

Have you ever found yourself using the phrase, “There just aren’t enough hours in the day”? Everyone feels this way from time to time, whether you are a working parent, busy entrepreneur, student, or any other human in our fast-paced world. Now think about it this way: Everyone has the same amount of hours in the day. So how do some people successfully balance all their work and personal responsibilities more easily than others? The answer is time management skills.

Time management is the ability to use your time productively and effectively. Good time management skills enable you to work smarter, not harder, and accomplish more in less time. This guide will provide you with strategies to avoid procrastination, use your time effectively, and get things done.

There are many things in life that are outside of your control, but how you spend your time is not one of them. Using your hours to work toward the outcomes you value most will not only keep you productive, but it will also keep you fulfilled knowing that you are accomplishing your goals. Fortunately, there are many tools and tricks to help us manage our time more effectively to get things done.



## Procrastination

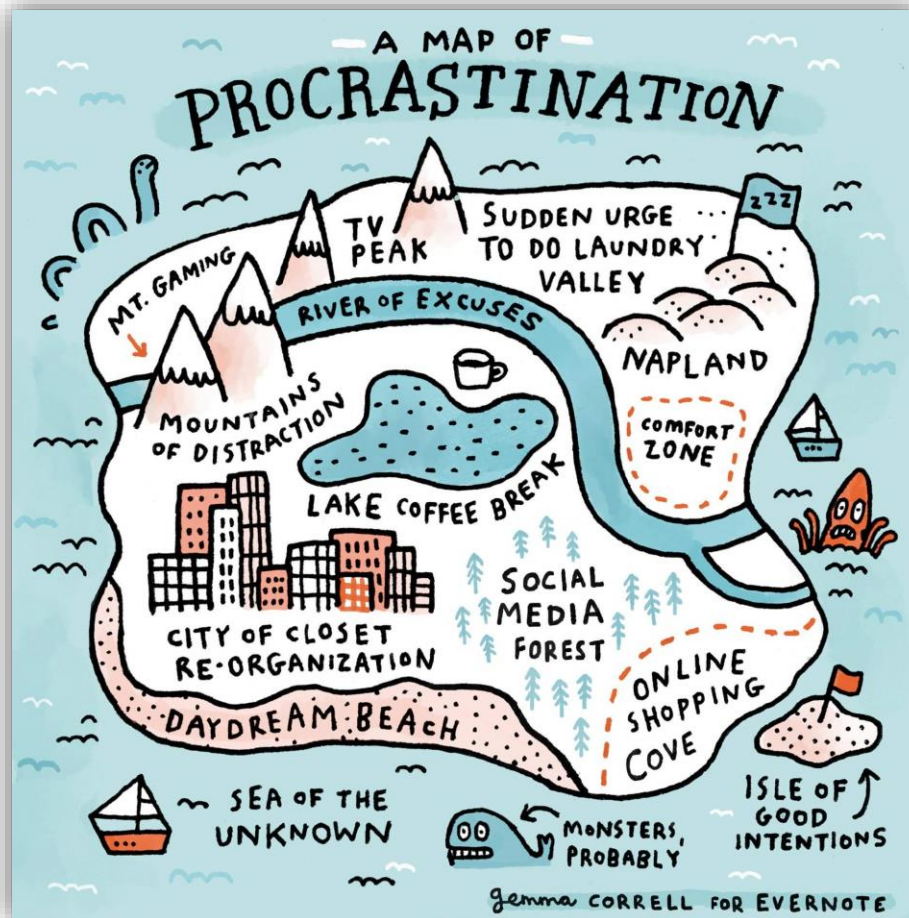
---

### What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is the act of unnecessarily postponing decisions or actions, and it is a trap that we all fall into from time to time. We all know that feeling when we’re rushing to finish something that we knew we should have started earlier. We scramble to get it done and endure the stress and anxiety that comes with procrastination.

Procrastination is often confused with laziness, but they are very different. Procrastination is an active process because you choose to do something else instead of the task that you know you should be doing. For example, you know you have a deadline coming up at the end of the week, but you’re dreading getting started. So instead, you spend your time checking your email, talking with a co-worker, or going out for coffee, rather than getting started. In contrast, laziness is a voluntary unwillingness to exert the effort required.

Procrastination can affect many parts of our lives. Not getting that irritating symptom checked out leaves an unknown disease untreated. Avoiding a difficult conversation only prolongs the conflict. And delaying an important life decision like breaking up, making a serious commitment, going back to school, or finally changing career paths, can lead to running in place for years.



## How to Overcome Procrastination

There are several strategies we can employ to stop procrastinating.

