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# How To Be More Productive at Work

A comprehensive guide on workplace productivity



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# Introduction

We've all had those days. You start the day early with the best intentions in mind. There's a huge project on your to-do list, and the deadline is looming. But instead of sticking to the plan and getting an early start, everything but work captures your attention.

Once you're at your desk (either in the office or at home), it's Twitter, Slack, and LinkedIn. Don't get me started on email. Soon enough, any hope of that project being done before lunch is a distant thought.

Once you've wrangled your distractions, lunchtime hunger pains creep in and all you can think about is Chipotle. Now that your morning is nearly over, your brain suddenly erupts into a state of panic and your stressful afternoon evolves into a long night of work. Now imagine if having a productive workday was more than just a fluke — imagine it as a sustained habit.

To boost your morning motivation and help you knock out your to-do list with less stress-induced headaches, read on for practical productivity tips and tricks. Proceed with caution: Additional time and effort will be required in the beginning. But after a bit of self-reflection and forward-thinking, we hope you'll find these tips helpful for long-term changes in your workday habits.





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# Starting Your Day

There is no denying that your first hour of work can set the tone for the entire day. With a few wrong decisions, you may find yourself at 10:30 a.m. asking where the first two hours of your day went. Morning productivity is all about forming habits that stick. That way, when Monday rolls around and being productive is the last thing you want, you'll be thankful it's become second nature to open Google Docs instead of TikTok.

## First Things First

Starting your morning off well begins long before you step foot into the office by eating a healthy breakfast. Remember, what you eat has a direct effect on how productive you are at work. Experts suggest **foods low in glycemic carbohydrates** to provide sustained energy throughout the day. For those of us who are not dietitians, this means plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. For example, a breakfast of eggs, bananas, yogurt, or blueberries can help to boost memory and counteract stress.

Fight the temptation to check your email when you first sit down at your desk. When you begin your day in the chaos of your inbox, you enter a productivity vacuum of reading, replying, and organizing that can steal your most precious early-morning hours of creative thinking. In addition, you'll establish a day-long habit of checking your email all too often (more on this danger later). For those who do not drive themselves to work, try checking your email on your commute. It might also work well to set aside 5 to 10 minutes as you get ready for work to monitor your email for any vital to-do items.

But after a quick check, shut it down. Your productivity will thank you, I promise.



## Tiny Habits

Is the urge to click the Gmail tab still too strong? The easiest way to achieve productivity goals is to build “tiny habits.” These are small, easy-to-do actions that bring long-term changes in your behavior.

To make new habits stick, identify the following elements:

1. Authentic motivation to change the habit.
2. Simple actions that make the new habit easy to accomplish.
3. A trigger that causes an action, which leads to a reward.



For example, if you know checking your email is a major distraction for you, schedule times to check your inbox. If you complete it in under 15 minutes, reward yourself with a snack break. Try this technique for any behavior you want to transform into a habit: reading, meditating, or even flossing your teeth.



## Prioritize Prioritizing

Although we might not all be Type A personalities, it doesn't mean we wouldn't benefit from a more organized to-do list. Build out your list, separating tasks by different priority levels. While it is always tempting to pick the smallest tasks, setting priority levels will remind you to tackle the largest projects first.

## Identify What Distracts You

As in the world of medicine, it is difficult to prescribe the right cure if you haven't identified a diagnosis. Therefore, to set productivity habits that last months, not days, it is vital to know what exactly it is that distracts you.

Take a week to track how you spend your time, whether it's using a time tracking app, a spreadsheet, or old fashioned pen and paper. Be honest with yourself through the process, noting what distractions hit you and when. At the end of the week, set aside time to evaluate how you spend your time at work. Look for cause and effect trends. Maybe it's whenever you are researching, you fall prey to reading the news. Or perhaps when you check your email, you find yourself shifting from a LinkedIn new connection email to 30 minutes of social media scrolling.

Many will be tempted to skip this step, arguing that it will take a lot of extra time to record your week. But don't ignore this one. Although it will add work to one week, it might just save you hundreds of hours of lost productivity in the future.

## Working Remotely

Working from home has become a more common experience of the modern workplace. But just because you are far away from the distractions of co-workers, doesn't mean you are home free. In fact, when you work from home you often become your own worst distraction.

To maximize productivity on your out-of-office days, mimic your regular workday as much as possible. This means getting started at a normal hour, taking a shower, and sitting down in a dedicated workspace with minimal distractions. And just because you are working from home doesn't mean you actually have to work from home. Go to a coffee shop to embrace a change of scenery while you set aside dedicated time for your task list.





