

How to Make a To Do List

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It's easy to get overwhelmed when you have a lot on your plate. Between work responsibilities and personal obligations, life can get stressful, and it's even more stressful when you forget something important. By creating organized to-do lists, you can prioritize the things you need to do, keep track of what still needs to be finished, and feel productive and prepared in all areas of your life.

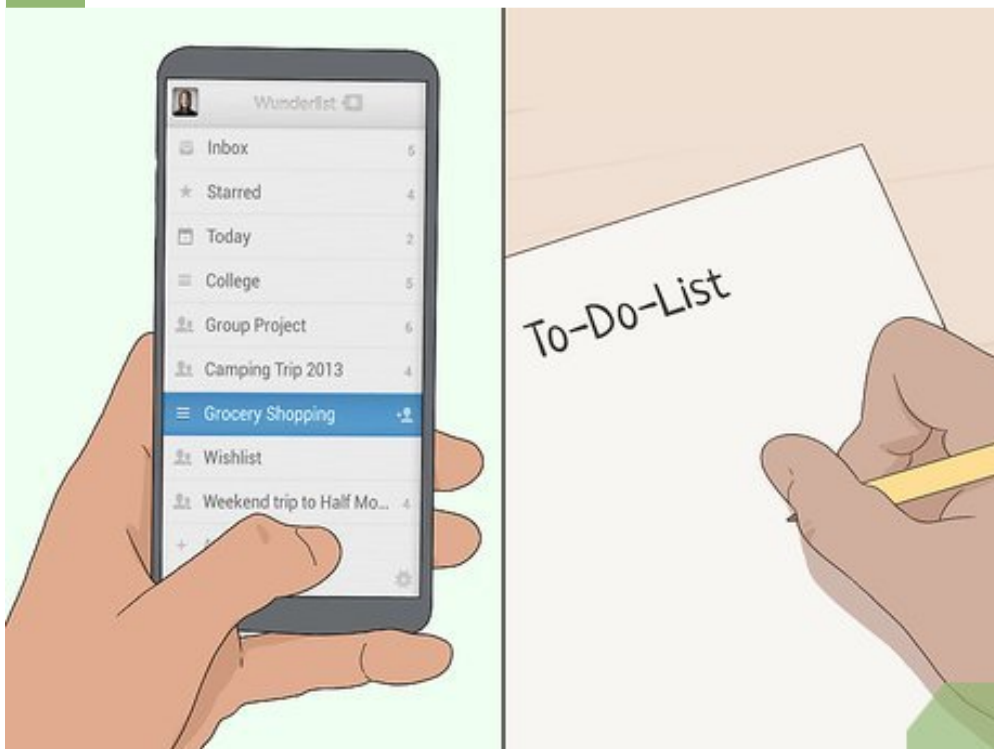
An editor has suggested a title change

 Make a To-Do List

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Part
1

Part 1 of 3: Brainstorming Your Tasks



1 **Decide what medium works best for you.** If your smartphone is in your hand all day every day, use the Notes application to create your to-do list. If you hate staring at a phone or computer screen, grab a pen or pencil and write your list by hand. A to-do list will not be helpful if you dread making it or using it, so choose whatever medium you prefer most.^[1]

- There are applications available for download, such as Any.do, Wunderlist, and Pocket Lists, that can help you organize your tasks in different ways.^[2]



2 List all of the tasks that you need to accomplish. [3] These can range from “Shower” to “Finish presentation for work next week” to “Find a present for Mom’s birthday next month.” As you can see, these tasks range in their nature, their importance, and the time they will take. Don’t worry about following a pattern or organizing them— that will happen later. For now, just write down every responsibility you think of.[4]

- Writing absolutely *everything* down, you will be getting it off your mind and onto paper. It will ensure you don’t forget anything, and hopefully, it will also help your mind feel less crammed.[5]
- The running list of every single task you have on your radar will be referred to as your master list.[6]



