

A top-down view of a desk with a blue background. At the top is a white computer monitor. To the left is a white smartphone. At the bottom is a white keyboard and a white mouse. There are three sticky notes: one orange on the right with 'App @ / turn', one yellow on the right with 'Call / Answer', and one yellow on the left with 'Down Down Down'.

How To Boost Your Personal Productivity: A Complete Guide

Tips, Tricks, Frameworks & Apps For Building A Better Daily Routine

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What Is Productivity, Really?

Productivity isn't just about checking boxes off your to-do list; it's about making sure you're getting the right things done, in the right timeframe, in a successful and effective way.

Having a good productivity system in order, and an effective workflow you enjoy, is valuable not only for your work, but also your personal life. It starts by setting realistic goals, breaking those goals down into actionable tasks, and at the end of it all, asking yourself, "did I accomplish something meaningful with a measurable impact from what I set out to do?"

In this ebook, we'll take you through the steps of increasing your productivity by building a workflow that works best for you. We'll cover:

- How to establish productivity goals;
- How to prioritize tasks to use time more efficiently;
- The best techniques to boost your productivity;
- Tools you can use to increase your personal productivity

Let's dive right in...

How To Establish (Actually Useful) Goals

The first step towards being more productive is establishing the goals you want to achieve.

How will you determine your own productivity if you don't know the end result you're working towards?

Once you establish goals, you'll be able to more effectively prioritize tasks and set time management guidelines.

Take a moment to explore the true point of your project. Ideally it's one you're truly passionate about. Organize your thoughts in a way that works for you. You may or may not want to write them down, but following the process (even in your head) helps just the same.

Here's an example:



PROJECT ASSIGNED:

Write a monthly team report.

GOAL:

Showcase my team's accomplishments through a data-packed presentation and visually show the team what we've accomplished and how we can improve in the future.

Once you have a goal in mind, create a mission or purpose statement behind the goal you've set.

Whether you're passionate about a project or not, reminding yourself of the reason why you're doing a project is a helpful way to stay focused.

Once you have a goal and a mission statement in mind for your project, generate a to-do list of every task—small or large—that will be necessary to complete the project, including any “ideal” tasks that could be a part of your project but aren't critical.

Here's an example of a mission statement and task list based on the goal in our example:

MISSION STATEMENT:

I am proving my team's value by creating a monthly report that showcases both our wins and areas where we can improve. Doing so will motivate me, my team members, and other stakeholders to support my team's positive performance.

TASKS NEEDED TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT

- Research examples of team reports for inspiration
- Delegate data analysis of our team's metrics
- Create presentation with key insights and data
- Practice my presentation for the team.
- Present the report to my team.

When you set a goal and start working on the tasks without a mission behind the goal, it's easy to lose perspective on what you're trying to achieve.

Make sure you take the time to step back, reflect, and understand that even seemingly-tedious tasks are part of a larger project with a purpose, whether it's professional or personal.

It's also important to constantly improve. Not only does this mean improving the steps it takes to achieve your goal, it also means improving your personal productivity system, or even just yourself. Honing your process along the way will help you work more efficiently than you first expected, which means more goals accomplished!

With your goal and mission statement established, it's time to break down the steps needed to prioritize the tasks of your project.



PROJECT

GOAL

MISSION
STATEMENT

How To Prioritize The Right Tasks

One reason why many productivity systems fail is because you often have too much on your plate.

Being able to say “yes” to the right (read: goal-driven) things and “no” to the clutter that gets in the way is important when prioritizing tasks.

Prioritization means working along a purpose-driven path: you are aware of what you need to do, are capable of doing it, and know how to delegate anything else that requires help. Remember, having a clear understanding of the “why” means that you can easily discard any tasks that do not live up to your mission statement.

It’s also important to recognize that achieving your goals often requires collaboration with others. Get to know your strengths and weaknesses, then delegate tasks to others available to help fulfill your greater vision.

Let's go back to our project example to see how you might prioritize tasks for your goal path.

Establishing your priority and thinking through the time and effort each task will take is essential to being your most productive self.

