Managing multiple priorities
Topics

Core tool: An effective to-do system

Core strategy: Engage regularly with MIP’s

Core habit: Weekly & daily tactical plans
Topics

Core tool: An effective to-do system

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Core habit: Weekly & daily tactical plans
The solution: A effective “distributed cognition system” for storing to-do’s in order to support prospective memory:

- Calendar
- Lists
- Physical and recorded reminders

- ~4 items only
- Can’t prioritize:
  - Later=now
  - Unimportant=important
  - Maybe=for sure
- The Zeigarnik effect

Get everything out of your head:
- Reduced stress
- No more reliance on memory
- Attention improves
- Easier to plan, prioritize and prune
A single calendar with all your time commitments
A single* master to-do list

MASTER TO DO LIST

call John (351-5555) re: Thurs meeting
Draft introduction for budget report
Buy 3-hole punch for office
Start planning spring break trip
Purge one file drawer
Read article on strategic planning
Google Vitamix Reviews
Develop specs for Smith proposal
Complete Alex's performance review
Order fresh Turkey
Call dentist office for appointment
Investigate new WiFi plan
Take jacket to tailor for fitting
Place ad in CPC
Renew Chamber Membership
Email Jane Doe re: her info request
Reorganize the break room
Plan office holiday party
Avoid poorly defined to-do list items:

- Too vague: e.g. “call Mary”
  → Instead: “Call Mary (333-4444) to schedule lunch for next Wednesday to discuss new committee”

- Some items are too big: e.g. “K-application”
  → Instead: “Spend one hour drafting Aim 1 for K”
  → Consider keeping a separate list of projects
**Project List**

**PERSONAL**
- Plan Dad’s 80th birthday party

**WORK**
- Hire research assistant

**Task List**
- Email my sister to check on dates
- Draft job description
Master list of everything you intend to do

Projects and tasks that are in progress

Weekly task plan

Daily task plan
?? Ideas you may want to pursue later....
A storage system for ideas to consider *later*

**Master list**

Work that you *intend* to do

---

**Ideas for later**

Work you *might* do, someday

**Storage options:**

- Reminder?
- Calendar
- List / file / folder
Topics

Core tool: An effective to-do system

Core strategy: Engage regularly with “MIP’s”

Core habit: Weekly & daily tactical plans
MIPs?
- most important projects
- what are yours?
Scenario 1: With a deadline

Scenario 2: Without a deadline
• “...[make] real progress every single day.”
  Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus at the Harvard Business School
A brief history of academic writing advice

- Pre-Boice
- 1980s: the Boice data
- Post-Boice:
  - “write every day in moderate sessions”
- 2011-2015: the Sword data


“Only 1 in 8 wrote every day.”
Write regularly, for long enough to make progress, and frequently enough to stay engaged.

Parameters?
1. Interval between sessions: \( \leq \) a week
2. Session length: sufficient to keep on track
   (? \( \sim \) 3-5 hours/week = 45-60”/d)
Try:
At the start of the work day, work on an MIP before you do anything else

Or, find your best time to do it
Schedule time blocks

- Have a goal for the block & a simple action to get started.

** Focused Work **

- Plan a starting task for the next session, then stop
### Time Block:
3 different scheduling plan approaches

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**Project** (one big chunk per week)
Scheduled time block alternative:

... based on Neil Fiore’s “unschedule” method.

