

APPSUMO

PRODUCTIVITY, BOOSTED

Top 10 Time Management
Frameworks Compared



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“You do not rise to the level of your goals,
you fall to the level of your systems.”

- James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*



Most of us wish we could accomplish more in a day. Maybe we see productivity as a road to greater lifestyle freedom, or a better paycheck, or the means to build a business that fulfills all our wildest entrepreneurial dreams.

Maybe being more productive just means finishing work before dinner or avoiding procrastination on that project we should totally be working on.

No matter the need, pure hustle doesn't usually lead to our highest level of productivity. **We need systems that keep us focused on what matters most for the long term.**

In this guide, we've compiled **10 of the most popular productivity systems** we could find. Some of these play off one another, others stand alone. Try these on for size. See which ones work for you—and then share this ebook with the busiest entrepreneur you know.

Let's go!

Getting Things Done®

TL;DR:

Getting Things Done is a famous productivity system created by author and consultant, David Allen.

The primary philosophy is that getting tasks from your head to a notebook is the first step to accomplishing them.

The system was invented to help people with lots of responsibilities stay ahead of everything on their task list.

The Getting Things Done framework is a foundational methodology which plays into other frameworks throughout this ebook.

Management consultant and executive coach, David Allen, invented Getting Things Done to help his busy clients, well, get more done. The core idea behind this system is that **the mind is a terrible place to store responsibilities and tasks**. They must instead be captured outside the mind, preferably on a sheet of paper. With your mind freed up, you can begin to solve the problems and take action on the tasks in front of you.

Here are 5 steps to applying Getting Things Done from the official website:

- 1 Capture:** This is where you record—often with a pen and paper—what has your attention. You should list all responsibilities you’ve been storing in your mind.
- 2 Clarify:** Make the items you’ve listed actionable so that you understand what you must do next.

- 3 **Organize:** Categorize your content so that you're reminded of what you need, plus when and where you need to be reminded of it.
- 4 **Reflect:** Regularly update and review the contents you've captured to regain control and focus.
- 5 **Engage:** Use your system to act on the next steps and responsibilities you've captured.



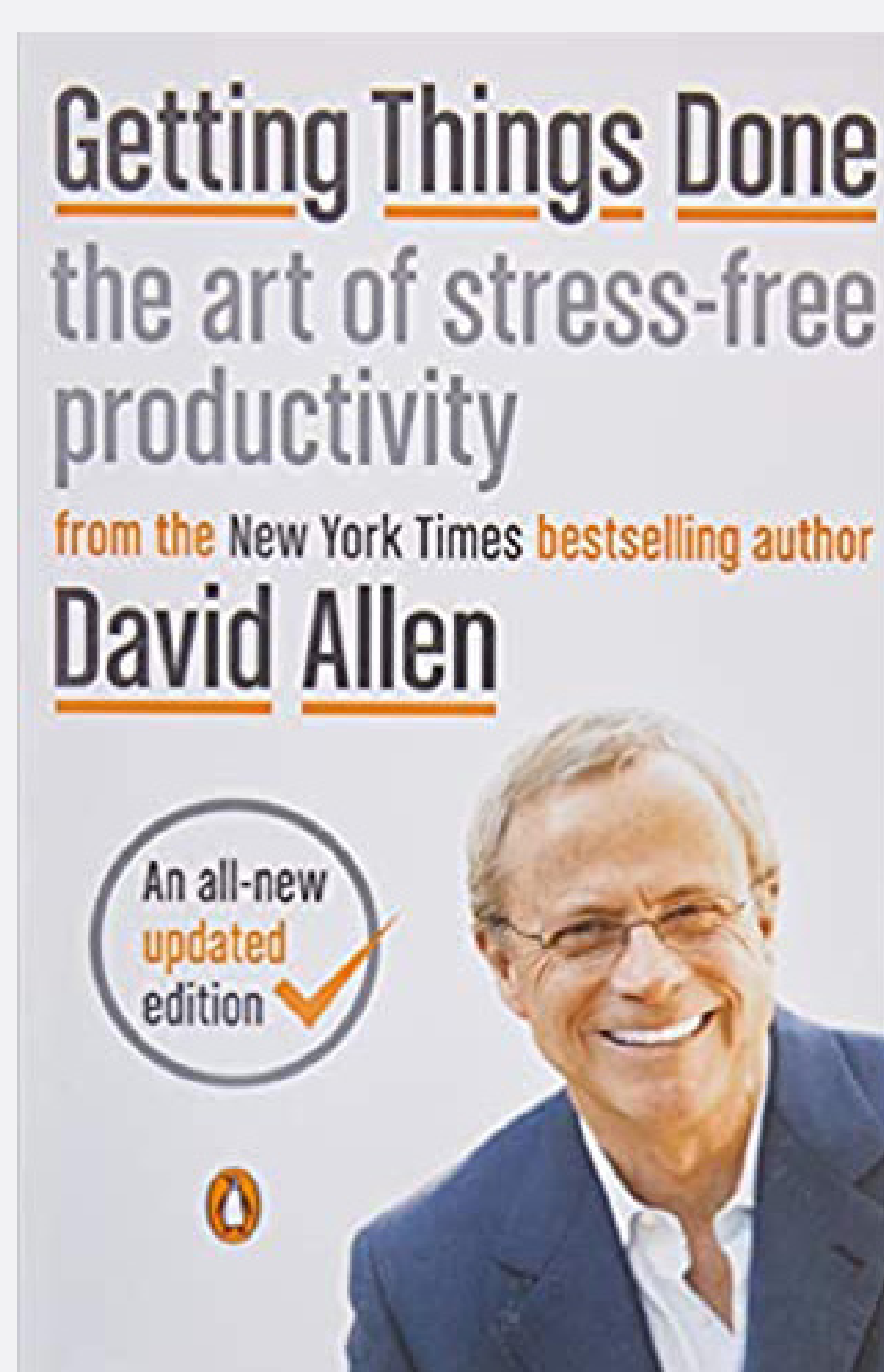
“Your head's for having ideas, not for holding them.”