# Office Etiquette

Mid-morning has hit and your productivity has been strong thus far.

Starting work early has been on your side and you had held strong against the temptation to check your email every 15 minutes. But no matter your level of focus or how expensive your noise canceling headphones are, you can't always be to blame when co-workers are the root of your distraction.

## Don't Be *That* Coworker

Everyone has their ideal work environment. While some prefer deafening silence, others rely on coffee house buzz to keep them on task. Despite our varying preferences, the frustration of invasive co-workers is universal.

It may be tempting to stop by a coworker's desk on the way to get coffee to talk about your day or ping a co-worker on Slack if you haven't received an answer to a question you asked only an hour ago. But, proceed with caution — you are not the only person completing projects. Although it may sound harsh, there is one piece of advice to hold onto: Start by figuring out the answers to your questions yourself. Don't ask questions Google can answer. Don't put yourself in a place where you are asking to be micromanaged. Respect others' time, and collaborate at times that work for everyone.



## Make Meetings Efficient

You may have seen the popular office meme: “I survived another meeting that should have been an email.”

There is a reason it gets a laugh out of most office workers — it’s all too relatable. **According to Atlassian**, the average office worker spends over 31 hours each month in unproductive meetings. Now, imagine a workplace without meetings.

Bliss, right?

While some meetings, of course, have their necessary place, be sure to do a self-check before you send out that Google Calendar invite. If an obligatory meeting is in order, be sure to include an agenda in the calendar invite. This will keep the meeting on track and on time, and also provide an outlet for attendees to write down questions before it even begins. This way, you can prepare your answers for these questions in advance and avoid scheduling yet another follow-up meeting.





# Take a Break

Nothing interrupts a productive workflow like the rumbling of your stomach. So, when the clock strikes noon, don't ignore what your body is telling you.

Skipping lunch is not only dangerous to your health, but your work habits as well. But what about non-lunchtime breaks? Is it bad to take the occasional walk around the office or grab a second (or third) cup of coffee? Often we think that the ideal productive day would involve eight plus hours of endless tapping on our keyboards. But in reality, the average person switches tasks every three minutes.

Maximizing our productivity is all about finding the right balance. And getting more done in a day involves identifying what tasks are most important. No matter what crucial projects may be on your to-do list for the day, remember taking breaks is just as important.





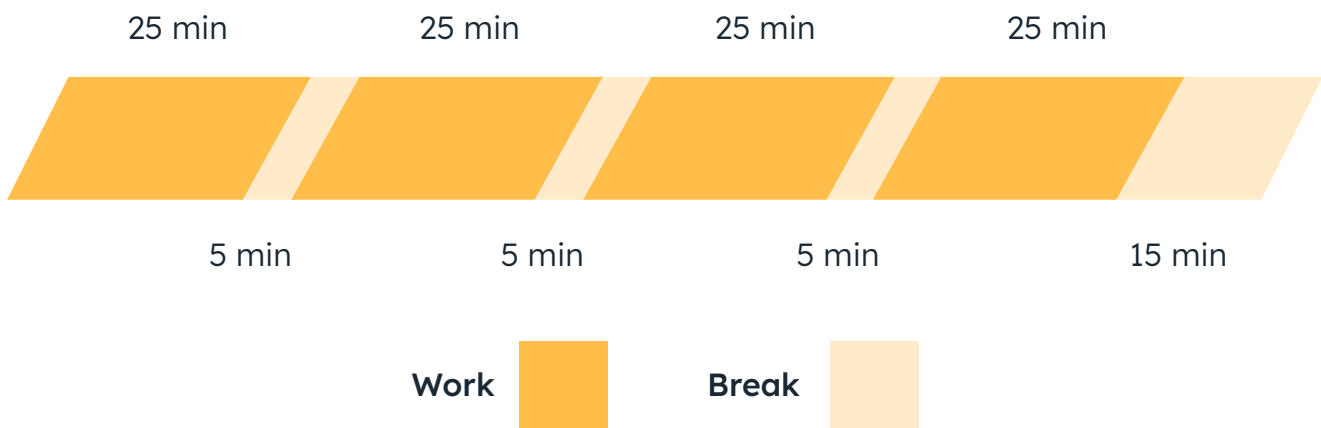


## The Pomodoro Technique

There is only so much time you can work non-stop before your brain starts to fry. Experts have found that working in 90 minute intervals maximizes productivity. In fact, the human mind can only work for **90 to 120 minutes** before it begs for a break. Using your prioritized to-do list, pick your most important task and focus on it solely for 90 minutes and then reward yourself with a break.