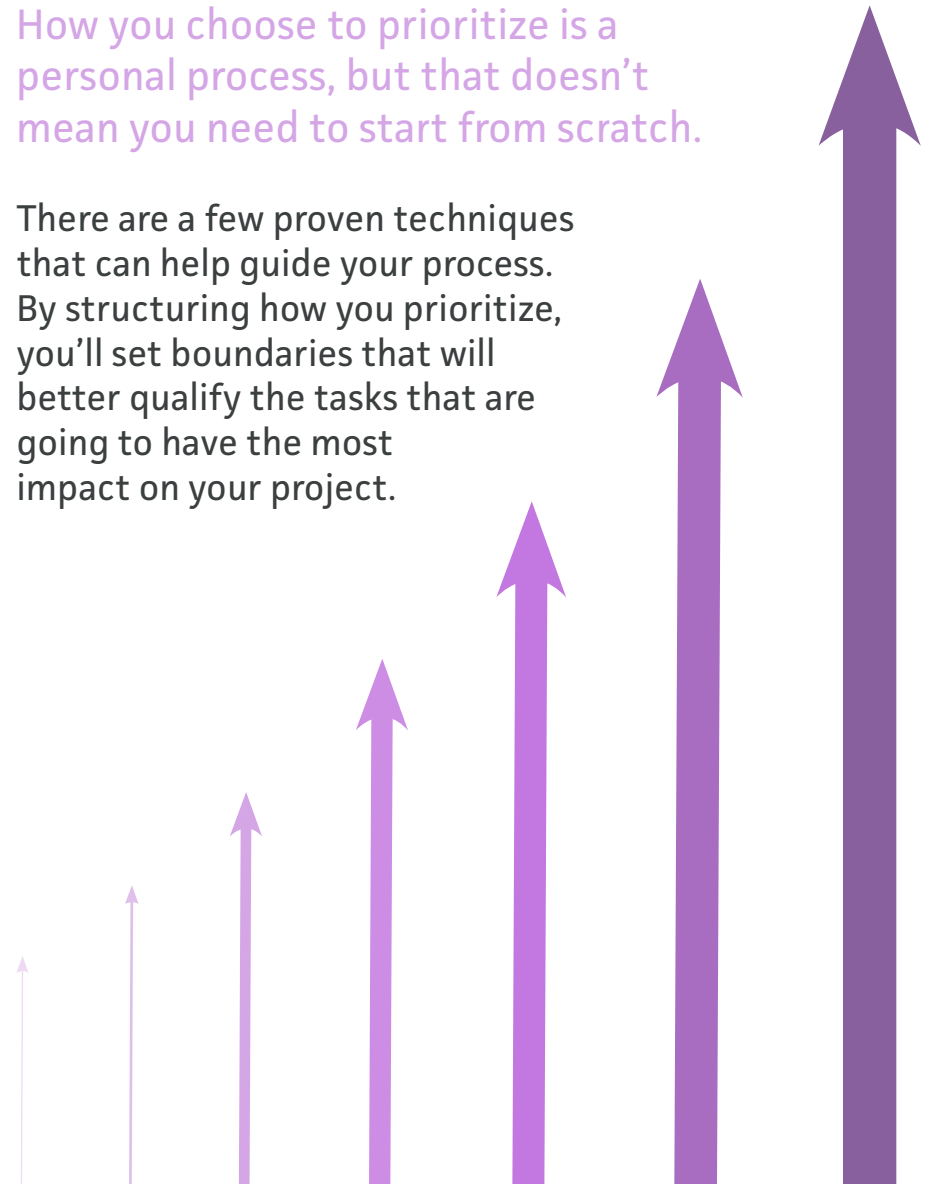
Different people prefer performing tasks in different orders. Whether you prefer to start easy or tackle difficult tasks first, prioritizing down to the details then organizing those tasks based on your own process is essential.

Task	Difficulty Level	Help Needed?	Priority #
Research examples of team reports for inspiration	3	No	1
Delegate data analysis of our team's metrics	1	Yes	2
Create a presentation with the information I've collected	5	No	3
Practice my presentation for the team	6	No	4
Present the report to my team	8	No	5

Best Techniques To Boost Your Productivity

How you choose to prioritize is a personal process, but that doesn't mean you need to start from scratch.

There are a few proven techniques that can help guide your process. By structuring how you prioritize, you'll set boundaries that will better qualify the tasks that are going to have the most impact on your project.



The 80/20 Rule

WHAT IS IT?

You may have heard of the 80/20 rule when it comes to sales in the business world. The idea is that 80% of profits will come from 20% of your customers. Therefore, you really want to spend the most time nurturing the smaller portion of your customers that are going to provide bigger profits for your company.