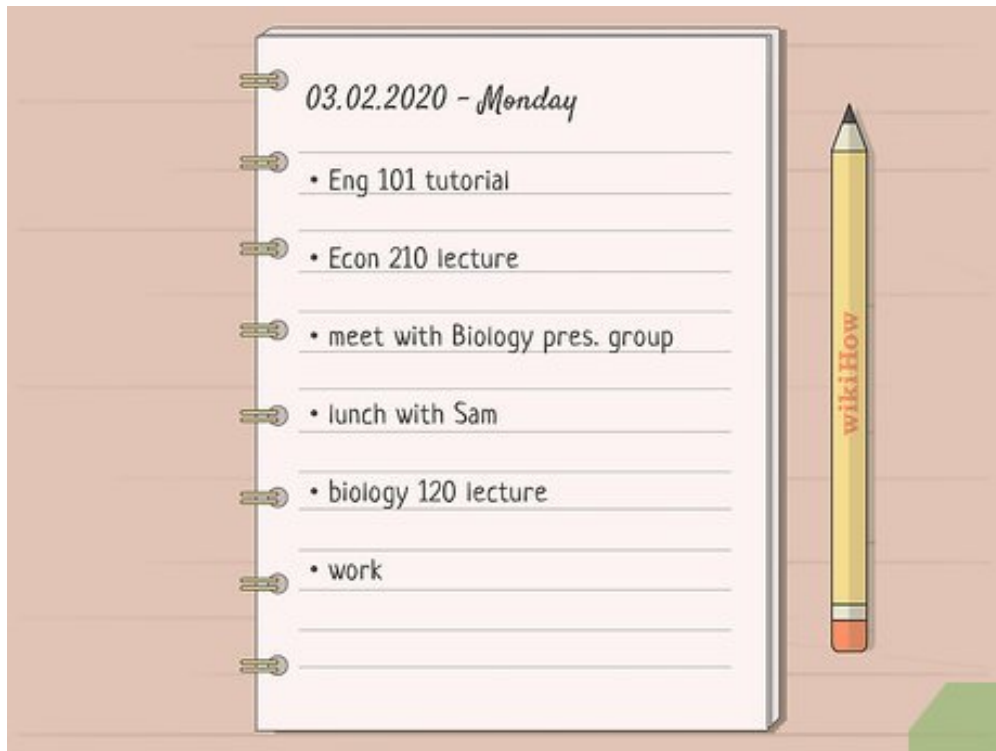
3 Outsource any tasks you can. After you've listed the things you need to do, decide if you can enlist any help. This is especially important if you are overwhelmed or crunched for time. Don't be afraid to ask for help, delegate duties, and resist the urge to micromanage. If it doesn't *need* to be on your to-do radar, remove it.

Part 2 of 3: Organizing Your Tasks



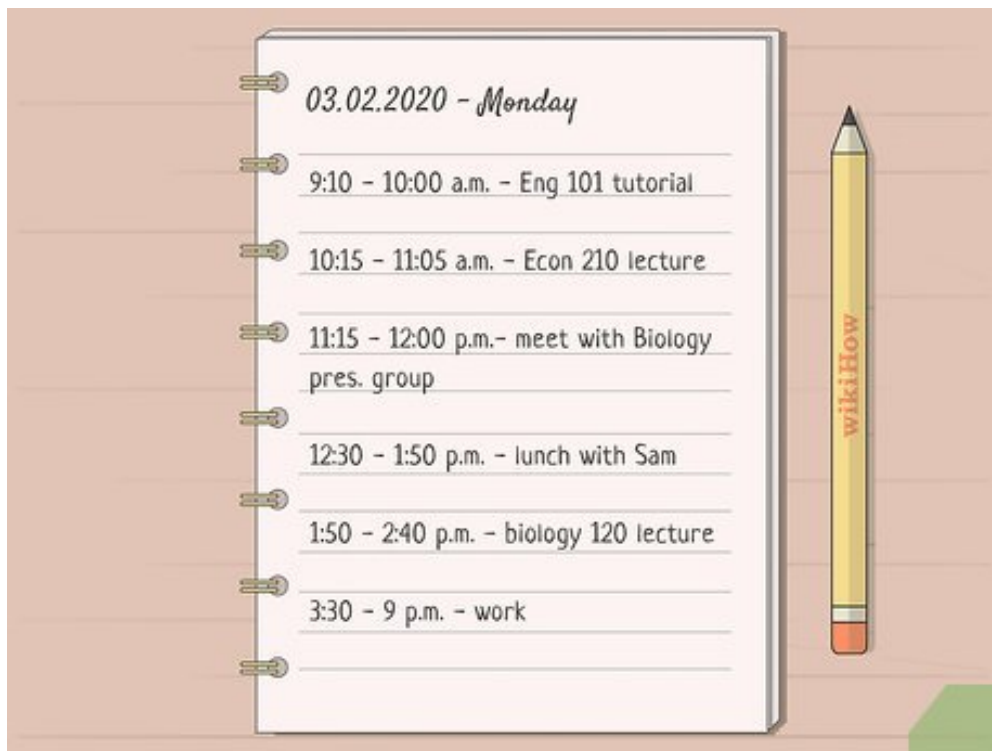
1 Sort your master list into categories. [7] For example, you may have a to-do list for work and a to-do list for home. By creating separate lists, you can focus your attention and energy on one set of tasks at a time. There is no point in looking at your personal to-do list while you're sitting in your office, so put it away!

- To be your most **productive**, you need to have tunnel vision on the tasks in front of you. Remove the background noise and the stress of future chores by making situation-specific lists.



2 Make your to-do lists for the current day only. Keep it simple! This will help you organize your tasks in order of priority, and you won't feel overwhelmed looking ahead at tasks for tomorrow, next week, or next month. Be realistic about what you can accomplish in 24 hours.^[8] Your daily to-do lists should have less than ten things, and maybe even less than five.^[9]

- If you can't figure out where to start, try this. Imagine you fast forward to bedtime. Which task do you want to be finished with first? That should be at the top of your list.
- Use your master list to make your daily lists. After you've created your daily list, put your master list away.



