

Time Management

Being able to manage your own time is a crucial skill in the workplace.

If you work for yourself, it's even more important – poor time management could spell the end of your business, or at least make you less successful than you'd hoped.

Poor time management can be at the essence of many problems.

If you find yourself taking work home in the evenings, it might not be because you've got too much work but because you're not managing your time well during the day.

And if you're often stressed out and frustrated by your work, this might be a time management issue too

If you know your time management skills aren't quite up to scratch, try these simple steps to improve:

Use Scheduling Tools

It doesn't matter what kind of scheduling tools you use – some people like a paper diary, others use outlook or google calendars, and others have a custom build software programs to assist in their search for tools to help them manage their time. What's important is that you **have** a scheduling tool and that you *use* it.

Your scheduling tools should let you keep track of your appointments. If you've ever forgotten a meeting, or double-booked yourself, you'll know why this matters! It's also useful if there's space for a daily to-do list. Remember to allow for interruptions (block out at least an hour a day for interruptions, if they don't happen, then you are well in front)

Write a To-Do List "Every Day"

How do you begin your working day? Many people start off by checking their emails, and then jump into tackling whatever happens to have come in. It's easy to end up spending the whole day on minor tasks, rather than tackling the work that *really* needs to be done.

At the end of the day, take five or ten minutes to write down a list of what you want to accomplish the following day. You'll probably have a few task-critical items ("finish client's report") and a few things that are effectively just reminders of small tasks ("phone new client").

Writing down the your items helps you focus on them right from the beginning of the day; writing down the small ones means you don't have to use up valuable mental energy trying to remember them. **Remember to allow for interruptions (block out at least an hour a day for interruptions, if they don't happen, then you are well in front)**

Prioritize by Importance

How do you decide which tasks to tackle first? If you go for the ones that seem most urgent – with the closest deadline, or the loudest client – then you might end up shoving aside more important things. Sometimes, prioritising by urgency makes sense, but as a general rule, you should be tackling the important tasks first.

One way to do that is by dividing your day into two halves: work on important, longer-term tasks in the morning, and on urgent tasks in the afternoon.

If those urgent things truly need to get done by 4pm, you'll probably manage them just fine -- without spending the whole day caught up in them.

Understand Your Peak Times of Day

Are you a morning person or a night owl? Do you find it easier to focus at 10am or 10pm? We all have peaks and troughs of energy throughout the day – and it's useful to get to know when your best (and worst) times are.

For me, early mornings and evenings are the best time: I use the mornings to push out the more creative and mind thoughtful work with, the evenings for my most strategic work. Afternoons are when I deal with editing, admin, emails, and other smaller tasks.

I have a slump around 2pm - 4pm, when I'm tired and unable to focus. I can easily accomplish twice as much between 8am - 10am as between 2pm - 4pm. Your ups and downs may be very different from mine – but by figuring out when they are, you can plan your work and manage your time more effectively.

Take Regular Breaks

If you're aiming to improve your time management, you might try to do so by working steadily for hours without stopping, but this isn't going to make you more productive. By taking regular breaks, you give yourself a chance to switch off and recharge.

Most people can only focus for around 25 - 45 minutes before needing a brief break (even if it's just five minutes to get up, grab a glass of water, and move around a bit).

Planned breaks are crucial: don't simply work until you get stuck or run out of steam. If you know you're going to take a break at 11am and it's 10.40, it's easy to stay focused – you may even find yourself working harder to get a task completed before your break.

Check Email Less Often

Do you keep your inbox open constantly? Or do you find yourself checking emails every half-hour? If so, you're destroying your ability to get into the zone with your work. Yes, your clients and colleagues might like it that you always reply promptly – but if this pulls you away from your actual work, you aren't doing anyone any favors.

Try checking email a bit less frequently. That might mean every two hours, or just once or twice a day, depending on your industry and the expectations of your boss or clients.

You'll find that you're not only more focused, you're able to get through your emails in less time, because you can tackle them as one batch.