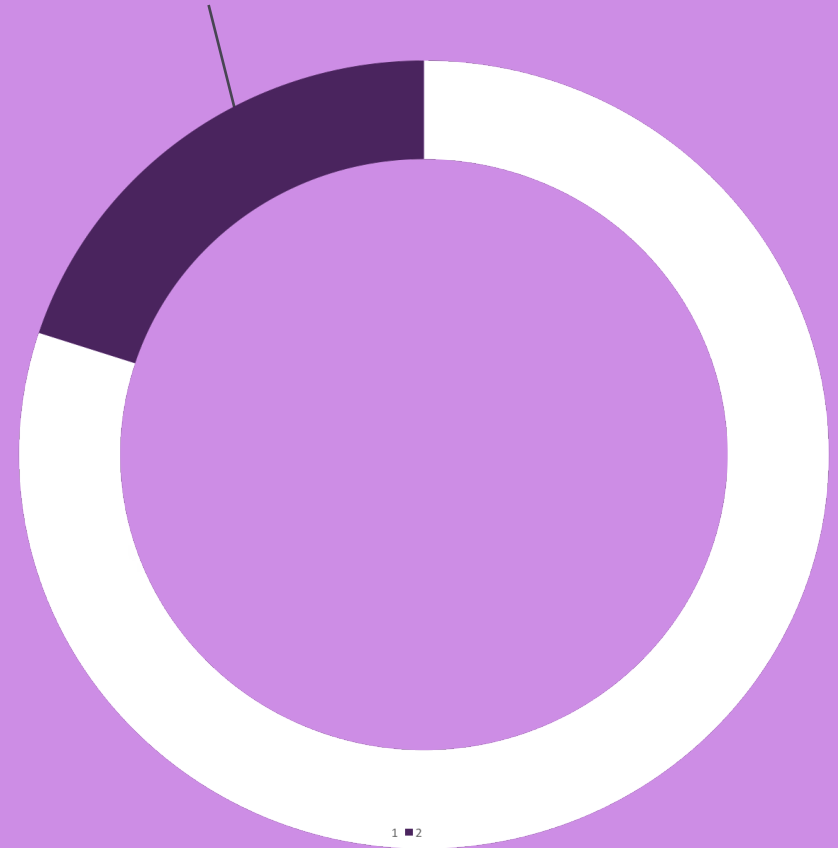
The same principle applies to your own productivity. 20% percent of your tasks are probably going to have 80% of the impact. By prioritizing the tasks that have the most impact first, you can let other tasks that may not be as impactful fall by the wayside or simply delegate them to someone else.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

One way to determine the impact of your tasks is to think about how many people one task or project will affect. Let's say you're a marketer, and one of the tasks on your to-do list is to make a video that will maybe reach 100 people, but the other task is to build a well-constructed newsletter that will be sent to a million users. Which task will have the most impact? Because the newsletter will have an overall greater marketing impact, prioritizing it over the video makes the most sense according to the 80/20 rule.

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**20% of Your Tasks Have
The Biggest Impact**



The Rule of Five

Working on this task right now

Working on this task right now

Working on this task next

Working on this task next

Not actually going to work on this task

The Rule Of Five

WHAT IS IT?

Joel Spolsky, co-founder of Trello and CEO of Stack Overflow, developed the Rule of 5. The concept is that no person should ever have more than five tasks on their to-do list at any given time.

According to this rule, two of your five tasks should be ones you are working on right now, two more should be the tasks you will be working on next, and one task should be something that people probably expect you to work on, but you're not actually planning on doing.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

Let's say you're managing a team project and you're typically in charge of planning and organizing your team meetings.

With the team project underway, your first four to-do list tasks are taken up already, and you know you'll probably put the team meeting off until the last minute. Because the team meeting is something you're "not actually going to do item," it's easier to delegate that last task to a team member who is able to pick up the task that you just can't prioritize right now. We're all busy, but procrastination doesn't need to be a roadblock!

Prioritizing just two things at once helps you make better use of your limited mental resources and prevents you from overloading on anxiety about your to-do list.

Additionally, if you have too many items on the table, then you end up constantly jumping back and forth between tasks. Doing so makes you suffer from [context switching](#), which ultimately makes you a less effective and less productive worker because you don't have a focus.

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The Eisenhower Matrix

WHAT IS IT?

Developed by the 34th US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Eisenhower Matrix allows you to create a system of prioritizing the most important tasks so that they don't get lost to the sudden, unexpected tasks that always seem to arise out of nowhere.