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Keys:

1- Set an intention to do MIP work at the beginning of the week (or day)
2- Decide exactly what you will do when time is available
**Check your play store for a Pomodoro phone app**

Write down what you are going to do

25 + 5
25 + 5
25 + 5
25 + 15
Repeat as needed

Manage interruptions

Francesco Cirillo
http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/
the Pomodoro technique
Topics

Core tool: An effective to-do system

Core strategy: Engage regularly with MIP’s

Core habit: Weekly & daily tactical plans
At the beginning of the week:

– Sketch a plan for overall time use that supports your whole life
# Plan work boundaries & personal / social activities

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- **Exercise**
- **Calls with family**
- **Bike ride**
- **Laundry**
- **Cleaning**
- **Friends birthday party**
- **Groceries**
- **Eat out with friends**
- **Movie**
- **PTO night**
- **Day OFF**
At the beginning of the week:

– Review and update your to-do list(s)

– Review your calendar(s) 3+ weeks forward

– Identify at least ONE chunk of MIP work that you want to complete in the coming week
At the beginning of the day:

– Ask yourself what you would like to accomplish *in addition to* scheduled and routine work – focus on MIPs
Daily: MIT list

**Must** *be done today*

- ...

**Aim** *to do today*

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...

*The deadline is today*

* “It will be so great if I get this done today but nothing bad will happen if it don’t.”

(highest priority work task)
Productivity Resources: general time management /organization/ productivity

A popular, effective, comprehensive workflow and planning system. If you aren’t sure about buying the book, go to [https://www.dandywithlens.com/getting-things-done-gtd/](https://www.dandywithlens.com/getting-things-done-gtd/) for a brief overview of this system.

This book covers goal setting, planning, and executing to reach those goals and other relevant topics.

**NOTE: IMHO, the combo of *Free to Focus* and *Getting Things Done* provides a complete productivity system.**

Michael Linenberger. *The One Minute To-do List*  ([https://www.michaellinenberger.com/free1MTD.htm](https://www.michaellinenberger.com/free1MTD.htm))
You can request a free pdf download of this book at the link above. The method is an effective way to create and manage your to-do (task) list, and can be used either as a stand alone, or as a complement to the GTD next action list method.

Laura Vanderkam (2015). *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time*
Vanderkam is a journalist and author who became interested in how people spend their time, and now writes books about successful strategies. This book focuses on the actual experiences of a group of 100 women who have busy professional careers and children at home, and who kept time diaries for a week. Vanderkam analyzed the diaries and identified strategies these women use to be successful in both spheres. Not just for women!

Cal Newport (2012) *So Good They Can’t Ignore You: Why Skills Trump Passion in the Quest for Work You Love*
Newport wrote this book as he was finishing his postdoctoral fellowship at MIT, at a time that he was contemplating his own career path as a theoretical computer scientist. He researched the idea that you should “follow your passion,” and in this book explains that that is not the best approach, and what you should do instead. Relevant for anyone at the beginning of their career, or for those considering a career change.

**ASIANEFFICIENCY**
The Asian Efficiency group offers a wide range of both free and fee based resources (newsletter, podcasts, videos, white papers, courses), and they include most all of the effective systems, trips, and strategies – a “one stop shopping” resource.
Jensen and Silvia recommend the same core advice: write nearly every day, but each then covers additional issues not included by the other. Between these two books, the topic is covered completely.


Silvia is an academic psychologist, and this book is perhaps the most popular in this genre. This second edition reflects the authors new status as a dad with young children (making his advice about finding time to write more realistic). The book has has been updated to apply to a wider variety of disciplines, and has a new chapter devoted to grant and fellowship writing.


The academic world Jensen describes is that of a liberal arts and sciences university (she is a communications studies professor) but the advice applies equally well to health science faculty and trainees. She sends the same message as Siliva - write nearly every day - but covers some additional reasons for resistance and has different views on some issues. She provides welcome detail on writing accountability group options, and how to deal with stalled projects.


• Detailed strategies for planning time to write, with emphasis on time blocking.
• See also, Study Hacks blog: Cal posts about “deep work” and other productivity topics: [http://calnewport.com/blog/](http://calnewport.com/blog/)


• A short introduction to “writing” every day.


• Practical approaches to procrastination
Susan R. Johnson
srj.susanjohnson@gmail.com

Contact me anytime with questions or comments, and, get articles on my website

www.thrivingamidstchaos.com