<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_00.htm>

**What Is Time Management?**

**Working Smarter to Enhance Productivity**

**Improve the way that you use your time.**

**Time Management Definition**

“Time management” is the process of organizing and planning how to divide your time between specific activities. Good time management enables you to work smarter – not harder – so that you get more done in less time, even when time is tight and pressures are high. Failing to manage your time damages your effectiveness and causes stress.

It seems that there is never enough time in the day. But, since we all get the same 24 hours, why is it that some people achieve so much more with their time than others? The answer lies in good time management.

The highest achievers manage their time exceptionally well. By using the time-management techniques in this section, you can improve your ability to function more effectively – even when time is tight and pressures are high.

Good time management requires an important shift in focus from activities to results: **being busy isn’t the same as being effective**. (Ironically, the opposite is often closer to the truth.)

Spending your day in a frenzy of activity often achieves less, because you’re dividing your attention between so many different tasks. Good time management lets you work smarter – not harder – so you get more done in less time.

**What is “Time Management?”**

“Time management” refers to the way that you organize and plan how long you spend on specific activities.

It may seem counter-intuitive to dedicate precious time to learning about time management, instead of using it to get on with your work, but the benefits are enormous:

* Greater productivity and efficiency.
* A better professional reputation.
* Less stress.
* Increased opportunities for advancement.
* Greater opportunities to achieve important life and career goals.

Failing to manage your time effectively can have some very undesirable consequences:

* Missed deadlines.
* Inefficient work flow.
* Poor work quality.
* A poor professional reputation and a stalled career.
* Higher stress levels.

Spending a little time learning about time-management techniques will have huge benefits now – and throughout your career.

**Key Points**

Time management is the process of organizing and planning how much time you spend on specific activities. Invest some time in our comprehensive collection of time management articles to learn about managing your own time more efficiently, and save yourself time in the future.

**How Good is Your Time Management?**

**Instructions:** For each statement, click the button in the column that best describes you. Please answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be), and don't worry if some questions seem to score in the 'wrong direction'. When you are finished, please click the 'Calculate My Total' button at the bottom of the test

**Your last quiz results are shown.**

You last completed this quiz on , at .

Reset Your Score

| **15 Statements to Answer** | **Not at All** | **Rarely** | **Sometimes** | **Often** | **Very Often** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

| **15 Statements to Answer** | **Not at All** | **Rarely** | **Sometimes** | **Often** | **Very Often** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | | | | | |
| **1** The tasks I work on are the ones with the highest priority. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2** I find myself completing tasks at the last minute, or asking for extensions. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **3** I set aside time for planning and scheduling. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4** I know how much time I spend on each of the various task I do. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **5** I find myself dealing with interruptions. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **6** I use goal setting to decide what tasks and activities I should work on. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **7** I leave contingency time in my schedule to deal with "the unexpected"? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8** I know whether the tasks I am working on are high, medium, or low value. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **9** When I am given a new assignment, I analyze it for importance and prioritize it accordingly. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10** I am stressed about deadlines and commitments. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **11** Distractions keep me from working on critical tasks. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **12** I have to take work home in order to get it done. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **13** I prioritize my To Do list or Action Program. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **14** I confirm my priorities with my boss. |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **15** Before I take on a task, I check that the results will be worth the time put in. |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 still need to be answered!

Calculate My Total

**Total = \_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Score Interpretation**

| **Score** | **Comment** |
| --- | --- |
| 15-30 | Ouch. The good news is that you've got a great opportunity to improve your effectiveness at work, and your long term success! However, to realize this, you've got to fundamentally improve your time management skills. (Read [**below**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm#groups) to start.) |
| 31-45 | You're good at some things, but there's room for improvement elsewhere. Focus on the serious issues [**below**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm#groups), and you'll most likely find that work becomes much less stressful. |
| 46-75 | You're managing your time very effectively! Still, check the sections [**below**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm#groups) to see if there's anything you can tweak to make this even better. |

**Goal Setting**

(Questions 6, 10)

*Your score is 0 out of 0*

To start managing time effectively, you need to set goals. When you know where you're going, you can then figure out what exactly needs to be done, in what order. Without proper goal setting, you'll fritter your time away on a confusion of conflicting priorities.