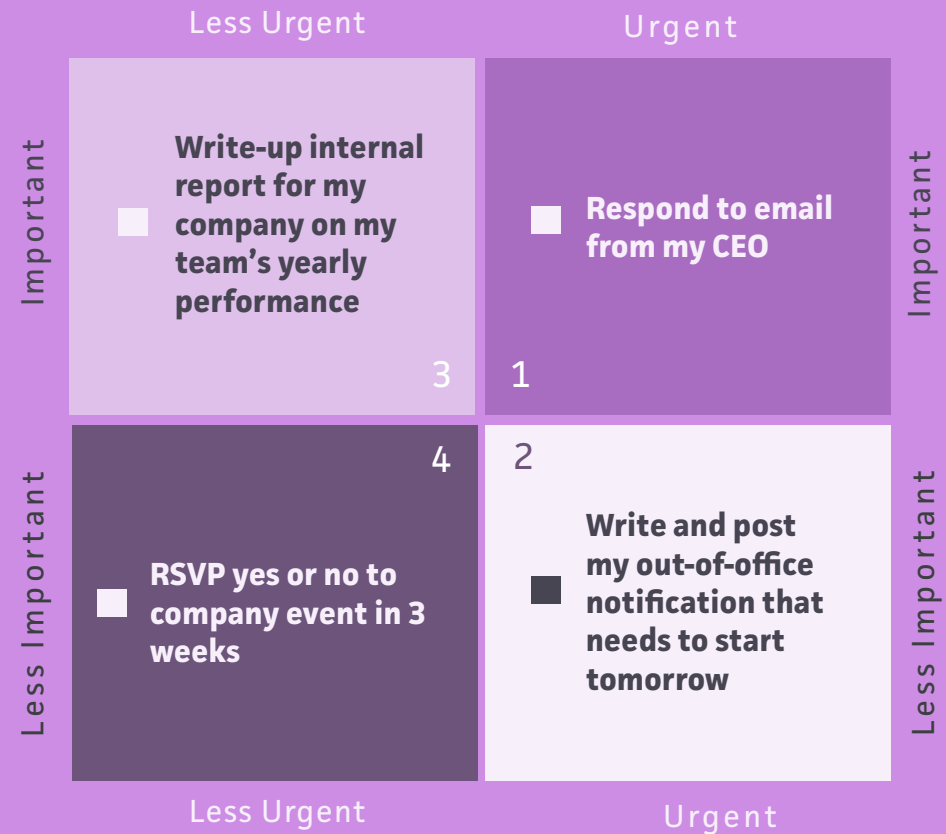
The idea is that all of your tasks can be sorted into four quadrants, with axes of "Important" and "Urgent". These four quadrants are given number values of 1 through 4 based on their priority.

Tasks that are both "Important" and "Urgent" receive a priority level of 1, and should be your focus. On the other end of the spectrum, tasks that are deemed both "Not Important" and "Not Urgent" should be put to the wayside. In the middle are tasks that can either be scheduled for "Next Up", or even delegated to someone else.

Assigning a task to each quadrant helps you remove decision-making from the process. Be like Ike! Stay productive by removing emotional overload from the equation and focus on your most valuable tasks.

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EXAMPLE IN ACTION



How To Manage Your Time (And Stay In Control)

Now that you've tackled your to-do list, it's time to think about how to manage your time given all of the prioritization work you've accomplished.

More and more studies show that multitasking is terrible for your productivity. While your brain might think you're getting more done, scientists have found that multitasking actually makes you work less effectively. Here are just a few of the many ways you can better structure your time if you want to be more productive.

Pomodoro Technique

WHAT IS IT?

The Pomodoro Technique maximizes time and efficiency by blocking out 25 minutes of uninterrupted focus, followed by 5 minutes of break time.

While it sounds easy, making yourself stay fully focused for 25 minutes straight can be a challenge. Be reasonable with yourself; try just starting with one block a day of uninterrupted focus.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

Pick a task that you can accomplish in 25 minutes and solely work on that task, letting no external distractions creep into your mind.

If you are able to do one Pomodoro session successfully, slowly expand until you can turn your day into a set of focused work sessions.

Don't forget! The Pomodoro Technique is built on the idea of true focused effort and taking breaks. So when your timer goes off, you have to make yourself take real breaks to rest your mind.

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Francesco Cirillo, the creator of the Pomodoro Technique, broke down this technique into 5 simple steps:

1. Choose a task to be accomplished.
2. Set a timer to 25 minutes.
3. Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings, then put a check on your sheet of paper.
4. Take a 5-minute break (this marks the completion of one "Pomodoro").
5. Every four Pomodoros, take a longer break.

If you think of an unrelated topic or task that needs to get done, make sure to jot down a note for yourself and deal with it later.



There are a lot of great tools and timers (even browser extensions!) that can help you implement the Pomodoro technique.