### **Step 1: Recognize that you're procrastinating.**

The first step to avoid procrastinating on something important is to recognize that you are delaying. You may be procrastinating if you:

- Fill your day with low-priority tasks.
- Leave an item on your To-Do list for a long time, even though it's important.
- Read emails several times over without making a decision on what to do with them.
- Start a high-priority task and then go off to make a coffee.

- Fill your time with unimportant tasks that other people ask you to do, instead of getting on with the important tasks already on your list.
- Wait to be in the "right mood" or for the "right time" to tackle a task.

## **Step 2: Work Out WHY You're Procrastinating**

We all procrastinate for different reasons, but the end result is usually the same – we unnecessarily postpone doing a task that needs to get done. Some of the reasons that might cause you to procrastinate include:

- Having abstract goals, instead of clearly defined goals
- Prioritizing short-term gratification, instead of long-term wellbeing
- Feeling indecisive
- Feeling overwhelmed by the number or size of tasks
- Feeling anxious about a task
- Perfectionism or being afraid to make a mistake
- Fear of negative feedback or failure
- Depression
- Lack of motivation



It is also important to recognize **when and how** you procrastinate.

- **When you procrastinate:** This involves asking yourself in what situations you procrastinate. For example, do you tend to procrastinate more when you are working from home compared to when you are working in an office? Do you struggle to finish tasks after you have started them or do you struggle to get started in the first place?
- **How you procrastinate:** This involves asking yourself what you do when you're procrastinating. For example, do you browse social media, play video games, watch TV shows, go out with friends, or find small and unimportant tasks to complete?

By taking the time to clearly identify the nature of your procrastination problem, you can then figure out a valid way to deal with it, instead of just hoping that things will be different in the future.

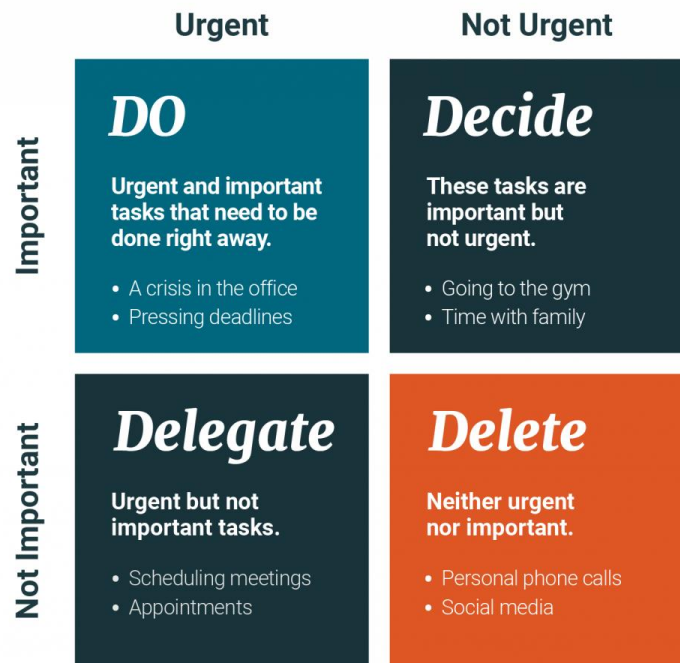
Your solution for overcoming procrastination will usually depend on what is causing you to procrastinate in the first place. For instance, are you avoiding a particular task because you find it boring or unpleasant? If so, take steps to get it out of the way quickly so that you can focus on the aspects of your job that you find more enjoyable. Or maybe you're feeling overwhelmed by the scope of a task. It might help to break it up into smaller, more manageable chunks, and to set goals for when you finish each part.

## **Step 3: Adopt Anti-Procrastination Strategies**

Procrastination is often a habit – a deeply ingrained pattern of behavior. This means that you probably can't break it overnight. Undesirable habits only change or end when you stop performing the habit or replace it with a new more desirable habit. The following strategies, when practiced, may give you the best possible chance to successfully end procrastination.

- **Start by establishing the goals of your tasks.** Define your goals as clearly as possible, and ensure these goals are meaningful and realistic. are significant enough that they will allow you to make meaningful progress, while also being realistic for you to accomplish. Also, make sure your goals are time-bound, with clear deadlines.
- **Prioritize tasks based on how important they are.** This will ensure that you don't end up procrastinating by wasting time on trivial tasks while neglecting important ones. Two common methods for prioritizing your tasks are the following:

- **The Ivy Lee method:** This method involves preparing a to-do list at the end of each day and writing down a list of six tasks that you want to complete tomorrow, ranked in order of importance.
- **The Eisenhower Matrix:** This method involves categorizing each task that you have based on whether it is important or unimportant, and urgent or not urgent, and then prioritizing your tasks based on these criteria (see graphic).



