



Time Management

Time management is one of those skills no one teaches you in school but you have to learn. It doesn't matter how smart you are if you can't organize information well enough to take it in. And it doesn't matter how skilled you are if procrastination keeps you from getting your work done.

Younger workers understand this, and time management is becoming a topic of hipsters. One of the most popular blogs in the world is [Lifehacker](#), edited by productivity guru [Gina Trapani](#), and her forthcoming book by the same name is a [bestseller on Amazon](#) based so far on pre-orders.

In today's workplace, you can differentiate yourself by your ability to handle information and manage your time. "Careers are made or broken by the soft skills that make you able to hand a very large workload," says [Merlin Mann](#), editor of the productivity blog [43 Folders](#).

So here are 10 tips to make you better at managing your work:

1. Don't leave email sitting in your in box.

"The ability to quickly process and synthesize information and turn it into actions is one of the most emergent skills of the professional world today," says Mann. Organize email in file folders. If the message needs more thought, move it to your to-do list. If it's for reference, print it out. If it's a meeting, move it to your calendar.

"One thing young people are really good at is only touching things once. You don't see young people scrolling up and down their email pretending to work," says Mann. Take action on an email as soon as you read it.

2. Admit multitasking is bad.

For people who didn't grow up watching TV, typing out instant messages and doing homework all at the same time, [multitasking is deadly](#). But it [decreases everyone's productivity](#), no matter who they are. "A 20-year-old is less likely to feel overwhelmed by demands to multitask, but young people still have a loss of productivity from multitasking," says Trapani.

So try to limit it. [Kathy Sierra](#) at [Creating Passionate Users](#) suggests [practicing mindfulness](#) as a way to break the multitasking habit.

3. Do the most important thing first.

Trapani calls this "running a morning dash". When she sits down to work in the morning, before she checks any email, she spends an hour on the most important thing on her to-do list. This is a great idea because even if you can't get the whole thing done in an hour, you'll be much more likely to go back to it once you've gotten it started. She points out that this dash works best if you organize the night before so when you sit down to work you already know what your most important task of the day is.

4. Check your email on a schedule.

"It's not effective to read and answer every email as it arrives. Just because someone can contact you immediately does not mean that you have to respond to them immediately," says [Dan Markovitz](#), president of the productivity consulting firm

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, "People want a predictable response, not an immediate response." So as long as people know how long to expect an answer to take, and they know how to reach you in an emergency, you can answer most types of email just a few times a day.

5. Keep web site addresses organized.

Use book marking services like del.icio.us to keep track of web sites. Instead of having random notes about places you want to check out, places you want to keep as a reference, etc., you can save them all in one place, and you can search and share your list easily.

6. Know when you work best.

Industrial designer [Jeff Beene](#) does consulting work, so he can do it any time of day. But, he says, "I try to schedule things so that I work in the morning, when I am the most productive." Each person has a best time. You can discover yours by monitoring your productivity over a period of time. Then you need to manage your schedule to keep your best time free for your most important work.

7. Think about keystrokes.

If you're on a computer all day, keystrokes matter because efficiency matters. "On any given day, an information worker will do a dozen Google searches," says Trapani. "How many keystrokes does it take? Can you reduce it to three? You might save 10 seconds, but over time, that builds up."

8. Make it easy to get started.

"We don't have problems finishing projects, we have problems starting them," says Mann. He recommends you "make a shallow on-ramp." Beene knows the key creating this on ramp: "I try to break own my projects into chunks, so I am not overwhelmed by them."

9. Organize your to-do list every day.

If you don't know what you should be doing, how can you manage your time to do it? Some people like writing this list out by hand because it shows commitment to each item if you are willing to rewrite it each day until it gets done. Other people like software that can slice and dice their to-do list into manageable, relevant chunks. For example, Beene uses [tasktoy](#) because when he goes to a client site tasktoy shows him only his to do items for that client, and not all his other projects. (Get tasktoy [here](#))

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10. Dare to be slow.

Remember that a good time manager actually responds to some things more slowly than a bad time manager would. For example, someone who is doing the highest priority task is probably not answering incoming email while they're doing it. As Markovitz writes: "Obviously there are more important tasks than processing email. Intuitively, we all know this. What we need to do now is recognize that processing one's work (evaluating what's come in and how to handle it) and planning one's work are also mission-critical tasks."