If repeating 90 minute work sessions isn't the right fit for your work style, test out the **Pomodoro Technique**. Work on one task for 25 minutes. Take a five minute break. Repeat this process three more times, and then take a 15 minute break.

### ONE POMODORO CYCLE



## Do Lunch Right

We all have those days where we forget to eat lunch. Or if we do take the time to eat, it's often with a fork in one hand while the other stumbles across the keyboard.

Yet, multitasking can reduce our productivity by **up to 40%**. When you add the effect of these 30 minutes of unproductive work to the fact that **more than a quarter** of workers don't take a break other than lunch, it is no surprise afternoon motivation dwindles.

As you implement leisurely lunches back into your work routine, be sure you are doing them right. Use this time to connect with teammates outside of work-talk or meet employees you otherwise wouldn't cross paths with. It is great to be able to call on friends in other departments for advice or perspective.

Aside from those you eat with, choose what you eat wisely. Employees who ate healthy all day long were **25% more likely** to have higher job performance.

In addition to lunches, be sure to utilize your breaks to eat a healthy snack. Avoid foods high in sugar that lead to a drop in blood sugar and the dreaded afternoon slump. Instead, try berries, avocado, or almonds to keep your brain well fed, and encourage yourself to choose water or coffee over soda. For more ideas of workplace food that will help you get more done in your day, check out the **Productivity Diet**.





# Find Your Flow State



Flow is everything when you're setting out to have your most productive work day, week, or year. But flow can quickly be disrupted when switching between communication channels, searching for files across folders, or simply finding that one piece of feedback to your latest document.

To preserve your productive flow state, it's necessary to limit disruptions like context switching and lost information. The more you simplify your daily activities, the more time you'll have for deep work and problem solving. Follow these best practices to unlock your work flow state.

## Use Tools, Don't Let Tools Use You

Employees spend almost four hours a week reorienting themselves after switching between applications. The [Harvard Business Review](#) calls it the "toggle tax," which creates productivity drain from using too many tools to get your job done.

Take a Marie Kondo approach to your tech stack. Ask yourself which tools make you more productive and which just add more steps to get work done. Then get rid of those tools that are not making your work easier. For the tools required by your company, look at ways to integrate them with the primary technology you use the most.

At ClickUp, we use our platform to bring our teams, work, and tools all into one place. For example, our teams use Chat, [Docs](#), [Whiteboards](#), and tasks that all connect to relevant work without having to jump through multiple apps or logins. There are times when email, design platforms, developer tools, or [HubSpot](#) are must-haves. We integrate those tools with ClickUp so they can be used seamlessly across 1,000+ employees.



## Know What to Communicate and Where

Every day, **employees spend almost an entire hour looking for information**. That's five hours a week! Most of this information is hidden in message threads, email chains, or the obscure corner of an unsearchable folder.

To make it easier to find the information you need to do your work, set rules of engagement for communication and communication channels.

At ClickUp, we break communication into three buckets: task-based conversations, team and project updates, and comms with external stakeholders.

1. Task-based conversations include work discussions like feedback, updates on timelines, or relevant information and files. With **ClickUp**, all of this information is shared within task comments and attachments so everyone sees relevant information alongside their work.
2. Big ideas, project plans, or team updates that span multiple tasks are best shared in cross-functional chat channels for real-time communication. Once everyone is aligned on an idea or plan, we then action them with ClickUp tasks.
3. We use email to communicate with external stakeholders such as partners or customers. Once there are action items, we “task” it and coordinate on delivery with ClickUp.



To create rules of engagement for your team, identify all the communication channels you use and get alignment from everyone on what information to include in each channel going forward.



## Create Workflows That Have Context

It can be frustrating to have a task on your to-do list without any understanding of its purpose. Lack of context can immediately disrupt your flow state, forcing you to spend time searching through apps and email chains to decipher the project's objectives.

Productive workflows shouldn't just outline tasks and assignees, but also provide context at every stage and to every contributor.

A simple way to do this is by starting with a project brief that highlights:

- Project purpose
- Objective
- Goals
- Contributors
- Stakeholders
- Milestones
- Timelines

Once complete, your project brief should be attached to every task and shared with contributors. This gives everyone on the team the ability to view project information and work with the right collaborators at every step of the workflow.

