Time Management Toolkit



Mind Tools™

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Time Management Toolkit

Introduced by Mind Tools CEO, James Manktelow



Welcome to the Mind Tools **Time Management Toolkit**!

The tools it contains are the simple, practical, powerful techniques that have helped the leading people in business, sport and public service reach the pinnacles of their careers.

The skills we explain help you become highly effective, by showing you how to identify and focus on the activities that give you the greatest returns. Investing in these time management activities will actually save you time, helping you work smarter, not harder. What's more, these same techniques help you beat work overload – a key source of stress.

Enjoy finding out about them – and enjoy the benefits you'll get from them, too!



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Activity Logs

Finding out how you really spend your time

How long do you spend each day on unimportant things - things that don't really contribute to your success at work? Do you KNOW how much time you've spent reading junk mail, talking to colleagues, making coffee and eating lunch? And how often have you thought, 'I could achieve so much more if I just had another half hour each day.'

And are you aware of when in the day you check your e-mail, write important articles or do your long-term planning?

Most people find that they function at different levels of effectiveness at different times of day as their energy levels fluctuate. Your effectiveness may vary depending on how long it is since you've eaten, the length of time since you last took a break, routine distractions, stress, discomfort, or a range of other factors.

Activity logs help you to analyze how you actually spend your time. The first time you use an activity log you may be shocked to see the amount of time that you waste! Memory is a very poor guide when it comes to this, as it can be too easy to forget time spent on non-core tasks like browsing news sites, chatting, reading low priority email, and suchlike.

How to Use the Tool

Keeping an Activity Log for several days helps you to understand how you spend your time, and when you perform at your best. Without modifying your behavior any further than you have to, note down the things you do as you do them on our Activity Log template which can be downloaded here. Every time you change activities, whether opening mail, working, making coffee, gossiping with colleagues or whatever, note down the time of the change.

As well as recording activities, note how you feel, whether alert, flat, tired, energetic, etc. Do this periodically throughout the day. (You may decide to integrate your activity log with a stress diary.)

Learning from Your Log

Once you have logged your time for a few days, analyze your daily activity log. You may be alarmed to see the amount of time you spend doing low value jobs!

You may also see that you are energetic in some parts of the day, and flat in other parts. A lot of this can depend on the rest breaks you take, the times and amounts you eat, and quality of your nutrition. The activity log gives you some basis for experimenting with these variables.

Your analysis should help you to free up extra time in your day by applying one of the following actions to most activities:

1. Eliminate jobs that your employer shouldn't be paying you to do. These may include tasks that someone else in the organization should be doing, possibly at a lower pay rate, or personal activities such as sending non-work e-mails.

2. Schedule your most challenging tasks for the times of day when your energy is highest. That way your work will be better and it should take you less time.

3. Try to minimize the number of times a day you switch between types of task. For example, read and reply to e-mails in blocks only a few times each day.

4. Reduce the amount of time spent on legitimate personal activities such as making coffee (take turns in your team to do this – it saves time and strengthens team spirit).

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Key Points

Activity logs are useful tools for auditing the way that you use your time. They can also help you to track changes in your energy, alertness and effectiveness throughout the day.

By analyzing your activity log you will be able to identify and eliminate time-wasting or low-yield jobs. You will also know the times of day at which you are most effective, so that you can carry out your most important tasks during these times.

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To-Do Lists

The key to efficiency

Do you frequently feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do? Or do you sometimes just forget to do something important, so that people have to chase you to get work done?

Both of these are symptoms of not keeping a proper 'To-Do List'. To-Do Lists are prioritized lists of all of the tasks that you need to carry out. They list everything that you have to do, with the most important tasks at the top of the list, and the least important tasks at the bottom.

While this sounds a simple, inconsequential thing to do, it's when people start to use To-Do Lists properly that they often make their first personal productivity breakthroughs, and start to make a real success of their careers.

By keeping a To-Do List, you make sure that you capture all of the tasks you have to complete in one place. This is essential if you're not going to forget things. And by prioritizing work, you plan the order in which you'll do things, so you can tell what needs your immediate attention, and what you can quietly forget about until much, much later. This is essential if you're going to beat work overload.