- David Allen, author of [Getting Things Done](#)



“Getting Things Done is much more than just a way to get things done. It is a framework for organizing and tracking tasks, such that you can 100% trust that the things on your to-do list truly are the things you need to do.”

- Siobhan O'Rourke, [Zenkit](#)



▶ **Additional reading:**

[Getting Things Done by David Allen](#)



Capture, Configure, Control

TL;DR:

Cal Newport's method, Capture, Configure, Control, builds upon David Allen's Getting Things Done.

Newport borrows Allen's idea of capturing ideas instead of storing them in your head.

Once captured, Newport believes there needs to be a better system for processing the information that's been written down—particularly for people in the knowledge work sector.

Newport believes notebooks work better than apps for capturing ideas and tasks throughout the day. There's less friction to jotting down what's immediately on your mind.

Cal Newport is a computer scientist and nonfiction author in the productivity space. Capture, Configure, Control **brings together a few popular productivity methods—Getting Things Done, time blocking, Deep Work**—and combines them into a single 3-step system.

The 3 steps are built into the name:

- 1 Capture:** Throughout your day, write ideas and tasks in a notebook or note-taking system.
- 2 Configure:** Place tasks into a productivity app—like a Kanban board—and add ideas where you can flesh them out—like a note-taking app.
- 3 Control:** Use time blocking to accomplish the items in your productivity apps. Newport believes in doing “deep work,” being undistracted as you focus on one cognitively demanding task at a time.



“As soon as you have to turn on the phone, tap on an app, click on Today, click the Plus sign to create a new task, and then hand type in your task—as soon as you have that much friction, you’re going to stop doing it.”

- Cal Newport, from the [Deep Questions podcast](#)



“It can’t make an overwhelming amount of work go away. But [Capture, Configure, Control] can give you a clear line of attack. It can make sure you find a way to get the urgent things done.”

- Cal Newport, from the [Deep Questions podcast](#)



The Seinfeld Strategy (also called “Don’t Break the Chain”)

TL;DR:

Rather than focus on results, the Seinfeld strategy focuses on maintaining consistency in your most important work.

Set a minimum criteria for a certain task that you must accomplish every day. This could be as simple as doing just one push up or writing a single sentence each day. The point is consistency.

This method is designed for achieving large tasks or building habits that you want to foster for the long term.

It’s called the Seinfeld Strategy because comedian Jerry Seinfeld used this same method to become so well known: writing jokes every single day.