	Monday	Tuesday
8:00 AM	Check Email	Finish Project 1
9:00 AM	Scheduled Meetings	
10:00 AM		
11:00 AM	Work on Project 1	Scheduled Meetings
12:00 PM		Presentation Prep
1:00 PM		
2:00 PM	Work on Project 2	Finish Project 2
3:00 PM		
4:00 PM	Afternoon Snack	Respond to Email
5:00 PM	Respond to Email	

Time Boxing

WHAT IS IT?

Time boxing is another structured session technique, but on a larger scale. It can be all-too-easy to fall into a 60- or 80-hour workweek. With so much to get done, invoking the time boxing method will help you set limits on yourself so you can maintain a healthy work-life balance.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

With this technique, you have to say to yourself: “I’m only going to work 35 or 40 hours a week and I will get my tasks done in that time.” You may also want to apply time boxing to surfing the web before bed or watching TV on the weekends. Visualize the other activities you can enjoy with your earned time. By working within allotted time frames that are motivated by both personal and professional goals, you force yourself to be more efficient and you give yourself permission to have fun.

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Batching

WHAT IS IT?

Batching is a really simple technique that trains you to accomplish a lot of similar small tasks in one sitting.

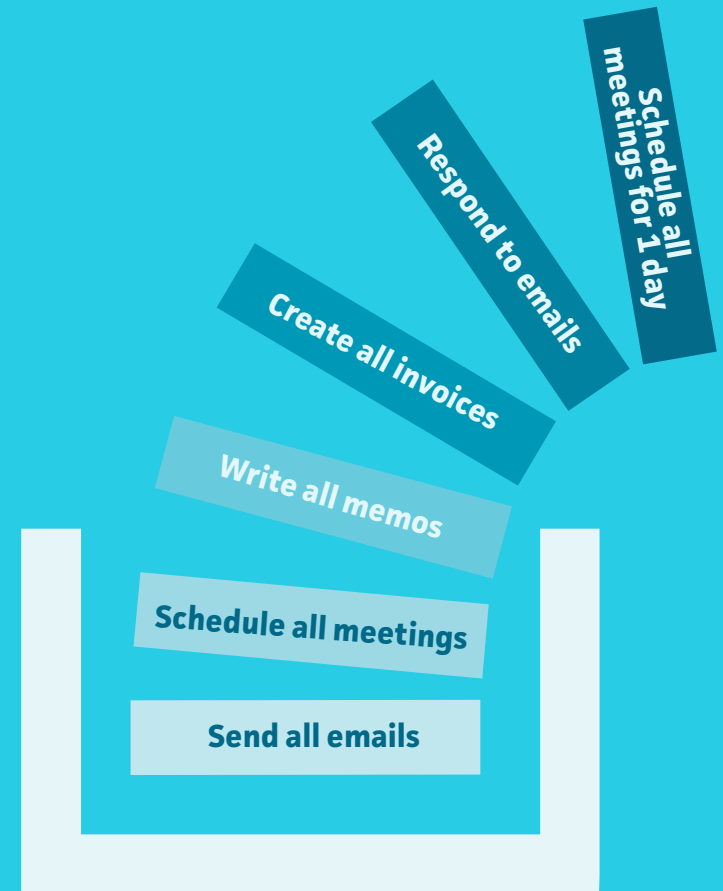
By grouping repetitive, regular tasks into concentrated work sessions, you turn many tasks into a single task, making you feel like you have more uninterrupted time blocks in your day to accomplish larger, time-demanding tasks. It also enables you to get into your workflow in the morning by starting with easy, repeatable tasks first—or keeps you productive at the end of your work day when your brain has maxed out on strategy and problem-solving.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION

For example, you might batch all of your social media scheduling for an entire week or all of your daily email correspondence in one hour per day.

To use the batching method, simply think of all of your different tasks that can be grouped together. It might be catching up email, filling out tedious forms or paperworks, filing expenses and receipts, or scheduling all of your meetings. Do those types of tasks at once so that your mind is not switching back and forth all day.

