

SCHEDULE BASELINE + 3-WEEK LOOK-AHEAD

Two Time Horizons of GC Schedule Discipline

Project: [Project Name] | Schedule Date: [Date]

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1. TWO TIME HORIZONS — BASELINE VS. LOOK-AHEAD

Aspect	Baseline Schedule (CPM)	3-Week Look-Ahead
Time horizon	Notice to Proceed → Final Completion (typically 6–36 months)	Current week + next 2 weeks (21 calendar days)
Granularity	Activities of 1–14 days each, organized by phase / area / trade	Daily granularity at the trade-level work crew
Updated	Monthly (with each Application for Payment)	Weekly (every coordination meeting)
Audience	Owner, architect, lender (if any), GC project executive, surety	Trade subcontractor PMs and superintendents at the weekly coordination meeting
Decision it drives	"Are we on schedule overall? When is substantial completion? What's on the critical path?"	"What's happening this week and next? Who has what crew where? What conflicts need to be resolved?"
Software	Primavera P6, Microsoft Project, Asta Powerproject, Synchro	Excel, Smartsheet, P6 + filter, Asana / Monday for simple projects
Format	Gantt chart with logic ties; CSV export with predecessors / successors / float	Tabular by trade and by week; sometimes printed as 11x17 banner posted at job trailer

A baseline without a look-ahead is a wall decoration. A look-ahead without a baseline is a guess.

Some GCs have only a Baseline (developed at contract execution and never looked at again — lives in a binder). Others have only a weekly trade list (no understanding of cumulative cost / schedule impact). Both fail. The Baseline tells you whether what's in the Look-Ahead actually fits the contract; the Look-Ahead tells you whether what's in the Baseline is actually achievable. Project managers who manage both have schedule reliability 2–3x better than those who manage only one.

2. BASELINE SCHEDULE — MASTER CPM

The Baseline is developed in the first 30 days of the project. It identifies every activity required to complete the work, with durations, dependencies (predecessor → successor relationships), and milestone dates. The Critical Path is the longest sequence of dependent activities — any delay on the critical path delays the project; activities not on the critical path have float (the time they can slip without affecting the project end date).

BASELINE SCHEDULE — CPM ACTIVITY LIST

Project: [Project name] · Baseline Issue Date: [Date]

ACT ID	ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	PHASE / AREA	TRADE	CSI DIV	DURATION (DAYS)	PREDECESSOR (RELATION)	EARLY START	EARLY FINISH	FLOAT (DAYS)	CRITICAL?
— SAMPLE EXTRACT (typical 12-month commercial project; full schedule has 200–500 activities) —										
A100	Notice to Proceed	Pre-Con	—	—	0	—	2026-03-01	2026-03-01	0	Y
A110	Mobilize site (fence, trailer, util.)	Pre-Con	GC	01	10	A100 (FS)	2026-03-02	2026-03-15	0	Y
A200	Site clearing & demolition	Site	Demo	02	15	A110 (FS)	2026-03-16	2026-04-05	0	Y
A210	Mass excavation	Site	Earthwork	31	20	A200 (FS)	2026-04-06	2026-05-01	0	Y
A300	Foundation rebar & formwork	Foundation	Concrete	03	15	A210 (FS)	2026-05-02	2026-05-22	0	Y
A310	Foundation pour + cure (28 days)	Foundation	Concrete	03	28	A300 (FS)	2026-05-23	2026-06-19	0	Y
A400	Order long-lead steel (begin)	Pre-Con	Steel	05	1	A100 (FS)	2026-03-02	2026-03-02	21	N
A410	Steel shop drawings + fabrication lead time (incl. shop dwg approval)	Pre-Con	Steel	05	108	A400 (FS)	2026-03-03	2026-06-19	0	Y
A500	Structural steel erection	Structure	Steel	05	25	A310 (FS), A410 (FS)	2026-06-20	2026-07-22	0	Y
...	(continue for all activities)
A990	Substantial Completion	Closeout	—	—	0	(many predecessors)	2027-02-15	2027-02-15	0	Y
A999	Final Completion	Closeout	—	—	0	A990 (FS) + 30	2027-03-17	2027-03-17	0	Y