People tend to neglect goal setting because it requires time and effort. What they fail to consider is that a little time and effort put in now saves an enormous amount of time, effort and frustration in the future. Mind Tools has two great articles on goal setting that are must-reads for everyone. If you are serious about time management, we suggest you start with [**Personal Goal Setting**](https://www.mindtools.com/page6.html) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif and [**The Golden Rules of Goal Setting**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_90.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif. We also recommend [**Treasure Mapping**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_94.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif.

**Prioritization**

(Questions 1, 4, 8, 13, 14, 15)

*Your score is 0 out of 0*

Prioritizing what needs to be done is especially important. Without it, you may work very hard, but you won't be achieving the results you desire because what you are working on is not of strategic importance.

Most people have a "to-do" list of some sort. The problem with many of these lists is they are just a collection of things that need to get done. There is no rhyme or reason to the list and, because of this, the work they do is just as unstructured. So how do you work on To Do List tasks – top down, bottom up, easiest to hardest?

To work efficiently you need to work on the most important, highest value tasks. This way you won't get caught scrambling to get something critical done as the deadline approaches. For information on how to start prioritizing your tasks, see [**Activity Logs**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_03.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, [**Prioritized To Do Lists**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_05.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, [**Prioritization**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_92.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, [**The Action Priority Matrix**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_95.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, and [**Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_91.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif.

**Managing Interruptions**

(Questions 5, 9, 11, 12)

*Your score is 0 out of 0*

Having a plan and knowing how to prioritize it is one thing. The next issue is knowing what to do to minimize the interruptions you face during your day. It is widely recognized that managers get very little uninterrupted time to work on their priority tasks. There are phone calls, information requests, questions from employees, and a whole host of events that crop up unexpectedly. Some do need to be dealt with immediately, but others need to be managed. Our article on [**Managing Interruptions**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_94.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif discusses how you can minimize your interrupted time.

**However**, some jobs need you to be available for people when they need help – interruption is a natural and necessary part of life. Here, do what you sensibly can to minimize it, but make sure you don't scare people away from interrupting you when they should.

**Procrastination**

(Questions 2)

*Your score is 0 out of 0*

"I'll get to it later" has led to the downfall of many a good employee. After too many "laters" the work piles up so high that any task seems insurmountable. Procrastination is as tempting as it is deadly. The best way to beat it is to recognize that you do indeed procrastinate. Then you need to figure out why. Perhaps you are afraid of failing? (And some people are actually afraid of success!)

Once you know why you procrastinate then you can plan to get out of the habit. Reward yourself for getting jobs done, and remind yourself regularly of the horrible consequences of not doing those boring tasks! For more help on recognizing and overcoming procrastination see our guide to [**Beating Procrastination**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_96.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif.

**Scheduling**

(Questions 3, 7)

*Your score is 0 out of 0*

Much of time management comes down to effective scheduling of your time. When you know what your goals and priorities are, you then need to know how to go about creating a schedule that keeps you on track, and protects you from stress.

This means understanding the factors that affect the time you have available for work. You not only have to schedule priority tasks, you have to leave room for interruptions, and contingency time for those unexpected events that otherwise wreak chaos with your schedule. By creating a robust schedule that reflects your priorities and well as supports your personal goals, you have a winning combination: One that will allow you to control your time and keep your life in balance. To learn specific scheduling skills, see our articles on [**Pickle Jar Theory**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_98.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif and [**Scheduling Skills**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_07.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif.

**Key Points**

Time management is an essential skill that helps you keep your work under control, at the same time that it helps you keep stress to a minimum.

We would all love to have an extra couple of hours in every day. Seeing as that is impossible, we need to work smarter on things that have the highest priority, and then creating a schedule that reflects our work and personal priorities.

With this in place, we can work in a focused and effective way, and really start achieving those goals, dreams and ambitions we care so much about.

This self-test is just one of a large set that helps you evaluate your abilities in a wide range of important career skills. [**Click here**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/SelfTestsIndex.htm) for other self-tests.

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/time-management-mistakes.htm>

**10 Common Time Management Mistakes**

**Avoiding Common Pitfalls**

Learn how to overcome several common time management mistakes.

How well do you manage your time? If you're like many people, your answer may not be completely positive! Perhaps you feel overloaded, and you often have to work late to hit your deadlines. Or maybe your days seem to go from one crisis to another, and this is stressful and demoralizing.