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Ultradian Rhythm

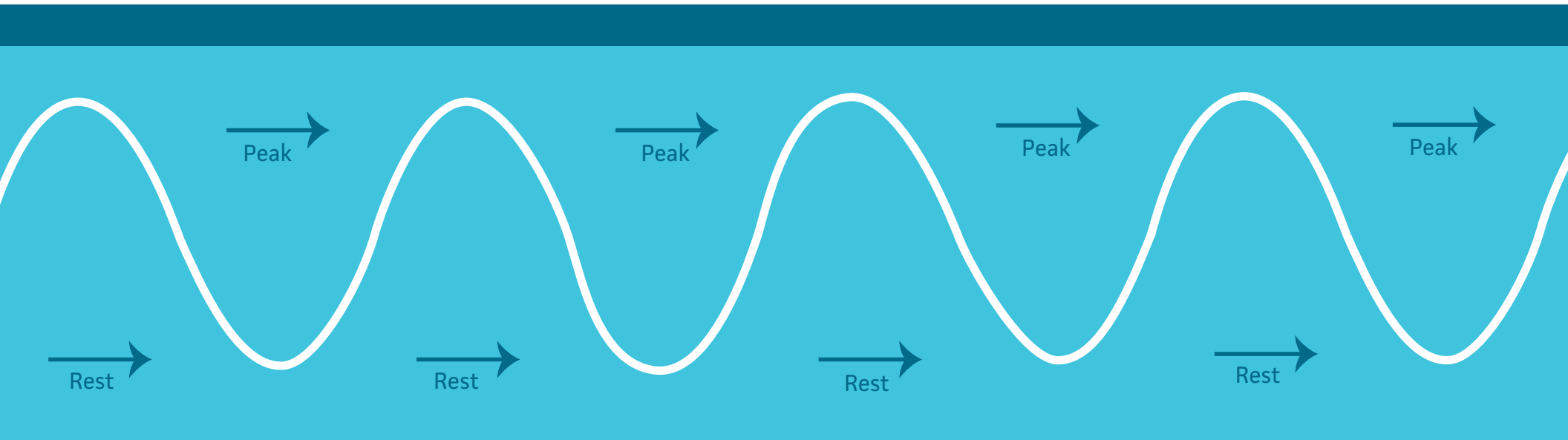
WHAT IS IT?

Another important technique you can try is following your body's ultradian rhythm. The ultradian rhythm is made up of 90 to 120 minute cycles where you'll be at peak productivity, followed by 20 minute lulls. Focus on your most difficult tasks during your most productive cycles and then complete less difficult, mentally intensive tasks during your 20 minute lulls.

EXAMPLE IN ACTION:

Easy enough, right? So how do you find your ultradian rhythm? First, create a log or journal where you can score (on a scale of 1-10) your focus, energy, and motivation for every waking hour, every day, for three weeks.

After three weeks, review your log. Hopefully, you'll start to notice trends in your scores, which will enable you to figure out which times of day are your most productive hours and days.



Once you've taken the time to get to know your own natural rhythm, you can use this personal data to set a more productive schedule for yourself.

Don't forget to also note days or times when you feel least energetic or productive and take note of any circumstances that impact your productivity.

Maybe you had a cold one day, or maybe you realize you feel lethargic around 1 pm everyday. By taking these notes, you can build rest or coffee breaks into your days to make you more productive.

In the end, take all of your findings and figure out your ultimate productivity schedule. You might realize that it doesn't look like a typical 9-5 workday, or discover that you're a creative night owl. Ideally, you can find a schedule that works best for you based on your peak productivity hours.

[LEARN MORE](#)

	Monday
10:00 AM	Peak Productivity Hours Based On My Ultradian Rhythm
10:20 AM	
10:40 AM	
11:00 AM	
11:20 AM	Planned Rest
11:40 AM	Peak Productivity Hours Based On My Ultradian Rhythm
12:00 PM	
12:20 PM	
12:40 PM	
1:00 PM	Planned Rest

PRO TIP

Create margins. Instead of a creating an unrealistic, rigid schedule, create margins for yourself so you can let your productive moments flow into the next. **By having too rigid of a schedule, you'll cause yourself to burn out.**

Instead, take breaks, go for walks, plan for Netflix nights, and immerse yourself in things that relax you to make sure you're not burning out.

Forgive Yourself

When trying to manage your time effectively, you have to remember not to be too hard on yourself. Not all hours or days are the same, and it's impossible for anybody to be giving their all 100% of the time. You might have an amazingly productive 60 minutes, but then the next hour is a total dud.

Feeling guilty about that dud hour only means that you will carry over that lack of productivity and a bad mood into your next potentially-productive hour.

Understand that you will have productive moments and less productive moments. Recognize when you are in a good state, and take advantage of it to get as much done as possible. Accept the slower times, and switch gears to still give yourself a benefit in some way or another.

Best Tools To Use For Personal Productivity

Part of being your most productive self is ensuring that you're making use of tools and tech to leverage your effectiveness.

Luckily, there are plenty of tools we can recommend to help you enhance your productivity, get more done, and collaborate better with others.

PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS



To build your best personal productivity routine, you need perspective. For many people, having a visual representation of the scope of their goals, tasks, and projects can give them the right understanding of how to best manage their time and to-do's.