Relations: FS = Finish-to-Start (most common — successor cannot start until predecessor finishes); SS = Start-to-Start; FF = Finish-to-Finish; SF = Start-to-Finish (rare). **Lag:** "+ 30" means a 30-day lag between predecessor finish and successor start (e.g., concrete cure time). **Critical?:** Y = activity is on the critical path (zero float — any slip delays the project); N = activity has

float and can absorb some slip without affecting the project end. **Float:** the number of calendar days the activity can be delayed without delaying the project end.

Baseline Milestones

Milestone	Baseline Date	Type
Notice to Proceed	[Date]	Mandatory (contract)
Mobilization Complete	[Date]	Required precedent
Foundation Complete	[Date]	Critical path
Steel Topped Out	[Date]	Critical path / progress milestone
Building Dry-In (roof + exterior closed)	[Date]	Critical path / weather threshold
MEP Rough-In Complete	[Date]	Critical path
Drywall Complete	[Date]	Critical path
Finishes Complete	[Date]	Critical path
Commissioning Complete	[Date]	Required precedent for SC
Substantial Completion	[Date — per contract]	Mandatory (contract)
Final Completion	[Date — per contract]	Mandatory (contract)

Long-lead items go on the schedule even if they're not on the critical path.

Steel fabrication, custom curtain wall, custom switchgear, custom AV equipment, custom millwork — anything with a 60+ day lead time goes on the Baseline Schedule as a procurement activity even if installation is months out. The lead time often becomes the critical path even when the install activity itself wouldn't be (steel example above: A410 fabrication is on the critical path because it locks the start of A500 erection). Missing a long-lead item from the Baseline is the classic schedule-blow-up scenario.

3. 3-WEEK LOOK-AHEAD SCHEDULE

The 3-Week Look-Ahead is the operational schedule used at weekly trade coordination meetings. It shows what each trade is doing in the current week, the next week, and the week after that — at the trade-by-trade work-area-by-work-area level. Updated every week. Posted at the job trailer. Distributed to every trade sub PM and superintendent before each coordination meeting.

3-WEEK LOOK-AHEAD SCHEDULE

Project: [Project] · Week of: [Monday Date]

TRADE / SUB	CSI DIV	WORK AREA	WEEK 1 (CURRENT)	WEEK 2 (NEXT)	WEEK 3 (FOLLOWING)	CREW SIZE	COORDINATION NOTES / CONFLICTS
— SAMPLE WEEK (typical mid-construction; floor framing complete, MEP rough-in active) —							
Concrete ABC Concrete	03	Level 4 elev. slab	Form & rebar L4 (Mon-Wed); pour Thu	Strip + cure L4 (Mon-Wed); start L5 form Thu	Rebar L5; pour Fri	8	Need crane priority Thu morning for L4 pour. MEP rough-in must be inspected by Wed PM.
Steel XYZ Steel	05	L3-L5 stairs & railings	L3 stair install (Mon-Tue); L4 rail install (Wed-Fri)	L4 stair install; L5 rail install	L5 stair install	3	Rail install on L4 must wait for L4 slab cure (5 days) before securing posts.
Mech / HVAC ABC Mech	23	L3 above-ceiling MEP rough	Hang ductwork L3 zones 1-2	Hang ductwork L3 zone 3; start L4	Pre-test L3 ductwork; continue L4	5	L3 ceiling closure scheduled wk 4 — duct must be tested + signed off by then.
Plumbing QRS Plumbing	22	L3 above-ceiling rough	Above-ceiling drain & vent L3 zone 1	Above-ceiling drain & vent L3 zones 2-3	Pressure test L3	3	Coordinate with HVAC on overhead routing — conflict at L3 column line C-7 needs resolution Mon AM.
Electrical EFG Elec	26	L3 above-ceiling + L2 wall rough	L3 above-ceiling conduit zones 1-2; L2 wall rough zone 3	L3 above-ceiling zone 3; L2 wall rough zones 1-2	L2 wall rough complete; pre-inspect	6	Need inspector for L2 wall rough end of wk 3 — submit inspection request by Wed wk 2.
Drywall HIJ Drywall	09	L1 finishing; L2 framing	Finish drywall L1 zones 1-2 (complete by Wed)	L2 wall framing zones 1-2 (Mon-Thu)	L2 wall framing zone 3; start drywall L1 zone 3	5	L1 finishing held until L1 MEP rough re-inspection cleared Tue.
Roofing RoofCo	07	Membrane install	Membrane sections 1-2 (weather permitting)	Membrane sections 3-4	Pre-cap inspection; start cap flashing	4	Weather-dependent. If rain forecast >50% Tue/Wed wk 1, hold off membrane install.
Painting PaintPro	09	Mobilizing	Mobilize; submittals due	Submittal review; sample mock-up	Begin L1 priming (after drywall finish complete)	2 (mob)	Sample mock-up wk 2 — owner to attend approval. Schedule for Thu PM.
GC General Conditions	01	Site management	Crane scheduling; safety walks; coord meetings	Inspection scheduling; subcontractor billing reconciliation	Pay-app cycle; pencil draft with architect	3	Monthly architect pencil draft Thursday wk 3.

