



Managing your time

There are two sides to work-life balance: staying in control with work and allowing yourself enough time and space for living. This factsheet focuses on exploring techniques for managing your time and tasks at work, so you can feel on top of your to-do list. The advice can also apply to managing your time outside of work.



Work smart

Managing your time effectively at work should be at the centre of your personal work-life balance strategy.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by your workload, expectations of colleagues and managers and your responsibilities.

Breaking your work into manageable chunks using tried and tested productivity techniques will help you to feel better about your working day. You're also likely to achieve more and feel less stress as a result.

Some techniques for managing your time

Make a list

We all know that making lists helps us organise our thoughts and our time, but how many of us do it properly? Whether you use pen and paper, Outlook or a list-making app, write your lists consistently. Prioritise tasks, cross things off when complete and move tasks to another day as you need to.

Eat the frog

This comical-sounding technique refers to tackling the job that you fear the most first. Mark Twain coined the original phrase: 'If it's your job to eat a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first.' Author Brian Tracy developed the idea into a book in which the central concept is based around doing your worst task first, as it's the one likely to cause most procrastination.

Practise the four Ds

The four Ds is a task management system that allows you to keep on top of your to-do list. It's particularly helpful as an email management technique.

Do – when faced with a task that's quick to complete and important, go ahead and do it. Many tasks can be progressed or dealt with in two minutes.

Delete – some requests can be deleted as soon as they arrive. In the case of emails, around half our inboxes are full of promotional messages with limited value to us.

Delegate – can you pass a task on to someone else to carry out? If so, ask someone else to take the job on and complete it for you.

Defer – sometimes you simply need to mull something over. A decision might not be possible immediately, and it's fine to wait a while before acting.

Pomodoro technique

The Pomodoro technique is a method for managing your time. Originally created by software developer Francesco Cirillo, the Pomodoro system encourages you to break your tasks into 25-minute intervals. At the end of every timed interval, you take a short break, recharging your brain in preparation for the next Pomodoro. Every four Pomodoros, take a longer break to boost productivity. One of the most popular time management techniques, Pomodoro helps you stay on top of a busy, ever-changing workload by encouraging you to focus on a single task for a short yet intensive block of time.

Take regular breaks

Taking time out is key to how productively you spend your days. Research conducted by the University of Illinois showed that brief breaks from a task improved focus. The findings from the study support the theory that the brain is wired to thrive on change.

There are significant benefits from taking regular breaks from what you're doing. Sitting for long periods of time can have a negative impact on health and can increase your risk of obesity and serious conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes. Prolonged computer use is linked to eye strain and headaches. Moving regularly keeps your mind clearer and your body functioning better.

More benefits of taking a break

- Boost your creativity – your mind needs time to recharge
- See the bigger picture – take yourself out of the trenches to consider larger, strategic issues
- Solve problems – switch to another task and you may uncover a new way of thinking about the first one
- Get your metabolism moving and muscles working



'The aim of good time management is to achieve the lifestyle balance you want.' Emma Donaldson-Feilder, chartered occupational psychologist