Trello is a visual collaboration tool that gives you, and everyone you work with, perspective on what needs to get done. A Trello board is flexible and open to interpretation, meaning you can use it to apply any productivity frameworks you're learning about here to your daily routine. From creating powerful to-do lists to organizing all of your documents and brainstorms, Trello is a great productivity tool to help you manage your time and projects effectively.

Millions of people use Trello everyday to get more done. Check out these [beginner tips for using Trello](#) or get inspired with [sample Trello boards](#) that are free to copy and adapt for your workflows.





One Tab

When it comes to checking tasks off of your to-do list, focus is key. One awesome tool that helps you find focus is One Tab. This extension takes all of the open tabs you have in your browser and combines them into just one list, on one tab.

Stop being a digital packrat, and free yourself from the distraction of all of those open tabs. Like a cluttered room, when you have a million tabs open, you'll unnecessarily feel the weight of all of the other tasks on your to-do list.

TIME MANAGEMENT APPS

The average person checks their phone up to 150 times a day. Some of those instances were probably necessary, but mindlessly checking your phone can be a productivity killer.

Time management apps can help you stay focused on your work and not on your phone. Here are three ways to silence device distractions.



Offtime

Offtime lets you set time blocks where you can temporarily turn off notifications. You can even set categories like “family” and “work” so that you still remain connected to certain areas of your life if need be. Offtime also shows you analytics about your phone usage, giving you a better perspective on how your phone might be hurting your productivity.

Flipd

Flipd, like Offtime, allows you to turn off your notifications. However, it also actually initiates a custom lock screen with a timer to prevent you from opening your phone. If you’re having one of those days where your texts and social media are blowing up, Flipd is the tool for you. It forces you to focus while still letting you save emergency contacts in case someone desperately needs to reach you. Flipd also offers a social aspect by connecting you to the rest of the community of Flipd users. You can even complete productivity challenges with others if competition motivates you!

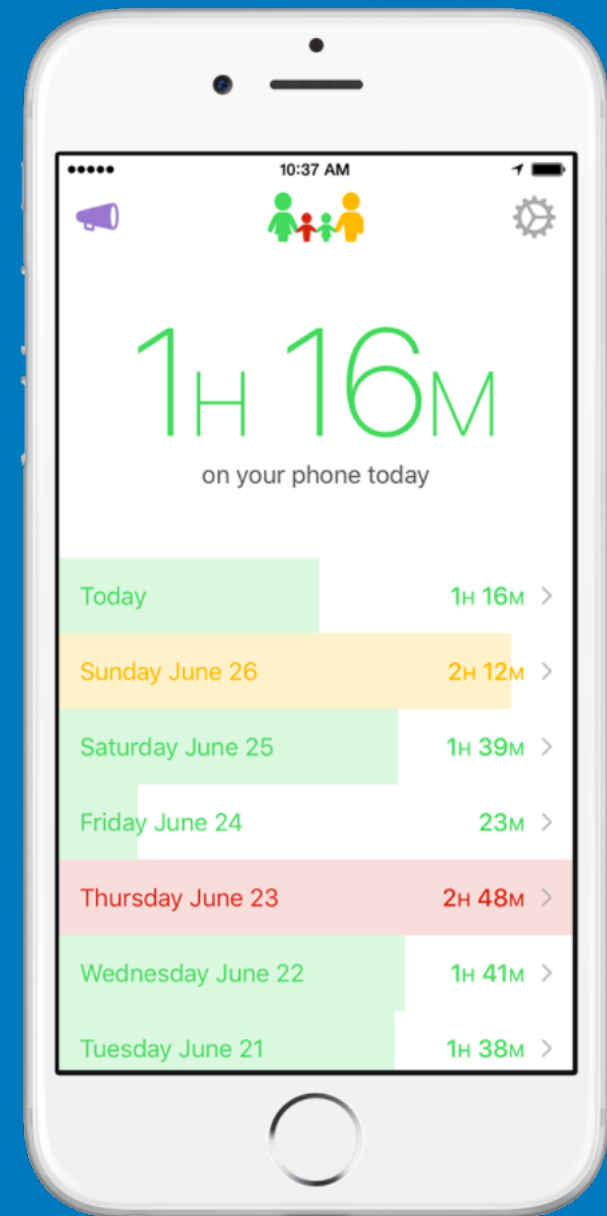
Moment (IOS Only)

Moment provides you with daily data about your phone usage. Feel like you should set a limit on yourself? Moment lets you do that. The app will actually blank out your screen and remind you to set your phone down and chill out in the real world if you go over your self-imposed limits. It also has a traffic light reminder to notify you when you're in the red zone.