Without To-Do Lists, you'll seem dizzy, unfocused and unreliable to the people around you. With To-Do Lists, you'll be much better organized, and this will show through in terms of your personal productivity. This is very important!

Preparing a To-Do List

Before you start preparing your To-Do List, first download an editable pdf copy of our To-Do List template here.

Then start by writing down all of the tasks that you need to complete, and if they are large, break them down into their component elements. If these still seem large, break them down again. Do this until you have listed everything that you need to do. This may be a huge and intimidating list, but our next step makes it manageable!

Next, run through these jobs, allocating priorities to them from A (very important, or very urgent) to F (unimportant, or not at all urgent). If too many tasks have a high priority, run through the list again and demote the less important ones. Once you have done this, rewrite the list in priority order.

You will then have a precise plan that you can use to bring your workload under control. You will be able to tackle your tasks in order of importance or urgency. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming and trivial ones that are clogging up your time.

Tip:
Once you're comfortable with use of To-Do Lists, you need to start differentiating between urgency and importance. For more on this, see our article on the Urgent/Important Matrix.

Using Your To-Do Lists

Different people use To-Do Lists in different ways in different situations: if you are in a sales-type role, a good way of motivating yourself is to keep your list relatively short, and aim to complete it every day.

In an operational role, or if tasks are large or dependent on too many other people, then it may be better to keep one list and 'chip away' at it.

It may be that you carry unimportant jobs from one To-Do List to the next. You may not be able to complete some very low priority jobs for several months. Only worry about this if you need to, and, if you are running up against a deadline for them, raise their priority on your list.

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If you have not used To-Do Lists before, try them now: using them is one of the most important things you can do to become really productive and efficient.

Key Points

Prioritized To-Do Lists are fundamentally important to efficient work. If you use To-Do Lists, you will ensure that:

- You remember to carry out all necessary tasks.
- You tackle the most important jobs first, and do not waste time on trivial tasks.
- You do not get stressed by a large number of unimportant jobs.

To draw up a Prioritized To-Do List, download our template and use it to list all the tasks you must carry out. Mark the importance of the task next to it, with a priority from A (very important) to F (unimportant). Redraft the list into this order of importance.

Now carry out the jobs at the top of the list first. These are the most important, most beneficial tasks to complete.

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The Urgent/Important Matrix

Using time effectively, not just efficiently

We've all been there: The project is due for today's meeting and we are only three quarters done. We're anxious, we can't concentrate, everything is a distraction, and then, finally, we blow. Time stressors are the most pervasive source of pressure and stress in the workplace and they happen as a result of having too much to do in too little time.

With this kind of pressure all too common, effective time management is an absolute necessity. You probably use a day-planner and to-do list to manage your time. These tools are certainly helpful, but they don't allow you to drill down to one of the most essential elements of good time management: distinguishing between what is important and what is urgent.

Great time management means being effective as well as efficient. Managing time effectively, and achieving the things that you want to achieve, means spending your time on things that are important and not just urgent. To do this, and to minimize the stress of having too many tight deadlines, you need to understand this distinction:

- **Important** activities have an outcome that leads to the achievement of your goals.
- **Urgent** activities demand immediate attention, and are often associated with the achievement of someone else's goals.

Urgent activities are often the ones we concentrate on. These are the "squeaky wheels that get the grease." They demand attention because the consequences of not dealing with them are immediate.

The Urgent/Important Matrix is a useful tool for thinking about this.

The idea of measuring and combining these two competing elements in a matrix has been attributed to both former US President Eisenhower and Dr Stephen Covey.

Eisenhower's quote, "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important" sums up the concept of the matrix perfectly. This so-called "Eisenhower Principle" is said to be how Eisenhower organized his tasks.

Covey brought the idea into the mainstream and gave it the name "The Urgent/Important Matrix" in his 1994 business classic, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People".

