasks make up the scope of your project.

Scope is related to resources and time, and reducing scope can be an effective way to meet limitations in these two elements. For example, if your resources are costing too much, you could eliminate some tasks. But remember that changes in scope can affect the quality of the final product. Only you can decide where you can reduce scope and whether the trade-offs are worth it.

Time is probably what you're most concerned with. It is also often constrained.

The time it takes to complete the project depends on the scope of the project and the resources working on it. Increasing the scope may cause the project to take longer. Likewise, removing resources may cause the project to take longer, because the remaining resources must do more work.

Resources are the people and equipment needed to complete each task in your project. Resources and costs go hand-in-hand. For example, adding resources or having them work overtime can increase costs.

If your resources are limited, or you need to limit them to keep within your budget, you can fine-tune your plan to meet the limitation by reducing the project’s scope or delaying the project's finish. Likewise, adding resources can be an effective way to meet increases in scope or to keep a project within its time limits.