Color code: green = activity scheduled to complete this week as planned · yellow = activity in progress on schedule · red = activity behind or with risk that needs attention. **Coordination notes column** is critical — every conflict identified in advance is a resolved meeting item; every conflict not identified is a field re-do and a delay.

The Look-Ahead is the agenda for the weekly coordination meeting.

Every Monday morning (typical), the GC project manager pre-prepares the Look-Ahead reflecting actual progress through Friday close. The weekly coordination meeting (Tuesday morning typical) walks the Look-Ahead row by row with each sub. Each sub confirms "yes I can do that" or "no, here's the conflict / constraint / delay." Conflicts get resolved in real-time with all parties at the table. The meeting takes 60–90 minutes and prevents the 5–10 hours of field re-coordination that happen when crews show up to find their work area is occupied or unprepared.

4. MONTHLY SCHEDULE UPDATE PROCEDURE

Most contracts require a monthly schedule update submitted with each Application for Payment. The update reflects actual progress (% complete on each in-progress activity), forecasts revised dates for upcoming activities, and identifies impact of any change orders or delays.

1. **Capture actuals.** For each activity scheduled to be in progress or complete this period: record actual start, actual finish (if complete), and percent complete (if in progress).
2. **Update remaining durations.** For each in-progress activity: update remaining duration based on field reality (often 1.2–1.5x the original duration for activities running behind).
3. **Recalculate forward.** Run schedule recalculation. Identify which activities are now driving the new substantial completion date.
4. **Compare to baseline.** Calculate variance: revised SC date vs. baseline SC date vs. contract SC date. If variance is positive (behind), identify recovery actions.
5. **Identify recovery options.** If behind: which activities can be accelerated? Which can be re-sequenced? Where is there float that can absorb slip elsewhere?
6. **Incorporate executed change orders.** Add new CO scope as new activities; revise existing activity durations / dependencies as the CO requires.
7. **Identify pending impacts.** Pending change orders, open RFIs over 14 days, late owner-supplied items: flag potential schedule impact even if not yet quantified.
8. **Issue updated schedule + narrative.** Submit with the monthly Application for Payment: updated CPM schedule (PDF + native file format), schedule narrative explaining variance from baseline and recovery plan, updated milestone dates.
9. **Communicate to subs.** Distribute the updated 3-Week Look-Ahead reflecting any changes. Discuss in the next weekly coordination meeting.

Schedule narrative is more important than the schedule itself.

