

How to Be Productive

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We've all been there: lots of things to do, but finding ourselves distracted, floundering, procrastinating, and unable to get things done. Are you tired of wasting time? If so, then it's time for you to get productive!

Method 1

Method 1 of 3: Be Organized



1 Make a to-do list. Write down all of your tasks, as well as everything you would like to accomplish for the day/week or keep a running list of tasks that you need to get done. To-do lists are tried-and-true productivity tools, but they only work if you use them correctly.^[1]

- Be as concrete, specific and reasonable about your tasks as possible. For example, don't just write "clean the house." Instead try "pick up the living room," "vacuum rug" or "take out the trash"—smaller, more discrete tasks are better.
- Don't let yourself get intimidated by or distracted by your to-do list. If you are spending all your time thinking of things you need to put on your list, that can be just as bad as not keeping one at all. Try to create your to-do list in one sitting and don't let yourself add to it throughout the day unless you have to.



2 Make a plan. Figure out what things on your list you can reasonably accomplish, and decide what order you are going to do them in. If you can, make a schedule for the day that includes when you are going to work on each task and when you are going to stop to eat or take a break.^[2]

- Be aware that tasks will often take more or less time than expected. Don't beat yourself up over this, and don't let it throw your whole plan out of whack. If something doesn't go as planned, just do your best to adjust your schedule and move on with your work.



3 Prioritize and do triage. Have the just way to many things on your plate to get everything done on time? Decide which things are most important and do those. You might have had big dreams of doing your taxes *and* washing the dog, but one or the other might have to wait. Trying to take on too much at a time is the fastest way to end up overwhelmed and unproductive.^[3]

- If there are tasks you have been meaning to do for a long time and never get done, don't let them hang over your head forever. Set yourself a deadline or pick a day to do them—or else decide that you can get by okay without them.



4 Set goals. Whether cleaning, studying or working, set reasonable but challenging goals for how much you are going to write, read, or create in a day. Don't let yourself quit until you've accomplished that amount. Try to be positive about your goals and don't let them intimidate you. Know that you can accomplish them if you stay focused.

- Consider creating rewards or punishments for yourself around your goals. Promise to treat yourself with something you want if you are successful.^[4] Threaten yourself with an undesirable consequence, such as donating money to a cause you disagree with. This works best if you can hand over control of the reward or punishment to a friend who won't let go back on your agreements.



5 Be mindful of your effectiveness. Don't get caught up thinking about how productive or unproductive you are being in the moment, but later do reflect on how well you stayed focused, how much you stuck to your plan, how accurate your schedule timing was. Note unexpected problems or disruptions to your workflow and think about what you can do to improve next time.

- Consider keeping a journal to jot down what worked and what didn't work at the end of each day.



6 Keep your tools and materials organized. Nothing will slow you down like not knowing where to find some vital file or object, or having to search through emails to remember the time of an appointment. Create robust systems to file information, store instruments, and record your appointments.^[5]



1 Remove distractions. We live in a world with an endless opportunity for stimulation and distraction. From TV to blogs to instant messaging, not to mention friends, family, and pets, it is so easy to spend just a minute on this and a minute on that and find the whole day lost. Don't let that happen! Keep your eyes on the prize by removing as many distractions and opportunities for distraction as possible.[6]

- Close your email and social media sites. Turn off any notifications that will interrupt your work. If you must, budget a few minutes into your day to check your inbox and updates for anything important, but having them open while you work is sure to lower your productivity.
- Use browser extensions to block time-wasting websites. The Internet is full of interesting pictures, .gifs, videos and articles that will eat away at your day if you aren't mindful. Install a browser extension like [StayFocusd](#), [Leechblock](#) or [Nanny](#) that will limit your time on distracting websites or keep you from checking them for certain periods during the day. You can also [block distracting sites on your iPhone](#). Do whatever you can to put the temptation to check the news, browse your favorite blogs or watch cat videos out of reach.[7]
- Turn off your phone. Don't answer calls, don't check text messages, nothing. Don't keep it near you. If it is important, whoever is calling will leave a message. If you are worried about emergencies, set aside one minute to check your phone every hour.
- Tell friends and family not to interrupt you. Keep your pets out of the room if they are going to be a problem.
- Use background noise to block out annoying noises and distractions. Constant background noise such as white, pink or brown noise but also natural noises such as the sound of rain or a river can help you to stay focused and boost your productivity. Use tools like [Noisli](#).
- Turn off the TV or radio. Depending on you and the nature of your task, a little background noise might be fine—especially music without lyrics—but any kind of media on around you will usually lower your productivity if your task requires mental focus.