Being productive at work starts with designing a work environment that activates your flow state. Keep tech simple, set guidelines for communications, and bring context into your work to find your most productive self.

# The Afternoon Slump

As 3:00 hits, work can be the last thing on your mind. What should I cook for dinner? When should I log off today? Should I go grocery shopping or do laundry today — or neither?

When your thoughts finally shift back to the project at hand, they generally are a mix of deadline-induced panic and frustration. Especially if the first half of your day has been less than productive, starting a new project after lunch may feel like an impossible feat.

## Procrastination Woes

Each day, the average worker procrastinates for **2.09 hours**. And once distracted, it takes the average person **23 minutes** to regain focus on their original task. Sound familiar?

We each have our go-to escapes: reading the news, sorting our inbox, cleaning our desk, monitoring Twitter. The scary part is we are incredibly good at rationalizing to ourselves why said distraction is a part of our job description or will make us better employees. For most of us, we are increasingly more susceptible to procrastination depending on the size or importance of the project at hand.

But don't be fooled — when we procrastinate, we think about the worst parts of our project and the job grows before our eyes. Instead, recall your priority list and listen to the motivation of one of our favorite ad campaigns: Just Do it.

Even if you successfully avoided checking your email first thing in the morning, don't let email be your afternoon escape either. The average person checks their email **36 times** in an hour. That adds up to **13 hours a week** spent reading, deleting, sorting and sending emails. Don't convince yourself that you need to respond to an incoming email that very minute. Instead, schedule breaks to check your email throughout the day and stick to them.





## Creative Burnout

Whether you spend your days crafting art in Illustrator or crunching numbers in Excel, creativity is a necessary attribute of a successful employee. But when innovative ideas seem out of reach, how do you stop an afternoon brain cramp? Following the theme of fighting procrastination, try setting a cap on your research time. It's tempting to follow link after link as you look for ideas, just to find yourself in a sea of GIFs and even further away from your starting point. One of the most effective ways to kickstart your momentum and reduce afternoon headaches is to turn your eyes away from your screen.

To avoid added stress on your eyes, shut your laptop and break out the legal pad or journal to restart your brainstorming process. Try doodling or drawing a flowchart to gain perspective on the scope of your project and begin making connections. Finally, remember to use your non-work time to brainstorm. While it is important to be able to leave work at work and achieve the coveted work-life balance, there is no denying that many of our best ideas come while driving or taking a shower.

## Step Away From the Desk

A wave of tiredness often comes alongside the afternoon slump. To give yourself a boost of energy, get away from your desk and add some variety to your working environment. Studies show that surrounding yourself with natural light will keep you energized while you work and help you fall asleep more easily at night. If possible, opt for a standing desk (or hybrid) to keep you alert and the blood flowing.

Finally, if your workload requires a lot of writing, consider booking yourself a conference room to shut out distractions and maximize productivity, or switch up your workplace in your work from home setup.

No matter what, get away from your desk for at least a portion of each day.

## Drop the Beats

There is nothing like the right song to boost motivation. And with Spotify's playlists organized by genre and mood, it is easy to find the perfect soundtrack for your workday. Match your playlist to the task at hand.

To help block out the distractions of a noisy office, get a nice pair of noise canceling headphones — it will be worth the investment. Focus@Will is another tool to increase concentration and focus by personalizing music to your work intensity and reminding you to take breaks. Finally, Noisli will help you get in the zone with the sound of a summer thunderstorm or your favorite coffee house bustle.

Part of mastering the art of music in the workplace is also know when music could be doing more harm than good. Especially during the mornings, I find it best to keep the headphones in, but opt for no music. The headphones will help block out the occasional distraction. Meanwhile, you can take advantage of the rare quiet office.





## Life on the Outside

The key to productivity is learning how to achieve balance. When you arrive at work, this means knowing when to stop updating your to-do list and when to start your most demanding projects. As your day progresses, this often requires taking a break as your stress levels peak and even closing your laptop from time to time.

Nevertheless, how you spend your time outside the office can be just as significant to your workplace productivity. Sure, you might not be able to leave at 5:30 p.m. every night. That's okay. But without an adequate work-life balance, you will not be able to do the things that make you the human that you are outside of your job title.

How you apply productive habits both in and out of the office is a two-way street. By forming more efficient workplace habits, you'll be able to alleviate much of the stress at home. And by getting ample rest and recreation outside of work, you'll be more content to use time wisely and get your job done. Remember, happy employees are the best employees. Teach yourself a new hobby and cherish time with family and friends. Without these outlets, a key component of the productivity puzzle will forever be missing.