How to Use the Tool

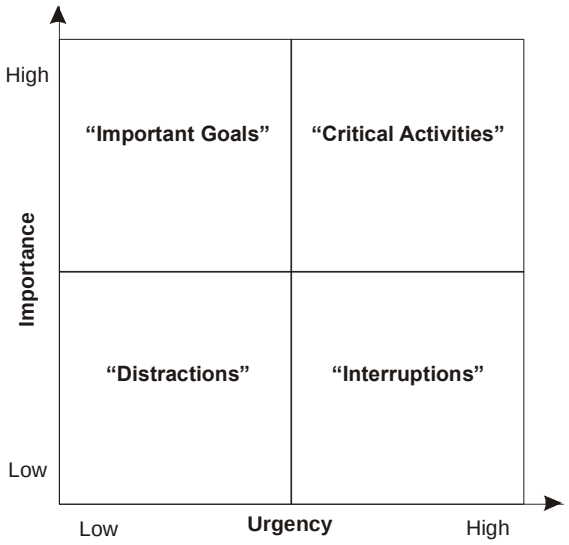
The Urgent/Important Matrix is a powerful way of thinking about priorities. Using it helps you overcome the natural tendency to focus on urgent activities, so that you can keep clear enough time to focus on what's really important. This is the way you move from "firefighting", into a position where you can grow your business and your career.

Here's how it works:

The matrix can be drawn as shown in figure 1 on the next page, with the dimensions of Importance and Urgency.

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Figure 1: Urgent/Important Matrix



The steps below help you use the matrix to prioritize your activities:

1. The first step is to list all the activities and projects you feel you have to do. Try to include everything that takes up your time at work, however unimportant. (If you manage your time using an Action Program, you'll have done this already.)

2. Next, assign importance to each of the activities – you can do this on, say, a scale of 1 to 5: remember, this is a measure of how important the activity is in helping you meet your goals and objectives. Try not to worry about urgency at this stage, as this helps get to the true importance.

3. Once you have assigned importance to each activity, evaluate the urgency of each activity. As you do this, you can plot the listed items on the matrix, according to the assigned importance and urgency.

4. Now study the matrix using the strategies described below to schedule your priorities.

Strategies for Different Quadrants of the Matrix

Urgent and Important

There are two distinct types of urgent and important activities: Ones that you could not foresee, and others that you have left to the last minute.

You can avoid the latter by planning ahead and avoiding procrastination.

Issues and crises, on the other hand, cannot always be foreseen or avoided. Here, the best approach is to leave some time in your schedule to handle unexpected issues and unplanned important activities. And if a major crisis arises, some other activity may have to be rescheduled.

If this happens, identify which of you urgent-important activities could have been foreseen and think about how you could schedule similar activities ahead of time, so they do not become urgent.

Urgent and Not Important

Urgent but not important activities are things that stop you achieving your goals, and prevent you from completing your work. Ask yourself whether these tasks can be rescheduled, or whether someone else could do them.

A common source of such interruptions is from other people in your office. Sometimes it's appropriate to say "No" to people, or encourage them to solve the problem themselves. Alternatively, try allocating time when you are available so that people only interrupt you at certain times (a good way of doing this is to schedule a regular meeting so that all issues can be dealt with at the same time.) By doing this, you'll be able to concentrate on your important activities for longer periods of time.

Not Urgent, but Important

These are the activities that help you achieve your personal and professional goals, and complete important work. Make sure that you have plenty of time to do these things properly,

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so that they do not become urgent. And remember to leave enough time in your schedule to deal with unforeseen problems. This will maximize your chances of keeping on schedule, and help you avoid the stress of work becoming more urgent that necessary.

Not Urgent and Not Important

These activities are just a distraction, and should be avoided if possible. Some can simply be ignored. Others are activities that other people may want you to do, but they do not contribute to your own desired outcomes. Again, say "No" politely and firmly if you can.

If people see you are clear about your objectives and boundaries, they will often not ask you to do "not important" activities in the future.

Key Points

The Urgent/Important Matrix helps you look at your task list, and quickly identify the activities you should focus on. By prioritizing using the Matrix, you can deal with truly urgent issues, at the same time that you keep on working towards your goals.

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The Action Priority Matrix

Making the very most of your opportunities (Also called the Impact Feasibility Matrix)

The Action Priority Matrix is a simple diagramming technique that helps you choose which activities to prioritize, and which ones you should drop, if you want to make the most of your time and opportunities.

