

Get Organized!

MANAGE YOUR TO-DO LIST

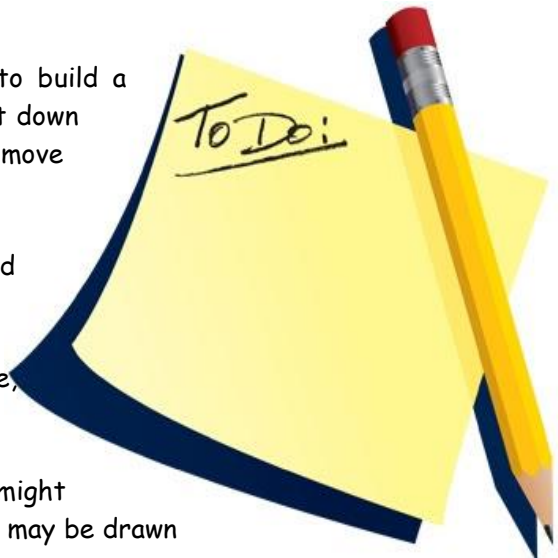
Do you feel like your to-do list is never-ending? Do you sometimes feel like ripping it into pieces and tossing it away? A lot of this frustration has to do with the way we organize lists. The success of a to-do list depends on its creator. A well-organized list can be therapeutic, and according to recent research is good for the brain as it reduces anxiety and clears the mind.

The Building Blocks of an Effective To-Do List

Step 1 Before you start building a detailed list, you need to build a master list. Compiling a master list is easy; you just need to jot down any to-dos that come to mind. The idea of the master list is to move these tasks from your brain to your writing pad.

Step 2 Turn that master list into something more useful (and less intimidating). Start by breaking it down into sub-lists, and give each sub-list a category. You can choose whichever categorization that makes sense, such as categorizing by place, action, or time-frame.

Step 3 Choose your tools. While the more visual person might prefer sticky notes and whiteboards, the more analytical person may be drawn to an hour-by-hour calendar.



For the tech-savvy, compulsive smartphone user, there are apps to help manage your tasks such as "Todolist" and "Evernote", which allow you to share tasks with other users (so you can send "pick up milk" to your partner) and "Carrot", which has a game-like points system which might apply to more competitive users.

Prioritizing

While a to-do list is a start to managing your time effectively, it is also essential that you know how to prioritize. Resist the urge to tackle easy items first just to get the jolt of checking them off. Instead, be strategic. Select the items that will need your best mental energy and address them at times when you can really be energetic and alert. Save the easy items for the relatively sluggish part of the day. Regularly check in with your list, and don't be afraid to re-shuffle it.

As you check in, you'll inevitably see items you're carrying forward from list to list, sometimes for weeks or months. Try scheduling tasks- perhaps some that have been hanging around too long or that seem particularly challenging, in your calendar. Figure out what's truly valuable. If you have trouble letting go of the idea of organizing your medicine cabinet, but you can't seem to every get around to it, create a maybe someday list.

Examples of Common To-Dos & How to Improve Them

- **Make vet appointment** - Include details like phone numbers or addresses to make tasks like this easier to accomplish, and harder to put off.
- **Organize spice rack** - Do you really need to do this? Or are you "should-ing" yourself?
- **Pick up dry-cleaning** - Can you delegate this to someone else? Can the cleaning be delivered?
- **Clean Attic** - Break big tasks like this into the first two or three steps such as organize holiday decorations, donate old clothes, etc.
- **Finish expense report** - Keep tasks separate by category: ie work, household, or due date.
- **Paint bathroom** - Are you going to do this immediately? If not, put it on a future or maybe someday list so it doesn't taunt you.
- **Pay credit card** - Autopay! Automate whatever you can in your life to boot it off your list.

To-Do List Don'ts

- ✓ Don't create a list if it's going to sit idle. Make sure you use it!
- ✓ Don't be judged by your list - if you can't sit back and enjoy reading a book without feeling judged, consider doing another leisure activity, such as going for a walk.
- ✓ Don't rush to get the list done. Downtime is important!

Structuring your Business Day for Maximum Productivity

For those in business, taking 10-20 minutes to plan out your next day proves highly beneficial. Also called, time blocking this process involves reviewing your task lists, calendars, and planning notes, and planning the next day in blocks. You can even plan for the unexpected by having a block set aside just for that! The goal is to make sure progress is being made on the right things at the right times. If done correctly, this can significantly boost productivity.

Benefits of Time Blocking

- It fosters discipline and discourages distraction.
- It ensures priorities remain priorities.
- It keeps momentum going and reduces the urge to flee or procrastinate. You have to earn your break!
- It boosts creativity. Working for hours without a mental break can lead you into a creative rut. A quick break allows you to shift context so that you can tap into new ideas and approaches and if your break includes walking, research has shown that walking boosts creative thinking.
- It supports healthy habits. It's healthy to get up from your desk once in a while.

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