

Systems for Working Faster: How To Boost Productivity and Efficiency

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We hear it all the time: "Work smarter, not harder!"

No matter what industry you're in, managing time effectively is essential for achieving your goals, reducing stress levels, and combatting procrastination.

If you're listening to this while panicking over a deadline or worrying about your inbox, have a short break from the stress. We've got you covered.

In this lesson, we'll provide an overview of key time management methods and their advantages. It's unlikely that all of them will suit you, but we're certain there'll be a couple you can integrate pretty easily.

Let's dive into the world of time management and explore systems for working faster!

Before we get into the specifics, it's essential to understand what time management is all about. It involves planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time you spend on specific activities. Good time management increases efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

It determines whether you'll hit those deadlines, rise through the ranks, and impress leaders you admire— all while feeling at peace as you achieve your career goals. The methods we'll discuss today aren't just about getting more done but striving for a healthier balance in your professional and personal life.

To start managing your time better, you'll need to establish a comfortable environment and a reliable system that suits your habits and lifestyle.

Now, let's break down a few methods and provide tips on how to integrate them into your daily routine.

Inbox Zero

According to the work management platform, Asana:

Inbox Zero is a productivity strategy that seeks to declutter your mind by decluttering your inbox through methodically deleting, sorting, or otherwise clearing incoming emails. If you've ever experienced the loss of productivity that comes from constantly checking your email, you'll understand the intention behind Inbox Zero. [1]

The key is not necessarily to reply or address every email immediately—this only serves to overwhelm and create an unhealthy work/life balance. Instead, sort your emails into different categories. Additionally, you may find it beneficial to check your inbox just once or twice a day. Doing so saves you from instantly reacting to notifications or abandoning the task you're working on to respond to new emails.

Bullet Journalling

Bullet journalling is a customisable organisational system that uses bullet points, symbols and indexes to track tasks, events, and notes [2]. It places an emphasis on tracking the past, ordering the present, and designing the future. It can be especially helpful for workers with ADHD, who feel their focus drifts into too many areas at once. Is this as simple as making a list? It can be! But it's also so much more. In fact, The Lazy Genius Collective's blog says, "The Bullet Journal is the Meryl Streep of organization; it can take on any role you need it to." [3]

You can choose the order in which you record your thoughts and plans. You can use a pen and paper, but a digital approach is also an option if it suits you. Remember, this is about finding methods that work for your work style and, most importantly, your lifestyle.

SMART Goal-Setting

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound [4]. The key to the SMART method is making sure your goals are well-defined and trackable objectives. Specific goals identify exactly what you want to

accomplish. Measurable goals force you to keep track of progress. Achievable goals allow you to be realistic, well-paced, and establish healthy trends. Relevant goals position your core values and overall life and career milestones at the centre. Time-based goals make it easier to hit deadlines and feel in control of your future.

Timeboxing

Timeboxing involves allocating fixed periods to specific tasks. This transforms the standard to-do list into a calendar system that positions your work in a visual and intuitive way. "When you create a 'timebox,' you're setting a goal to finish a particular task within a certain time frame." [5]

Marc Zao-Sanders, author of *Timeboxing – The Power of Doing One Thing at a Time*, says:

Working hard and trying your best is sometimes not actually what's required; the alternative — getting the right thing done at the right time — is a better outcome for all. [6]

Some clear advantages of timeboxing include improved focus, reduced procrastination, and enhanced autonomy.

Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique involves working in short, focused bursts (typically 25 minutes) followed by a 5-minute break. You pick a project, hack away for 25 minutes, take a break and repeat. After four sessions, you take a 15- to 30-minute break. It's crucial to record sessions to avoid burning out on this cycle. If you are the type of person who tracks workouts and knows the value of rest between sets, this method might be for you.

You should see improved concentration and reduced mental fatigue.

Eat the Frog

Are you a morning person? Then this method might be for you. "Eat the frog" involves tackling the most challenging task first thing. Its creator, Brian Tracy, argues that if the first thing you do is the worst thing you do all day, you'll discover greater satisfaction by getting it done, and everything else will feel relatively painless. The less you need to think about a task, the healthier your approach to productivity will be. So put the kettle on and get after that frog!

The 4Ds: Do, Defer, Delegate, Delete

The 4Ds method helps prioritise tasks by deciding whether to do, defer, delegate, or delete them. The 4Ds are all about hitting deadlines and pre-empting setbacks. "Do" allows you to clean up small tasks immediately. If it won't take long, finish it now before it builds. "Defer" refers to larger tasks that aren't labelled important. You can place those aside for now to tackle more urgent matters. "Delegate" is all about positioning your time and using resources at your disposal. If you have a team that can take a load off, then it's time to relinquish control. "Delete" allows you to step back and assess what is necessary—maybe scheduling that meeting isn't as important as it felt a week ago.

Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower Matrix helps prioritise tasks based on urgency and importance. "Just draw a two-by-two matrix where the X-axis represents *importance* and the Y-axis represents *urgency*." [7]

Tasks will fall into one of four categories:

Urgent and important

Urgent but not important

Important but not urgent

Not important and not urgent

Based on this, you'll either do, schedule, delegate or delete.

To do great things, it might take *not* doing other things—and that's okay! The Eisenhower Matrix is all about allowing important things to wait while urgent matters get addressed immediately.

Kanban Cards

Kanban is a visual workflow management method using cards to represent tasks and their progress. Each task is placed on a card that also includes descriptors, deadlines, and project members. Cards can come in any shape and form depending on preference or category of project. Kanban cards are all about the different stages of workflow, allowing teams to identify what is requested or in progress or completed.

Some clear advantages include visualising work, identifying bottlenecks, and improving efficiency.

As with any skill, practice is key to mastering time management. Start by experimenting with one or two methods that resonate with you. Gradually integrate more techniques as you become comfortable. Working on small projects or daily tasks using these methods can help reinforce your learning. Trial and error are the only way to find the perfect fit!

Start with achievable tasks that allow you to practise and refine your time management strategies.

Remember, time management is a skill that improves with practice and perseverance—try new things, but move on if they don't suit you!

[1] *Inbox Zero: What it is and how to achieve it*, Julia Martins, Asana (2024)

<https://asana.com/resources/inbox-zero>

[2] *The Bullet Journal Offers A Bullet-Proof Method To Stay Organized*, Nancy Olson, Forbes (2019)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nancyolson/2019/04/23/the-bullet-journal-offers-a-bullet-proof-method-to-stay-organized/?sh=48b994791a61>

[3] *How to Bullet Journal: The Absolute Ultimate Guide*, The Lazy Genius Collective

<https://www.thelazygeniuscollective.com/blog/how-to-bullet-journal>

[4] *How to write SMART goals in 6 steps (With tips and examples)*, Indeed Editorial Team (2024)

<https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-smart-goals>

[5] *Timeboxing: The goal-oriented time management technique*, Julie Martins, Asana (2024)
<https://asana.com/resources/what-is-timeboxing>

[6] *How Timeboxing Works and Why It Will Make You More Productive*, Marc Zao-Sanders, HBR (2018)

<https://hbr.org/2018/12/how-timeboxing-works-and-why-it-will-make-you-more-productive>

[7] *How To Get Stuff Done: The Eisenhower Matrix (a.k.a. The Urgent Vs The Important)*, Mark Nevins (2023)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hillennevins/2023/01/05/how-to-get-stuff-done-the-eisenhower-matrix-aka-the-urgent-vs-the-important/>