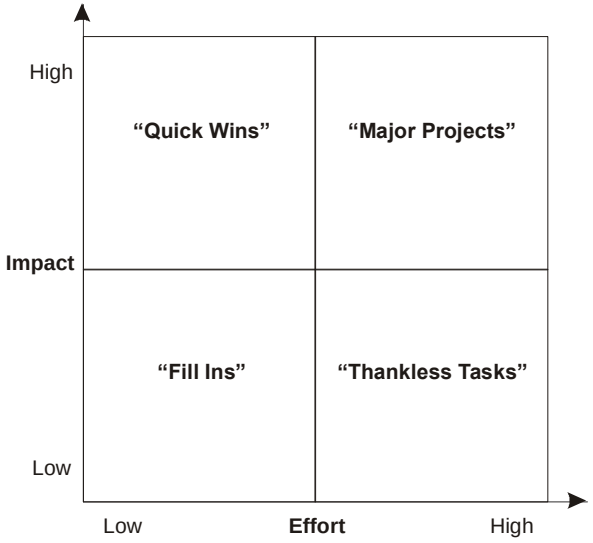
It's useful because most of us have many more activities on our "wish lists" – whether these are bright ideas to pursue, exciting opportunities or interesting possibilities – than we have time available. By choosing activities intelligently, you can make the very most of your time and opportunities.

However by choosing badly, you can quickly bog yourself down in time-consuming, low-yield projects that close down opportunities and stop you moving forwards.

How to Use the Tool

Figure 1 below shows the basic form of the Action Priority Matrix:

Figure 1: Action Priority Matrix



The principle behind using the tool is that you score each activity that you want to complete on two scales – firstly on the impact the activity will have, and secondly on the effort involved.

By plotting each activity on the Action Priority Matrix using these scores, you can quickly see the projects that give you the greatest returns on your efforts; and adopt the most appropriate approach for that type of activity:

- **Quick Wins** (High Impact, Low Effort): These are the most attractive projects, giving you a good return for relatively little effort. Focus on these as much as you can.
- **Major Projects** (High Impact, High Effort): While these give good returns, they take a long time to complete – meaning that one "Major Project" can crowd out many "Quick Wins". If you're engaging in these, make sure that you complete them quickly and efficiently and that you disengage your effort as soon as you can.
- **Fill Ins** (Low Impact, Low Effort): Don't worry too much about doing these – if you've got spare time, do them, but drop them if something better comes along.
- **Thankless Tasks** (Low Impact, High Effort): Avoid these. Not only do they give low returns, they crowd out time which would be better used elsewhere.

Tip 1:
Much of the "magic" of this technique comes from understanding and avoiding this crowding out effect.

Tip2:
A variant of this tool is the "Impact-Feasibility Matrix", which substitutes 'Feasibility' for 'Effort' on the horizontal axis. This gives a different perspective, looking at the organization's ability to deliver important changes.

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To use the Action Priority Matrix, print off our free worksheet and then follow these steps:

1. List the activities that you'd like to complete.
2. Score them on impact (from, say, 0 for no impact to 10 for maximum impact) and on effort involved (from 0, say, for no real effort to 10 for a very major effort).
3. Plot the activities on the Action Priority Matrix.
4. Select or drop activities appropriately.

Tip 3:
Use common sense in interpreting the lines separating the four quadrants – after all, there's only a small difference between a 4.9 impact activity defined as a "thankless task", and a 5.1 impact task defined as a "major project".

Tip 4:
Above we're suggesting a scale from 0 to 10 for both impact and effort. However there's nothing stopping you using other scales – for example if you were ranking major projects, you might use $ financial return as the scale on the impact axis, and "man days activity" on the effort axis.

This is just one of Mind Tools' personal effectiveness techniques. Click here to see more on Make Time for Success, Mind Tools' time management and personal effectiveness program.

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Managing Interruptions

Maintain focus. Keep control of your time.

Everyday interruptions at work can be a key barrier to managing your time effectively and, ultimately, can be a barrier to your success.