- **Tackle the hardest tasks at your peak times.** Do you work better in the morning or the afternoon? Identify when you're most effective, and do the tasks that you find most difficult at these times. In addition, you should also identify your *slump* times, which are the times of the day when you're least productive, and then plan your schedule so that only your breaks or most simple tasks are scheduled for those time periods.



- **Aim to "eat a frog" first thing, every day.** There's an old saying that if the first thing you do each morning is eat a live frog, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're done with the worst thing you'll have to do all day. In other words, get those tasks that you find least pleasant out of the way early. This will give you the rest of the day to concentrate on work that you find more enjoyable.

• **Break up large tasks.** If you are prone to delaying big projects because you find them overwhelming, try breaking them down into more manageable chunks. Organize your projects into smaller tasks and focus on starting them, rather than on finishing them. And don't forget to set deadlines for each chunk!

- **Promise yourself a reward.** If you complete a difficult task on time, reward yourself with a treat, such as a slice of cake or a coffee from your favorite coffee shop. And make sure you notice how good it feels to finish things!
- **Minimize distractions.** Turn off your email and social media and avoid sitting anywhere near a television while you work.
- **Ask someone to check up on you.** Allow others to hold you accountable to whatever goal or task you want to accomplish.

- **Act as you go.** Tackle tasks as soon as they arise, rather than letting them build up over another day.

Develop techniques for overcoming procrastination based on why you find yourself procrastinating in the first place. By identifying the reasons for procrastinating, you can try to set yourself up for success by motivating yourself and minimizing distractions.



**Reflection Questions:** When and why do you find yourself procrastinating? What strategies will you try to address your procrastination habits?

## Strategies for Staying on Task

Even if we can overcome procrastination and get started on a project or activity, it can still be hard to stay on task. Before we plan our time, we need to honestly reflect on how well we stay on task and address issues that keep us from starting and finishing projects. You can use various time management techniques in order to make it easier for yourself to get started on your work and to remain focused once you've started. Here are some strategies you can try:

### Use a Calendar or Planner

Time management would not be possible without calendars. They help to plan work, meetings, deadlines, important events, and personal responsibilities. Not only will using a calendar help you properly organize your work and personal life, calendars also give you a detailed insight into all the things you need to do. If you can plan your daily, weekly, or monthly tasks, the rest comes easily. Here are some tips for using a calendar or planner as a time management tool:

- **Write it down immediately** - Write down every meeting, event, deadline, appointment or other important date as soon as you are aware of it. This is the most basic calendar management tip that will keep you from forgetting about important events and it will ensure that you are aware of all your deadlines.
- **Find a calendar or planner that actually works for you** – The options are limitless, from physical wall calendars to fancy planners to apps and other digital calendars. Find a system that is easy for you to use and has all the features you find necessary.
- **Use reminders** - If using a digital calendar, set reminders for the things you don't want to forget or for recurring events.
- **Use one calendar** - You may be tempted to have two calendars - one for work and one for personal events. Having two calendars may be too much to keep track of as you will constantly have to juggle between the two.
- **Review Frequently** - When you review your calendar, you can clear outdated tasks, make sure events don't overlap, and gain a fresh perspective on your agenda. It is also a good idea to review your calendar before each day or before the start of the week so that you are mindful of what is coming up.





- **Purposefully leave free time on your calendar** – Whether it's a couple of hours or a whole day, this is especially important for catching up on responsibilities or facilitating deep focus time.

## **To Do Lists**

To-do lists are another common time management and organizational technique. It is wise to keep your to-do lists separate from your main calendar. Using a to-do list is highly beneficial when it comes to helping you keep on task:

- It helps you break down your goals into actionable tasks.
- It helps you organize your tasks, prioritize them, and schedule them in an optimal manner.
- It helps you focus only on specific tasks that you need to be thinking of at the moment.
- It helps you write down deadlines and stick with them.
- It helps you track your progress by crossing off tasks as you complete them.



When it comes to creating your to-do list, you can either use the pen-and-paper method or one of the many apps on the market. Try out different solutions until you find the one that works best for you. For to-do lists, it's appropriate to separate work and personal responsibilities. In other words, keep an organized list of all the tasks you want to get done at work and all the tasks you want to accomplish in your personal life.

## **The Pomodoro Technique**

If you find yourself having trouble avoiding distraction and staying on task for a given period of time, consider trying the Pomodoro Technique. This is a time management technique where you use a timer in order to organize your workflow. The Pomodoro Technique entails working on your tasks for a set amount of time (e.g., 25 minutes), and then taking a short break (e.g. 5 minutes), before starting to work again. In addition, once you complete a certain number of work cycles (e.g., 4 cycles), you can take a longer break (e.g., 30 minutes) before getting back to work.