# Mastering Remote Work

The advent of remote work is undeniable.

Working remotely has its clear pros and cons. The pros include more control over your space and environment, a 30-second commute, and more flexibility to get things done on your own time.

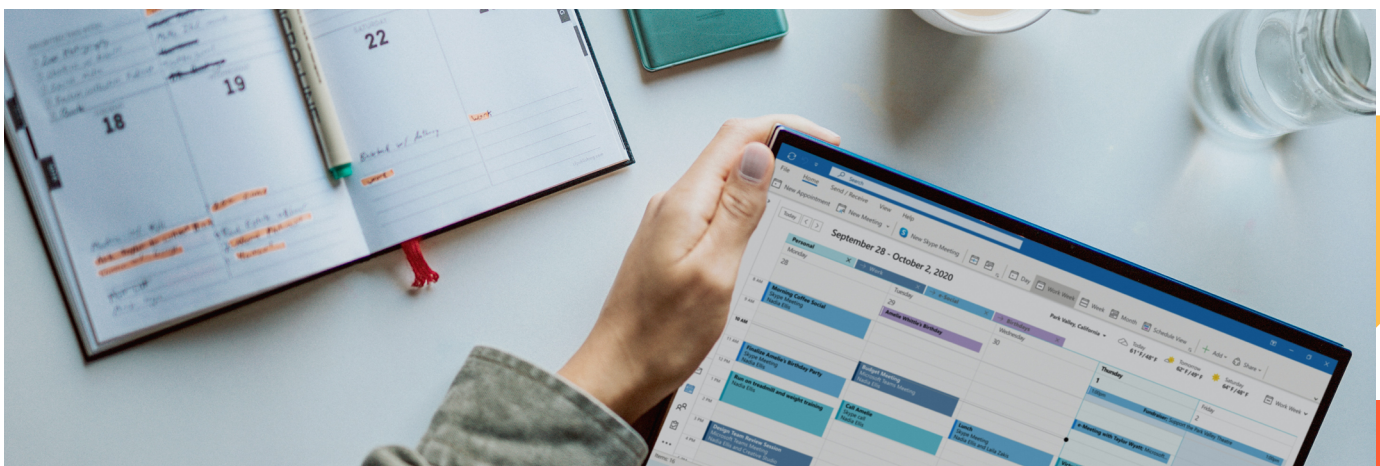
That said, there are some downsides to working remotely. Working out of the comfort of your own home can require extra discipline to hold yourself accountable, as it can be difficult to separate home life from work life without the geographic divide. On top of that, with roommates, kids, and partners in the background, it can be hard to keep your head down and focus. Not to mention the constant call of your refrigerator, smart TV, or pool for a break that lasts longer than intended.

Let's go over a few tips to maximize your remote efficiency.

## Utilize Your Calendar

If you use a daily calendar like Google Calendar, set up time blocks at the start of your day for specific tasks. This ensures you know which tasks you're prioritizing and when.

Additionally, working remote limits the visibility your manager(s) have into your work. By putting these working blocks on a shared calendar, they'll be able to know what you're working on – just be sure to deliver on those expectations if you're asked about progress!





## Establish a Home Office or Desk

It can be tempting to work from your bed or your couch, and like we said earlier, we'd encourage you to do so for a change of scenery. However, it's imperative to have a constant while working from home. Designate a desk or a specific seat at your kitchen table as your primary workspace during the day.

Doing this will help you associate that spot with work, efficiency, and productivity. Bonus points if you equip the spot with a dual monitor, a charging station, and whatever else you need to get your job done well.



## Prepare to Overcommunicate

Working remotely lowers the chances you'll get lost in an impromptu verbal brainstorm with your team members and limits the opportunity to have a quick chat with your manager. To that end, make a note to check in with others more than you would plan to otherwise. Send progress emails on your goals and/or projects to your team or collaborators.

Set up a coffee chat or remote water cooler Zoom with your colleagues. Commit to asking questions when something in an email or a virtual meeting you attended doesn't make sense. Don't allow yourself to fade into the background just because you're not in your physical office.

## Set Your Logoff Time

Working from home is tricky. There are days when you're ready to log off at 2:30 and other days you're ready to power through a project until 8. Remote working affords you more flexibility in your day, but don't let that flexibility be a detriment to your good standing or your mental health. Establishing a logoff time or time frame helps you stay productive until the end of the day and reminds you it's time to watch TV, make dinner, or take a walk with your spouse.





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