Think back to your last workday, and consider for a minute the many interruptions that occurred. They may have been phone calls, emails, hallway conversations, colleagues stopping by your office, or anything else that unexpectedly demanded your attention and, in doing so, distracted you from the task at-hand.

Because your day only has so many hours in it, a handful of small interruptions can rob you of the time you need to achieve your goals and be successful in your work and life.

More than this, they can break your focus, meaning that you have to spend time re-engaging with the thought processes needed to successfully complete complex work.

The key to controlling interruptions is to know what they are and whether they are necessary, and to plan for them in your daily schedule. The tips that follow will help you do that, and so prevent interruptions from frustrating you and jeopardizing your success.

Using the Tool

Use the following tips to understand and manage interruptions:

1. Keep an Interrupters Log

If interruptions consistently rob you of time and energy, or if they frequently push you off schedule and cause delays, it's time to keep an Interrupters Log. This is a simple record of the interruptions you experience in the course of a day.

Click here to download our free Interrupters Log Worksheet. Figure 1 shows an example of it.

Figure 1: The Interrupters Log

Person	Date and Time	Description of Interruption	Valid?	Urgent?

Keep your Interrupters Log with you every day for at least a week, recording every interruption you experience, and marking down the person interrupting you; the date and time it occurs; what the interruption is; whether it was valid; and whether it was urgent (or whether someone could have waited until a better time.)

Once you have recorded the interruptions for a week, sit down with your log and analyze the information.

Which interruptions are valid and which are not?

You need to deal with the valid interruptions. We'll show you below how you can schedule them into your day so that they get the attention they need, while you still have the time you need to adequately address your daily work.

As for the interruptions that are not valid, you must find a way to block these out in the future.

2. Analyze and Conquer Interruptions

To analyze and conquer the interruptions you find in your Interrupters Log, firstly look at whether the interruption is valid or not.

Could someone have avoided interrupting you by waiting for a routine meeting? Or was it

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something they should have asked you about at all?

If not, deal with this politely but assertively.

Next, look at how urgent the interruptions were, and whether they could have been pre-empted. You can pre-empt many interruptions by holding routine meetings with people: If they're confident that they'll have access to you at a defined point in the near future, they'll learn to save up non-urgent issues until this meeting.

However, some interruptions are both urgent and valid. You need to be interrupted, and you need to deal with the situation.

From your Interrupters Log, you'll see how much time is taken up by these urgent, valid interruptions. Block this time into your schedule as "contingency time", and only take on as much other work as you can fit into the remaining time. You'll have to juggle this other work around the interruptions, but at least you won't be overloaded and stressed by the things that you haven't done, because they've been displaced by emergencies.

3. Put Your Phone to Work for You (Not Against You)
A little bit of planning can go a long way in working to control telephone interruptions, which many people experience all day long. If you are on a deadline or your focus needs to be intense (and not interrupted), use your voice mail to screen calls, or have an assistant deal with messages for you. This way, you can deal with calls by priority, and at times that suit you. In fact, this telephone time can be planned into your schedule, and so become a normal part of your working day.

4. Catch Your Breath
When interrupted, it's easy to get caught up in the "rush" of the person who is interrupting, for they undoubtedly feel their request is urgent. In reality, however, most interruptions are not genuinely crisis-driven, and it can serve everyone best to take a little time before taking action.

Take a few minutes to consider the situation. Catch your breath and clear your head. A small delay, even one of just a few minutes, goes a long way in assessing the situation accurately and reacting appropriately.

5. Learn to Say "No"
It's often acceptable to say "no" to requests or tasks if you are busy when someone else can handle it, if it is not an important task, or if it can be done later.

When this is the case, saying "no" in a courteous and sincere way, followed by a short explanation is the best course of action to take: "I am working against a very tight deadline on an important project right now so, I am sorry, but I can not jump in and help".

6. "Available" and "Unavailable" Time
Simple yet effective: Let people know when you are available. and when you are not. Make sure that people know that during your "unavailable time", they should only interrupt you if they have to.

You and your co-workers can also agree on a signal that everyone in the office can use when unavailable, like turning the nameplate on the door around, or simply closing the door. This alleviates interruptions and can avoid hurt feelings.