Many of us know that we could be managing our time more effectively; but it can be difficult to identify the mistakes that we're making, and to know how we could improve. When we do manage our time well, however, we're exceptionally productive at work, and our stress levels drop. We can devote time to the interesting, high-reward projects that can make a real difference to a career. In short, we're happier!

In this article, we're looking at ten of the most common time management mistakes, as well as identifying strategies and tips that you can use to overcome them. These ten mistakes are:

**Mistake #1. Failing to Keep a To-Do List**

Do you ever have that nagging feeling that you've forgotten to do an important piece of work? If so, you probably don't use a To-Do List to keep on top of things. (Or, if you do, you might not be using it effectively!)

The trick with using [To-Do Lists](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_05.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifeffectively lies in prioritizing the tasks on your list. Many people use an A – F coding system (A for high priority items, F for very low priorities). Alternatively, you can simplify this by using A through D, or by using numbers.

If you have large projects on your list, then, unless you're careful, the entries for these can be vague and ineffective. For instance, you may have written down "Start on budget proposal." But what does this entail? The lack of specifics here might cause you to procrastinate, or miss key steps. So make sure that you break large tasks or projects down into specific, actionable steps – then you won't overlook something important.

You can also use [Action Programs](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_83.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifto manage your work when you have many large projects happening at once. (Action Programs are "industrial strength" versions of To-Do Lists.)

**Mistake #2. Not Setting Personal Goals**

Do you know where you'd like to be in six months? What about this time next year, or even 10 years from now? If not, it's time to set some personal goals!

[Personal goal setting](https://www.mindtools.com/page6.html) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifis essential to managing your time well, because goals give you a destination and vision to work toward. When you know where you want to go, you can manage your priorities, time, and resources to get there. Goals also help you decide what's worth spending your time on, and what's just a distraction.

To learn how to set SMART, effective goals, read up on [Locke's Goal Setting Theory](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_87.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif. Here, you'll learn how to set clearly defined goals that will keep you motivated.

You might also enjoy our Book Insight into [Long Fuse, Big Bang](https://www.mindtools.com/community/BookInsights/GettingThingsDone.php) by Eric Haseltine. This book teaches you how to focus on your long-term goals without overlooking your short term priorities.

**Mistake #3. Not Prioritizing**

Your assistant has just walked in with a crisis that she needs you to deal with right now, but you're in the middle of brainstorming ideas for a new client. You're sure that you've *almost* come up with a brilliant idea for their marketing campaign, but now you risk losing the thread of your thinking because of this "emergency."

Sometimes, it's hard to know how to [prioritize](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_92.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, especially when you're facing a flood of seemingly-urgent tasks. However, it's essential to learn how to prioritize tasks effectively if you want to manage your time better.

One tool that will help you prioritize effectively is the [Action Priority Matrix](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_95.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, which will help you determine if a task is high-yield and high-priority, or low-value, "fill in" work. You'll manage your time much better during the day if you know the difference.

You might also want to go through our Bite-Sized Training session [How to Prioritize](https://www.mindtools.com/community/Bite-SizedTraining/HowtoPrioritize.php), to further enhance your skills.

**Mistake #4. Failing to Manage Distractions**

Do you know that some of us can lose as much as two hours a day to distractions? Think how much you could get done if you had that time back!

Whether they come from emails, IM chats, colleagues in a crisis, or phone calls from clients, distractions prevent us from achieving [flow](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_86.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, which is the satisfying and seemingly effortless work that we do when we're 100 percent engaged in a task.

If you want to gain control of your day and do your best work, it's vital to know how to [minimize distractions](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/distractions.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifand [manage interruptions](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_94.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifeffectively. For instance, turn off your IM chat when you need to focus, and let people know if they're distracting you too often. You should also learn how to [improve your concentration](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_78.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, even when you're faced with distractions.

Additionally, our article on [managing email effectively](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/managing-email.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifteaches you how to gain control of your email, so that it doesn't eat up your entire day.

**Mistake #5. Procrastination**

Procrastination occurs when you put off tasks that you should be focusing on right now. When you procrastinate, you feel guilty that you haven't started; you come to dread doing the task; and, eventually, everything catches up with you when you fail to complete the work on time.

Start by taking our [procrastination quiz](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_99.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifto find out if procrastination is a problem in your life. If it is, then learn the strategies you need to [beat procrastination](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_96.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif.

