

## What are effective time-management strategies?

Time management can be difficult, especially in the current age of smartphones, social media, and 24-hour news cycles. My advice on managing time is divided in two parts: first, recognize we are mortal beings, and then make the most out of the time we do have with effective tools and habits.

Time is finite for us, mortal beings. Given our short life span, and nowadays the sheer number of things one could do or the amount of content one could consume, this implies we necessarily must make choices and bear responsibility for it. It implies we must ruthlessly prioritize for what truly matters, which may be only two or three big things. In a world full of feelings of busyness and distraction, it means we must accept the discomfort of working on something important, even if it is always more tempting to “multi-task” into cheap dopamine hits such from opening social media. Quite simply, it implies that “getting more done” is not necessarily better. But all this is better elaborated by Oliver Burkeman in his book “[Four Thousand Weeks](#)”, which I would highly recommend a read.

With that said, given the amount of time we have and that we want to spend working, I detail below a few tools and routines that you can incorporate into you day-to-day which will help you make the most out of it. My system includes four parts: calendar, task management, communication, and note taking.

### 1. Calendar

Use a calendar to keep track of and plan events, with specific start and end times. For example, you can have an event be “work on task X”, but not “deliver task X”.

Do color coding of events by category. This helps quickly assessing if you are indeed spending enough time on each category. Each person’s categories vary, but mine are: personal, research, service, teaching, and NGO.

Learn about the Eisenhower Matrix (importance vs urgency) and block time for important non-urgent tasks. This set usually includes the most important parts of our job, such as deep thinking and writing papers.

Block time for meetings in the beginning of the week (preferably on Monday) and time for research later in the week. Meetings should be as short as possible and scheduled sequentially in blocks.

Use a scheduler app. This saves you the back and forth when scheduling meetings and allows you to control what specific times you are available or not. There are many options available, but my current favorite is [Koalendar](#).

### 2. Task management

Use a task manager to keep track of tasks, their content and their deadlines. My current favorite app is ClickUp, but there are many good options (e.g., 2Do, Asana). Learn about systems such as the [Getting Things Done \(GTD\)](#).

Follow the “mind as water” principle. First add all your tasks to your app, and then group into projects and prioritize. Whenever new tasks arise, write them into an “inbox” and parse them later. As long as you trust your system to contain all your tasks and to tell you what to do next, this frees your mind to not think of tasks when you are not working.

### **3. Communication**

Communicating over email or apps such as Slack or Discord may help reducing the number of meetings you have to attend. But it may also generate a constant sense of busyness and distraction. We should learn to communicate wisely.

I would highly recommend reading Cal Newport’s books, especially one entitled “[A World Without Email](#)”.

### **4. Note taking**

Having a good note taking system can be immensely powerful. It helps keeping thoughts organized, and it helps finding things later. My current favorite app is Evernote (for its flexibility, notebooks, tags, and search), but other good options are OneNote, Notion, and Obsidian.

Have notebooks for specific types of text. For example, I have notebooks for thoughts (as a general diary), for meetings (where I document topics discussed, people present), for research ideas, for talks attended (with questions, follow ups), for talks given (with questions I received, people to touch base afterwards), for literature reviews, and for specific projects.

I also recommend you having “one note to rule them all” with personal information, such as personal documents’ numbers, bank and credit cards details, passwords, and more. This has saved me an unimaginable amount of time when logging into platforms, buying stuff online, or filling forms.

For keeping a library of papers and books and to annotate them, I would recommend having an app such as Zenodo or Mendeley. Even better, I would recommend having an e-ink tablet such as a Remarkable to read text, annotate, and sync it to the cloud.