3 Estimate the time each task will take. Be realistic! If you over-commit yourself and constantly feel like you're running out of time to get your list done, you will create unnecessary stress. It's hard to be productive if you're feeling flustered. Next to each task, jot down how much time you truly think each one will take. Use these time estimates to plan your day.^[10]

- Give yourself a cushion of 10 to 15 minutes between each task. Realistically you cannot switch from one chore to another without any transition time, so consider this while you're making your schedule.



4 Make your list aesthetically-pleasing. This may sound superficial or unnecessary, but it really can help change the way you look at your to-do list. Write or type it out in your favorite color. Write on a piece of stationery, post it on a pretty bulletin board, or create a sleek document on your smartphone. Just create a list that inspires you to stay motivated and get things checked off.

Part 3 of 3: Holding Yourself Accountable



1 Write down due dates next to every task on your master list. These will help you as you are making your daily to-do lists. When you have a large number of tasks, it is easy to let things accidentally slip through the cracks. As you make your daily list each day, go over your master list and make sure you include any task with upcoming due dates.

- If there is no due date for a particular task, decide on a realistic date you'd really like to have it done by.
- If you aren't setting goals for yourself, the less urgent things may never get done.



2 Put your to-do list somewhere you will see it regularly. There is no point in creating a list if you shove it in a drawer and forget about it. Make sure you are constantly seeing it! You may think that you won't forget anything or that you'll stay productive, but physically seeing a list of tasks you need to accomplish can really light the motivational fire within you.

- Carry it around with you. Post it on your bathroom mirror. Leave a copy in your purse and your car. Just put it somewhere where it will be in your face.



3 Share your list with someone. It can be a parent, a friend, a significant other, or a co-worker. Just make sure it is someone who will check up on your list and inquire about your progress. You probably won't feel very good if you tell someone you didn't check anything off your to-do list for a whole day!^[11]

- You don't need a babysitter, and no one probably wants to be your babysitter. However, it is incredibly helpful to have someone holding you accountable.



Expert Q&A

Question

How can I make a to-do list?



Annie Lin, MBA
Life & Career Coach
Expert Answer

Just list everything you want to get done the morning of or night before so you have a plan for your day.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 1

Question

How can I prioritize my to-do list?



Annie Lin, MBA
Life & Career Coach
Expert Answer

Start with tasks that require the most focus so you can get them out of the way early.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

Question

How can I keep up with my habits?



Sandra Possing
Life Coach
Expert Answer

Start small and build up to what you want to accomplish. For example, if you want to exercise every day for 30 minutes, start by exercising twice a week for 10 minutes. As you get used to it, you can push yourself to do more. Habits are built on practice and repetition, so don't give up!

Helpful 13 Not Helpful 3

Question

What if I want to create a to do list, but I have nothing to do?



Juhon Samith
Community Answer

Make a master list on ways you want to develop yourself as a person, or how you intend to make your dreams come true.

Helpful 53 Not Helpful 7

Question

When should I create my to do list?



Community Answer

The day before is usually best, but the morning that you want to start completing it will also work.

Helpful 31 Not Helpful 4

Question

What type of handwriting should you use?



Community Answer

If you are going to hand write your to-do list, make sure to use neat, tidy handwriting so that you can easily read what you need to get done. If you can't decipher what you wrote down, you may forget something important!

Helpful 76 Not Helpful 16

Question

Can I just take a few breaks instead of taking a break between every task?



Community Answer

Of course. Do whatever works for you. Some people need more breaks than others. Just try to be mindful of when your attention starts to drift, when that happens it's probably time to take a break.

Helpful 24 Not Helpful 3

Question

How do I draw a task list?



Community Answer

Get a plain piece of paper and a ruler. On the paper, use the ruler to draw a box divided into two columns; the first column should be much thicker than the second. Then, divide those columns into boxes. In each box on the left (thicker) column, write a task that needs to be completed. In the smaller box on the right, place a check mark when you complete that task.

Helpful 28 Not Helpful 6

Question

Anything can go on the list?



Community Answer

Yes. It's up to you what you think needs doing.

Helpful 28 Not Helpful 9

Question

Should I write the tasks which are obvious, like exercise, bath, eat healthy?



Community Answer

Absolutely! You shouldn't forget to do any of these things, so schedule them in as well.

Helpful 27 Not Helpful 6

[See more answers](#)



Tips

- Start with tasks that require you to focus the most so you can feel a little more relaxed in the afternoon.^[12]

References

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3. ↑ Sandra Possing. Life Coach. Expert Interview. 13 August 2020.
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7. ↑ Sandra Possing. Life Coach. Expert Interview. 13 August 2020.
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12. ↑ Annie Lin, MBA. Life & Career Coach. Expert Interview. 25 November 2019.

About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Annie Lin, MBA**. Annie Lin is the founder of New York Life Coaching, a life and career coaching service based in Manhattan. Her holistic approach, combining elements from both Eastern and Western wisdom traditions, has made her a highly sought-after personal coach. Annie's work has been featured in Elle Magazine, NBC News, New York Magazine, and BBC World News. She holds an MBA degree from Oxford Brookes University. Annie is also the founder of the New York Life Coaching Institute which offers a comprehensive life coach certification program. Learn more: <https://newyorklifecoaching.com> This article has been viewed 274,192 times.

★★★★☆
72 votes - 87%

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