Architects and owners do not parse 300-activity Gantt charts. They read the schedule narrative — a 1–2 page document that says: where we are vs. baseline; what's on the critical path; what variances exist and why; what we're doing to recover. A clean narrative submitted monthly builds trust over the project. A schedule submitted without a narrative gets ignored; when the project goes sideways, the GC then has no documented record of when delays were first identified or what mitigation was attempted.

5. SCHEDULE DISCIPLINE — 12 RULES

1. **Baseline within 30 days of NTP.** The Baseline is developed in the first 30 days. Submit to architect/owner; resolve comments; freeze as the contract baseline. Schedules that don't get baselined never get used.
2. **Long-lead items identified day 1.** Within the first week of NTP, every long-lead procurement (steel, custom curtain wall, custom switchgear, custom MEP equipment, custom millwork, specialty AV) is on the schedule with the lead time as a real activity, not a footnote.
3. **Every activity has a responsible party.** The schedule activity list assigns a responsible trade or sub for every line item — no orphan activities.
4. **Critical path identified and visible.** Every monthly schedule update highlights the current critical path. Activities on the critical path get extra scrutiny in coordination meetings.
5. **Float belongs to the project, not to the trade.** Float is a project resource — when one trade slips into another's float, both share the float. Don't let early trades consume all the float and leave later trades zero buffer.
6. **Look-Ahead updated weekly, period.** Every Monday before noon, the Look-Ahead reflects Friday-actuals and is distributed to every sub. Don't skip weeks. Don't merge weeks.
7. **Weekly coordination meeting walks the Look-Ahead.** The meeting agenda is the Look-Ahead — row by row, each sub confirms or flags conflicts. Meetings without the Look-Ahead in front of every attendee become rambling chat sessions.
8. **Inspector and architect attendance scheduled in the Look-Ahead.** Inspections, architect site visits, owner walks — schedule them on the Look-Ahead so they don't become last-minute scrambles.
9. **Weather-sensitive activities flagged.** Roofing, exterior masonry, asphalt paving, concrete pour in cold weather — flag in the Look-Ahead with the weather contingency.
10. **Schedule narrative submitted monthly.** Plain-English 1–2 page narrative with the schedule update. Variance, critical path, recovery plan.
11. **Time extensions documented as they occur.** When a delay event occurs (owner change, weather, late owner-supplied item, late RFI response), document the date, cause, and projected schedule impact. Submit time-extension request within the contract notice period (typically 7–14 days) — late requests are deemed waived.
12. **Recovery schedule when behind by 10+ days.** If cumulative variance reaches 10 days behind baseline SC, issue a recovery schedule showing what acceleration is required and at what cost. Owner-decision-required: accept the slip, or fund the acceleration. Don't silently absorb 30 days of slip with no plan.

Schedule documentation is the project's defense in delay claims. The single most common dispute on a commercial project at the end is "who caused the delay and who pays for it?" The party with rigorous schedule documentation — baseline, monthly updates, schedule narratives, time-extension requests submitted on time — wins these disputes overwhelmingly. The party with sketchy schedule documentation loses, regardless of whose

fault the delay actually was. Schedule discipline is not just about running the project on time; it's about preserving the project's legal defensibility if things go sideways.

Closing reminder. This Schedule package describes industry-standard CPM scheduling and 3-week look-ahead practices. **The actual schedule on a project is generated and maintained in scheduling software** — Primavera P6 (industry standard for mid-to-large commercial), Microsoft Project (smaller projects), Asta Powerproject (UK / European prevalent), Synchro (4D BIM-integrated), Smartsheet (lighter-weight, collaboration-first). The templates above are illustrative of the data captured; in practice, the schedule is software-generated and exported to PDF or web format for distribution. The discipline rules apply regardless of which tool. Construction-management-software platforms (Procore, Sage, BuilderTrend, Autodesk Construction Cloud) generally include scheduling integrations or modules.

Document version: 2026-05-15 (v1.0). Industry-standard CPM and short-interval scheduling practices. Maintained as part of the ContrPro Complete tier — General Contractor suite.