



12 top tips for time management at work



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Some of the UK's key causes of stress at work are workloads, deadlines and time management.

With so many demands on our time (inside and outside of work) it is easy to feel overwhelmed with all the tasks, jobs, and demands that we have. But you don't have to stay overwhelmed, there are some constructive ways you can manage your time that will relieve some of that building stress, and allow you to focus on and complete the jobs that need to be done.



1

Carry out a time audit

Before you can truly manage your time, you need to figure out how you're spending it. Yes, this may seem off-putting and a lot of work to do, but, trust us, it will be well worth the effort.

Essentially, a time audit involves monitoring what tasks you are doing and how much time you are spending on them, how many meetings and how long they take, and even how much time you are chatting to colleagues, spending browsing the internet – basically, monitor everything you do.

This level of detail is required in order to get an effective picture. There are apps you can use to help, such as RescueTime, or you can monitor your work yourself.

Overall, it will help determine how much you can accomplish in a day, when you are your most productive, and identify those unproductive tasks that drain your time. It will also handily feed into other steps in this list. You'll find it eye opening, believe me!

2

Create a to-do list

This may seem like an obvious one, but many people either do them half-heartedly or avoid them altogether. The most effective to-do lists include detail and priorities. Acknowledging and deciding your priorities means your day is structured from the get-go, which will help reduce stress and anxieties about what to do first. When making a list consider the following:

- What you need to do
- When the deadline is
- The order in which they need to be done

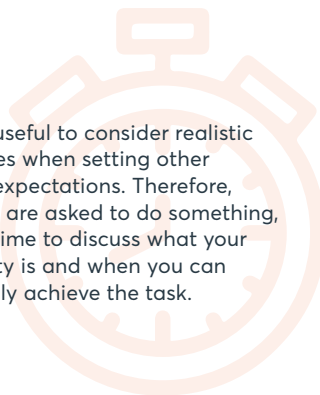
Either create the list last thing of the day (this will help you fully switch off from work in the evening and be fully prepared when you arrive the next day) or first thing in the morning, so you start the day knowing exactly what needs to be done.

3

Set realistic time limits

This ties in nicely with your to-do list and you'll find your audit helpful. Use the time audit to gauge how long tasks take, and then set realistic time-limits for each task in your to-do list. This will help structure your day and hopefully prevent you from over-stretching yourself, which will help reduce stress. It will also help reduce distraction and procrastination. Be patient with this step though, it can take practice.

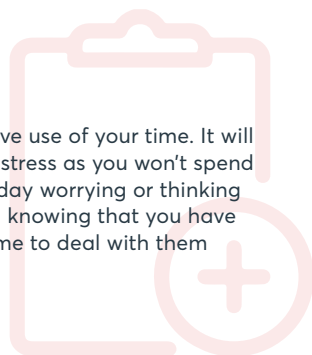
It is also useful to consider realistic time scales when setting other people's expectations. Therefore, when you are asked to do something, take the time to discuss what your availability is and when you can realistically achieve the task.

4

Group similar tasks together

Tasks such as responding to emails or making phone calls can easily be grouped together. Carrying them out in an adhoc style is interruptive and can slow things down. But if you set aside part of your day to respond to emails or phone calls, it will be much

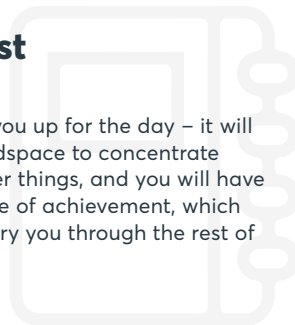
more effective use of your time. It will also reduce stress as you won't spend a lot of the day worrying or thinking about them, knowing that you have allocated time to deal with them properly.

5

Get the worst out of the way first

Often referred to as 'eat the frog', a classic time management tip is to get the worst task out of the way in the morning before you do anything else. Not only do you tend to have the most energy in the morning, but

it also sets you up for the day – it will free up headspace to concentrate fully on other things, and you will have a huge sense of achievement, which will help carry you through the rest of the day.



6

Get rid of those distractions

We have numerous distractions – social media, co-workers, text messages, phone calls, the internet – and they are hard to ignore and a huge drain on our time.