2 Tackle one thing at a time. It's a common misconception that multitasking can make you more productive. The truth is we can only really do one thing at a time, and when we try to multitask we are just switching back and forth between different projects. Every time you make that switch, you lose time and focus. To be truly **productive**, pick one task and work on it until completion, then move on to something else.[8]



3 Keep your home or workspace tidy. Yes, cleaning up all the time takes time and effort, but a big mess can be distracting and you may end up losing more productivity than you saved. Keep your desk, house or workspace neat and organized, without clutter and with a minimum of loose objects to catch your eye.[9]

Method 3 of 3: Take Care of Yourself



- 1 Go to bed early and get enough sleep.** [10] Being tired or sleep-deprived will make you more distracted and less productive.[11]



- 2 Set your alarm, and get up as soon as it goes off.** Don't hit the snooze button over and over and end up oversleeping.[12] Oversleeping even a few minutes can throw off your schedule and leave you out of sorts all day.



3 Eat healthy meals. You may not notice it at first, but if you don't keep yourself nourished you will soon find yourself more distracted, stressed and scatterbrained. You will make mistakes and have to redo your work. Make sure you set aside time in your day to have full, healthy meals.[13]

- Avoid heavy meals that are going to make you sluggish and want to nap. Digestion takes energy, and processing a large, greasy meal will sap your strength and focus.



4 Take breaks. Don't exhaust yourself or force yourself to stare at the screen until you are a zombie. Every 15 minutes or so take 30 seconds to stretch and rest your eyes a bit. Every couple hours take five or ten minutes to do some exercise, have a snack and replenish your resolve.[14]



Expert Q&A

Question

What does it mean to be productive?



Arda Ozdemir, MA
Career & Life
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Expert Answer

It means that you're efficient, as in you're using your time wisely. If you can't get into the zone or connect with what you're doing, you probably aren't being very productive.

Helpful 14 Not Helpful 4

Question

How can I be less stressed when I have lots of things to do?



Community Answer

Make a to-do list, and order everything from the most important to the least important. Alternatively, you could start your list with the things that will take the least amount of time to complete.

Helpful 98 Not Helpful 17

Question

How can I finish something when I am not interested in it but need to finish it?



Community Answer

Make a little reward system for yourself. For example, every page you write, give yourself a small treat.

Helpful 69 Not Helpful 15

Question

Can I oversleep sometimes?



Community Answer

Everybody oversleeps sometimes. Just try to keep a steady sleeping schedule as much as possible.

Helpful 58 Not Helpful 18

Question

What do I do if I can't be productive because of depression?



Community Answer

Visit your GP and tell them how you are feeling, see about talking to a therapist and getting medication if necessary as there is no shame in getting yourself better. Also, having/getting a job, exercising regularly, eating healthier foods, and picking up hobbies all add to making structure in your life, keeping you busier and less focused on your depression.

Helpful 29 Not Helpful 13

Question

What if others try to interfere and criticize my plans and to-do list?



Community Answer

Explain your plan to them, telling them that you're trying to stick to a schedule. They should understand that your day is busy. Just don't lose sight of what's more important; in other words, set your priorities. If someone tries to criticize you, don't let it get to you; you should be proud of yourself for being motivated and productive. Ignore those who try and stand in your way or disrespect your efforts.

Helpful 21 Not Helpful 6

Question

How should I reward myself?



Community Answer

A snack, or perhaps spending a short time doing something you enjoy.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 11

Question

How can I stay motivated while I'm working?



Gerald Wels
Community Answer

Tie what you do to a bigger goal. Something you really desire. If your work is just a job that pays the bills and then some, make an effort to think of it in terms of providing shelter, food, and safety for you (and your family) - most people on this planet can't say they have that. If you want more out of life than just being content with having the basics covered, then you need to figure out what you (really) want and acquire the skills to get it.

Helpful 11 Not Helpful 2

Question

Is it okay to work on the weekends?



Community Answer

Yes, many people work on weekends with little choice. If you mean is it okay to work weekends as well as weekdays, then that depends on your levels of energy, beliefs and other commitments. For example, in some religions, the weekend is the sabbath, where people can never work. Or, you might have sports or other commitments that need to come first. It is your own decision to make.

Helpful 13 Not Helpful 3

Question

How can I be productive as a child?



Community Answer

The article [Make Your Own School Planner](#) can help you get organized, which is the cornerstone to productivity. Maintain a to-do list of your chores and obligations and keep a list of steps toward your goals that you're working on and review progress on it regularly to ensure you're on track. Right now your grades should be your primary focus, so do everything you can to maintain and, where necessary, improve them.

Helpful 10 Not Helpful 2

[See more answers](#)



Tips

- Prioritize. If one task is more important than another, do it first! It also helps to finish difficult tasks before the easy ones.
- If you have a lot to do, set aside a day that you don't have any plans and make it a productive day!
- Don't let yourself become overwhelmed with the amount of work. Take short breaks to calm down and break huge tasks into smaller ones if you feel you need to. Get up early, have a nice breakfast and relax.

References

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This article was co-authored by **Arda Ozdemir, MA**. Arda Ozdemir is the Executive Coach and Founder of Rise 2 Realize, a nonprofit organization in Palo Alto, California that is dedicated to providing a practical roadmap toward one's full potential in their life and career. Arda is a Reiki Master, an Emotional Freedom Technique Practitioner, and a certified HeartMath Trainer and Mentor. This article has been viewed 224,371 times.

★★★★☆
49 votes - 90%

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