For instance, one useful strategy is to tell yourself that you're only going to start on a project for ten minutes. Often, procrastinators feel that they have to complete a task from start to finish, and this high expectation makes them feel overwhelmed and anxious. Instead, focus on devoting a small amount of time to starting. That's all!

You might also find it helpful to use [Action Plans](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_04.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif. These help you break large projects down into manageable steps, so that it's easy to see everything that you need to get done, and so that you can complete small chunks at a time. Doing this can stop you from feeling overwhelmed at the start of a new project.

**Tip:**

Our Bite-Sized Training session, [Overcoming Procrastination](https://www.mindtools.com/community/Bite-SizedTraining/OvercomingProcrastination.php), gives you more in-depth strategies and tips for dealing with procrastination.

**Mistake #6. Taking on too Much**

Are you a person who has a hard time saying "no" to people? If so, you probably have far too many projects and commitments on your plate. This can lead to poor performance, stress, and low morale.

Or, you might be a [**micromanager**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_90.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif: someone who insists on controlling or doing all of the work themselves, because they can't trust anyone else to do it correctly. (This can be a problem for everyone – not just managers!)

Either way, taking on too much is a poor use of your time, and it can get you a reputation for producing rushed, sloppy work.

To stop this, learn the subtle art of [**saying "yes" to the person, but "no" to the task**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCS_92.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif. This skill helps you assert yourself, while still maintaining good feelings within the group. If the other person starts leaning on you to say "yes" to their request, learn how to [**think on your feet**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/ThinkingonYourFeet.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, and stay cool under pressure.

**Mistake #7. Thriving on "Busy"**

Some people get a rush from being busy. The narrowly-met deadlines, the endless emails, the piles of files needing attention on the desk, the frantic race to the meeting... What an adrenaline buzz!

The problem is that an "addiction to busyness" rarely means that you're effective, and it can lead to stress.

Instead, try to slow down, and learn to manage your time better.

**Tip:**

"Do More Great Work", by Michael Bungay Stanier, is full of ideas and tips to reduce the "busywork" that you're doing, so that you're more excited and engaged in the work that matters. Click [**here**](https://www.mindtools.com/community/BookInsights/DoMoreGreatWork.php) for our Book Insight on it.

**Mistake #8. Multitasking**

To get on top of her workload, Linda regularly writes emails while she chats on the phone to her clients. However, while Linda thinks that this is a good use of her time, the truth is that it can take 20-40 percent more time to finish a list of jobs when you multitask, compared with completing the same list of tasks in sequence. The result is also that she does both tasks poorly – her emails are full of errors, and her clients are frustrated by her lack of concentration.

So, the best thing is to forget about [**multitasking**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_75.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gif, and, instead, focus on one task at a time. That way, you'll produce higher quality work.

Our Expert Interview with Dave Crenshaw, looking at [**The Myth of Multitasking**](https://www.mindtools.com/community/ExpertInterviews/DaveCrenshaw.php), will give you an enlightening look at multitasking, and will help you explore how you can manage simultaneous projects more effectively.

**Mistake #9. Not Taking Breaks**

It's nice to think that you can work for 8-10 hours straight, especially when you're working to a deadline. But it's impossible for anyone to focus and produce really high-quality work without giving their brains some time to rest and recharge.

So, don't dismiss breaks as "wasting time." They provide valuable down-time, which will enable you to think creatively and work effectively.

If it's hard for you to stop working, then schedule breaks for yourself, or set an alarm as a reminder. Go for a quick walk, grab a cup of coffee, or just sit and [**meditate**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_79.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifat your desk. Try to take a five minute break every hour or two. And make sure that you give yourself ample time for lunch – you won't produce top quality work if you're hungry!

**Mistake #10. Ineffectively Scheduling Tasks**

Are you a morning person? Or do you find your energy picking up once the sun begins to set in the evening? All of us have different rhythms, that is, different times of day when we feel most productive and energetic.

You can make best use of your time by scheduling high-value work during your peak time, and low-energy work (like returning phone calls and checking email), during your "down" time. Our article, [**Is This a Morning Task?**](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_79.htm) https://www.mindtools.com/images/tooltip/reading-plus-grey.gifwill teach you how to do this.

**Key Points**

One of the most effective ways of improving your productivity is to recognize and rectify time management mistakes.

When you take the time to overcome these mistakes, it will make a huge difference in your productivity – and you'll also be happier, and experience less stress!