You can modify this technique and similar ones to fit your personal preferences. For example, instead of using a set amount of time to limit each work cycle when using the Pomodoro Technique, you could choose to use a different measure, such as the number of words that you've written or the number of pages that you've read.

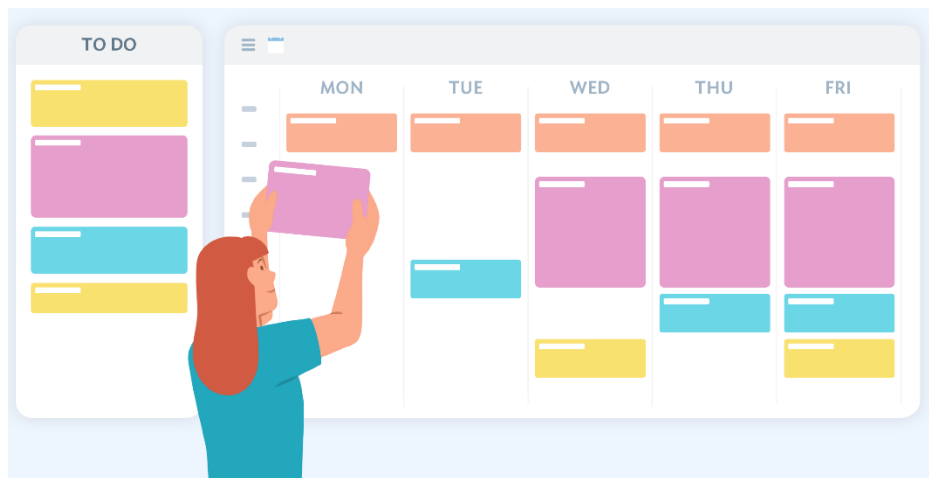
## **Timeboxing**

Timeboxing is a technique where you allocate specific blocks of time, called "timeboxes", to activities that you want to do or tasks that you need to work on. You can integrate timeboxing into the calendar you already use in order to visually represent time allocated for certain activities. For example, if you keep procrastinating on an annoying assignment that won't take long to handle, you can schedule a 30-minute timebox for it in the evening and finish it then.

### How it works:

1. From the moment you wake up, assign each time block in your day to a task. These tasks can be anything from eating breakfast to working on an assignment to walking the dog.
2. Divide a piece of paper into columns. On the left, write down each hour of the day and create blocks of time such as half-hour or hour chunks. On the top, write the days of the week.
3. Estimate the time it is going to take to complete each of your tasks and fit them into your time blocks.
4. Add buffer times in between each time block to allow for adjustments during the day.

Timeboxing can help you feel less overwhelmed or intimidated by unpleasant tasks that you need to do. For example, if you need to exercise but you don't enjoy it, knowing that you only have to do it for a set amount of time can make it easier to handle. Additionally, if your job requires you to independently work on tasks at your own pace, timeboxing can help you allocate your time for each of your responsibilities.



### Increase your Energy Levels

Increasing your energy levels is one of the best ways to get out of slumps and get yourself to stop procrastinating, since being tired can make you more likely to delay work. The following tips are some things that you can do in order to increase your energy levels:

- **Get enough sleep.** In general, you are more likely to procrastinate if you are not getting enough sleep. Simply making sure that you sleep enough will help you be more productive and lead to various other improvements in your life, including your physical health, mental health, and general wellbeing.
- **Drink some water.** Dehydration is a big problem when it comes to your ability to concentrate on your work, and you can easily solve it by just drinking a glass of water from time to time. Other drinks are acceptable in moderation, but try to avoid consuming too much caffeine or sugar, which could cause your energy levels to crash after a while.



- **Eat something (moderately) healthy.** If you are hungry, eat something that will give you some energy. Avoid junk food or snacks that will spike your energy for a short while and then cause you to feel tired.
- **Take a break and go outside.** If you're stuck inside all day and feel that the walls are closing in on you, take a short break and go outside to breathe some fresh air and clear your head.
- **Get some exercise.** If you haven't done anything physical in a while, try to get your body moving a bit. You don't have to do anything major - a short walk, a few pushups, or a bit of stretching can help you feel better.
- **Listen to music.** Listening to certain types of music that you like can sometimes give you a motivational boost while you work.

## Conclusion

---

Time management isn't a skill that comes naturally or effortlessly to people – it takes time. Whether you find yourself procrastinating on starting a task or you have trouble staying on task once you get started, there are many time management strategies you can try. It is also important to notice when, why, and how you procrastinate, because your solution should address those factors. Think about your lifestyle. What system could work best for you? How will you make it work for you?