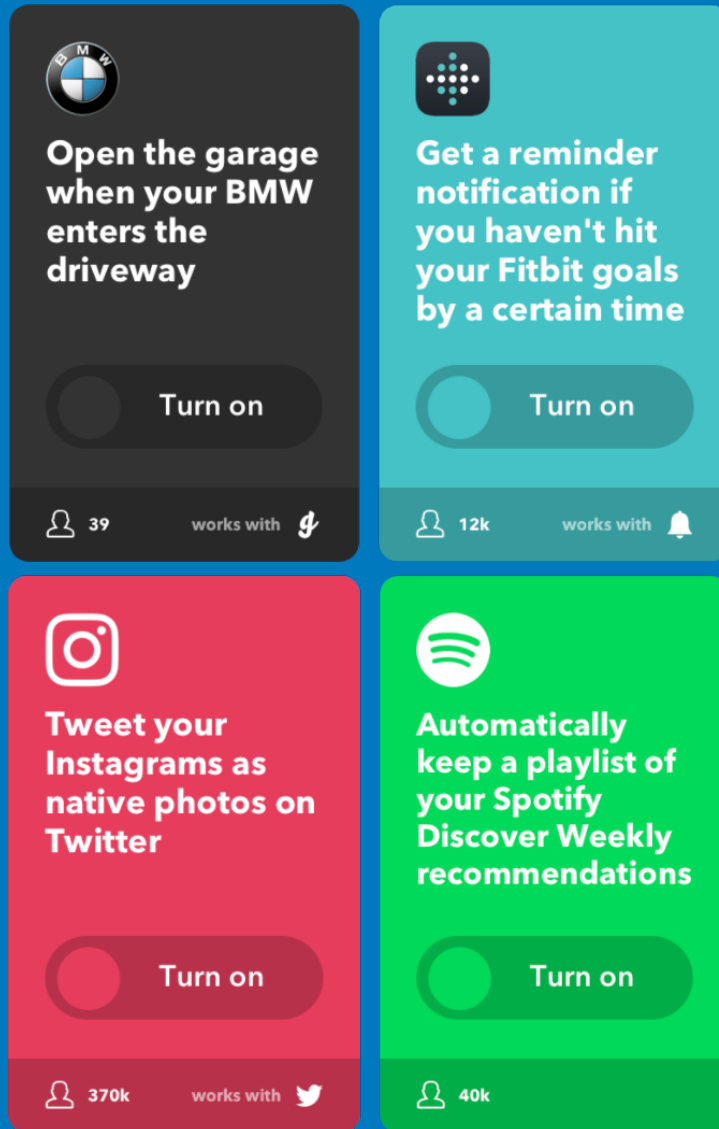
Harvest

Especially if you're working with clients, Harvest is the tool for you. Harvest allows you to track time and keep track of how long you are spending on each task.

You can even use Harvest as a productivity hack. Everyone has repeatable tasks, so by tracking your time each time you complete them, you can collect real data on your consistency. In fact, time tracking apps like Harvest can give you a boost on your ultradian rhythm project! Love Trello and Harvest? There's even a [Harvest Power-Up for Trello](#) so you can start timers directly from Trello cards.



AUTOMATION APPS



We all have recurring tasks that take up small amounts of time but are massive productivity killers.

Whether it's adding data to spreadsheets or scheduling your tweets on social media, using technology to eliminate those tasks helps you stay productive. [Zapier](#) and [If This Then That \(IFTTT\)](#) are two tools you can use to automate your life.

They can connect your apps in all kinds of ways to make your life easier. Set up reminders on your calendar from your Fitbit, auto-add new contacts from your iPhone to your Gmail or save tweets you like to a Google Sheet. You can have Siri communicate with your Trello boards, turn "starred" emails in Gmail into Trello cards and sync Trello with your other productivity apps like Evernote.

The key is to think of simple, repetitive tasks that you do manually—like making to-do's out of emails or calendar invites—and then building an automation network to support them. [Learn more](#) about how to add automation to your workflows properly.

Be the Boss: Boost Your Productivity

Productivity is personal, and improving it takes focus on your daily routines and habits (including those tendencies to push things off!).

The next step is up to you. Use this guide to start applying the tools, techniques, and pro tips you need to boost your productivity.

From here on out, you're the boss. Being more productive is all about putting these strategies into a plan that works best for you.

We're part of a larger community of productive people. Tell us: How do you stay on top of your to-do lists? What helps you be a productivity boss?

Reach us on [Twitter](#) and come join us in our [Trello community](#).