A key part of time management is managing these distractions and being able to shut our door to them. Again, use your time audit to help identify

what distractions you have and which you spend most time on, and then you can work towards managing them. But take baby steps, Rome wasn't built in a day. Focus on a couple to begin with, and once you feel you've mastered those, take on another two and so on until you have them under control.

7

Engage in deep work, not half-work

Some of the distractions above cause us to engage in half-work¹, which is a fragmented and unfocused way of working. Examples are:

- Suddenly looking up that film/video/football score you were curious about whilst working on a detailed report
- Keeping half an eye on your inbox when you're on a call
- Checking your phone suddenly for no reason when you're in the middle of a task
- Trying to do too many tasks at once

'Half-work' means that we aren't fully engaged in, or focused on, the task at hand and it prevents us from

accomplishing what we need, in the time we have, and it affects the quality too. It results in us taking twice as long to do half a job.

What we need to do is engage in deep work² instead. This involves making sure to take the time to focus on one project completely and eliminate all distractions, whether that means locking your phone away, using headphones to block out noise, asking your colleagues not to disturb you, or using a browser blocker. Not only will this mean your jobs will be completed quicker, the work will be of a better quality too, and overall it makes you more productive. It's not called the 21st century superpower for nothing.

¹ jamesclear.com/time-management-tips

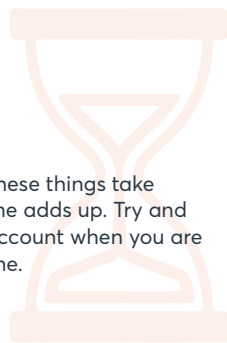
² www.calnewport.com/books/deep-work/

8

Build in time for interruptions

As much as we try and plan how much time things will take, life happens and there is likely going to be interruptions. Whether it is an email that just cannot be ignored, or a colleague who has

to talk to you – these things take time and that time adds up. Try and take these into account when you are planning your time.



9

Block off time so you can't be disturbed

We often work in open plan offices, and their design means that it is easy to be disturbed or interrupted. If you are at your desk, it is like an open invitation for anyone to talk to you.

Therefore, if there is a task you need the time to focus on, make sure to

block it out in your diary to ensure you have the time. You can then put up a 'Do not disturb' sign at your desk so people are aware, or you can always go into a quiet room.



10

Allow for time after meetings

Plan for time after meetings where you can spend 10 to 15 minutes digesting the meeting's actions and outcomes. This is similar to the point above – this

time is needed to allow your mind to catch up and process. This is vital if you want to achieve those new actions effectively.

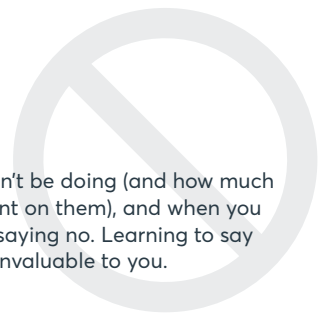


11

Learn to say no

You have to discover your limits, but only you know what you have the capacity for. Again, your time audit will help highlight whether there are tasks

you shouldn't be doing (and how much time is spent on them), and when you should be saying no. Learning to say no will be invaluable to you.

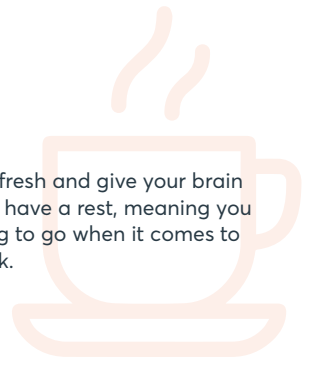


12

Plan for breaks

No one can work effectively without a break. Successful time management will always factor breaks in, and they don't have to be long. Breaks are important as they allow you to

recharge, refresh and give your brain a chance to have a rest, meaning you will be raring to go when it comes to the next task.



Hopefully these tips have provided you with some ideas as to how to plan your time effectively, or improve on any time management techniques you currently use. Be kind to yourself though, a lot of these are about breaking old habits and that won't happen overnight - they may need practice.



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