Tip:
Be careful here. If you're a manager, an important part of your job is to be available to people, to handle urgent issues which arise, and to coach your team so that people are as effective as possible.

If you put up barriers that are too high, you won't be able to do these jobs. By all means, use "unavailable time", but don't over use it, and make sure people know they can interrupt you if there is a genuine crisis.

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7. "Invitation Only" Time

Schedule regular check-in times for the individuals you talk to most often. Ask these people to keep a running list of things that they need to discuss, so you can cover all the points at one time. And, force yourself to do the same.

An open-door policy is good, but you should limit the number of people you invite to your work area. For instance, if you're scheduling a meeting, offer to meet your co-worker in his or her office or a conference room. This way, you can excuse yourself after you accomplish your purpose. Additionally, it's much easier to get up and leave than it is to get people to leave your office once they're seated and comfortable.

8. Uncontrollable Interruptions

There are interruptions that, no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot control.

Most people are happy to schedule a more convenient time, but when this does not work, quickly set the parameters by saying something like, "I only have five minutes to talk about this right now," and stick to it.

Do not ask the interrupter to sit down and do not engage in small talk. Encourage the interrupter to get right to the point and if a solution cannot be reached before the allotted time runs out, set a time for getting back to them and, again, stick to it.

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The Art of Filing

Managing your documents... and your time

Have you ever sat there while your boss stands over you, desperately searching for that missing document he or she needs RIGHT NOW? Or have you kept a client waiting on the phone for several minutes while you've searched for a status report?

If you have, then however organized and effective you are in your day-to-day work, your boss and your client may have a less than perfect opinion of you, because in a key encounter, you've let them down. And if it's your job to help people, how much of other people's time are you wasting if you can't find the information you need when you need it?

You owe it to yourself to file effectively, however boring this may seem. Imagine how much more impressive it would have been if – when asked – you'd smiled, accessed a well-organized filing system, immediately found the document, and quickly given the answer!

Managing Time

On a typical work day, we deal with many documents, presentations, graphics, and other files. There's a flurry of data pouring in from all directions that we need to process and, usually, store to retrieve later. We want to be able to lay our hands on the information we need – **at the right moment, when we need it** – so it can be used for further analysis or report writing, or perhaps for creating a presentation.

All too often, though, we waste our own time (and often the time of other people) searching for data that's sitting on the very computer we're using! This adds to our stress, and makes the task of putting the data to use more difficult than it ought to be. So we need to get more organized and efficient with our file management if we're going to get our work done in a timely manner.

Managing Information Efficiently

When you receive a file in an e-mail from a co-worker, vendor, or customer, it's tempting to "just put it away" in some folder for the time being. "Hmm. looks interesting, but I'll take a closer look at this later, when I've got more time." Sound familiar? Or, worse still, perhaps you just leave the message and its attachment sitting in your Inbox. After a while, many such documents build up, leading to a lot of clutter. It's highly unlikely that you'll ever find time to go back and get all of that information organized, especially considering that you're usually under pressure with other things.

You can spend hours of precious time searching for data you've filed away somewhere, because it's easy to forget the filename – or even to forget that such information is on your computer in the first place. So how can you go about simplifying your work? Get better at managing files.

Effective File Management

Managing files on your computer isn't much different from the way you've always stored and managed your paper files. It boils down to this: store the information in folders – by category, and in a sequence that makes sense to you.

Here are some tips to help manage your files:

- **Avoid saving unnecessary documents.** Don't make a habit of saving everything that finds its way into your Inbox. Take a few seconds to glance through the content, and save a file only if it's relevant to your work activity. Having too much data on your computer adds to clutter and makes it harder to find things in the future – and it may, over time, slow down your computer's performance too. Be selective about what you keep!

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- **Follow a consistent method for naming your files and folders.** For instance, divide a main folder into subfolders for customers, vendors, and co-workers. Give shortened names to identify what or whom the folders relate to. What's more, you can even give a different appearance or look to different categories of folders – this can make it easy to tell them apart at first glance.

- **Store related documents together, whatever their type.** For example, store Word documents, presentations, spreadsheets, and graphics related to a particular project in a single folder – rather than having one folder for presentations for all projects, another folder for spreadsheets for all projects, and so forth. This way, it's much quicker to find, open, and attach documents for a particular project.

- **Separate ongoing work from completed work.** Some people prefer to save current or ongoing work on their computer's desktop until a job is completed. Then, once it's done, they move it to the appropriate location, where files of the same category are stored. At periodic intervals (for example, weekly or every two weeks), move files you're no longer working on to the folders where your completed work is stored.

- **Avoid overfilling folders.** If you have a large number of files in one folder, or a large number of subfolders in a main folder – so many that you can't see the entire list on your screen without scrolling down – break them into smaller groups (subfolders or sub-subfolders). Think of creating a sequential menu, arranged either in chronological or alphabetical order, to make retrieval easy. For instance, you can divide a folder called "Business Plan" into subfolders called "BP2008," "BP2009," and "BP2010." Likewise, you can divide a folder for a client named Delta Traders into subfolders named "Delta Traders sales presentations" and "Delta Traders contracts." The idea is to place every file into a logical folder or subfolder, rather than have one huge list of files.

  Having said this, there is usually little point in creating a folder for fewer than about five documents. If you do, the time you spend clicking through subfolders to get to documents may not be outweighed by the greater ease of finding them.

- **Install Google Desktop on your PC.** If you can (sometimes IT departments don't permit this), install Google Desktop on your PC – you can find this at http://desktop.google.com. This neat tool creates a desktop search engine that indexes all of your files and emails, meaning that you can search for them quickly and easily. This can be invaluable when you need to answer offbeat questions!

- **Make sure your filing system is backed up.** Again, this is a bit tedious, but it's so important, as anyone who's had a failed disk drive will testify! Make sure, firstly, that your PC is backed up regularly and, secondly, that the backup includes the directories where you file information.

Prioritizing Your Files for Action

Take these approaches further by customizing your file management. This can help you prioritize your work, which can lead to better efficiency.

- **Organize files by dates**. Incorporate a date into the file name. This will help you determine which is the most recent document in the folder, without having to open the file and read through the content. For example, a file named "Guidelines 12Oct07" would indicate a version of the Guidelines file dated October 12, 2007. (If you're working internationally, be aware that in some countries this date can be presented as

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101207, while in other countries, this same date can be shown as 121007. This can be very confusing!)

- Some people use **version numbers** to distinguish between documents that have been reworked or changed. Examples would be "Delta Traders contract v1" and "Delta Traders contract v2." This also makes it easier to pick out the most current file.

Tip:
If your document is going to be looked at, used, or amended by several people, you need to be particularly careful about version control: people quite rightly can get very annoyed if versions are mixed up and their work on the document is lost.

Make sure you put the version number in the file name here, and also consider having a version control table at the beginning of the document showing the version number, the date of the version, the person making changes, and, perhaps, the nature of changes made.

- **Use "Tickler" files.** Tickler files, also known as the **"43 folders"** method, are a unique system that's used by many people for organizing files. Create 12 folders (one for each month of the year) and an additional 31 subfolders (for each day of the month). Fill each folder with the documents that you need to work with on that day. At the beginning of each day, open the folder for that day. Take all the items out of the folder and move them into a "today" folder or onto your desktop. Then move the empty folder into the corresponding slot for the next month. If you can't complete some work items by the end of the day, transfer them to the folder for the next convenient day. This system of file management helps you keep track of everything you need to do, and it also doubles as a diary.

For any system to be useful and effective, it must also be convenient for you. To some extent, this depends on the nature of your business or the work that you do. So, although there's no "one size fits all" solution to file management, you will likely profit by using some of these file management tips, and by customizing them in a way that best serves your own needs.

Key Points

Are you losing too much time searching through the clutter on your computer for files that you need? And when you're under pressure, can you retrieve information quickly and easily?

Spending precious time looking for data can take the pleasure out of any kind of creative work you might be doing – and it adds to your stress levels as well. Simple good file management habits can hugely simplify your working life!

Making This Part of Your Life:

We know this is boring, but you know you need to do it!

Clear an hour in your schedule somewhere in the next week, and set your filing system up!

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