The best way to understand the Seinfeld message is to hear where the name comes from. This story of Brad Isaac is found on [Inc.com](#):

“[Jerry Seinfeld] said the way to be a better comic was to create better jokes, and the way to create better jokes was to write every day.

He told me to get a big wall calendar that has a whole year on one page and hang it on a prominent wall. The next step was to get a big red magic marker. He said for each day that I do my task of writing, I get to put a big red X over that day.

“After a few days, you’ll have a chain. Just keep at it and the chain will grow longer every day. You’ll like seeing that chain, especially when you get a few weeks under your belt. **Your only job is to not break the chain.**”

Here are 3 steps to using the Seinfeld Strategy:

- 1 **Choose** a simple task that will make a meaningful impact on your life or work when repeated daily.
- 2 **Place** an X on a calendar for every day that you complete the task. After a few days in a row, this will form a chain of X's. Your goal is not to break that chain.
- 3 **Restart** when you eventually break the chain. To avoid losing momentum, do everything you can not to miss more than one day in a row.



“So often, we assume that excellence requires a monumental effort and that our lofty goals demand incredible doses of willpower and motivation. But really, all we need is dedication to small, manageable tasks. Mastery follows consistency.”

- James Clear on jamesclear.com



“Jerry didn’t focus on getting rich, something he hoped to someday be. Or becoming a headlining comedian, something he burned to someday be. Or developing an iconic TV series; that wasn’t even on his radar.

He focused on doing the work: Day after day.”

- Jeff Haden, [Inc.](https://www.inc.com)



Batchworking

TL;DR:

Batchworking means accomplishing multiple tasks that are similar to one another during the same time period.

Individual batches can be done by designated days of the week or hours in a day.

This is ideal for people who want to accomplish tedious, repetitive tasks, like social media creation and administration, in long sprints rather than daily short spurts.

Take control of your tasks and calendar by choosing when to handle recurring tasks, instead of letting your calendar be owned by passing whims.

Batchworking is a common tool for busy people who have similar recurring tasks that must be achieved on a regular basis.

Instead of working on small tasks daily, **batchworking lets you combine similar-style work into a single day of the week or designated hours in a day.**

Someone might batch the writing of all their social media posts into a single day of the month, for example, instead of writing a new social post every day.

Batchwork in three steps:

- 1 **Select a recurring task** that you'd like to accomplish at once (like social media scheduling, booking new guests for a podcast, answering emails, etc.).
- 2 **Determine how much time you need** to accomplish all these tasks in one or two sittings.
- 3 **Select a time of day that you will designate** to accomplishing this batched work.

Repeat regularly for recurring work.



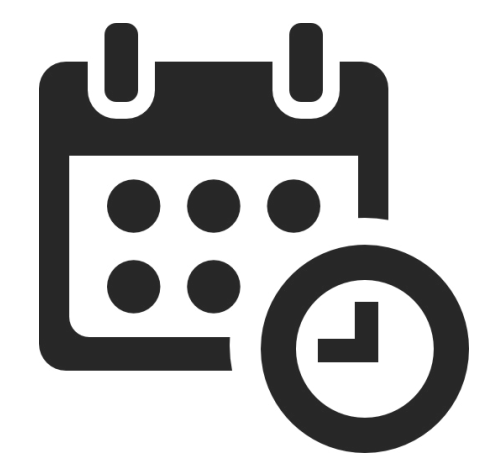
“The best way to increase productivity as an entrepreneur is to start batchworking your tasks and projects.”

- Kendall Cherry, host of the [Candid Kendall podcast](#)



“Batching your work into theme days helps reduce decision fatigue—it takes the guesswork out of any task that comes on my plate.”

- Ashlyn Carter, [Ashlyn Writes podcast](#)



Pomodoro Technique®

TL;DR:

Accomplish tasks using 25-minute time blocks.

Take intermittent breaks to avoid distraction when it matters.

You can use apps to set Pomodoro timers.

Get more done by focusing on a single task at once.

The Pomodoro Technique is a time management system that was invented by consultant Francesco Cirillo in the 1990s. It **consists of 6 repeated steps** to help people accomplish focused work.

From the official website:

- 1 Choose a task you'd like to get done.
- 2 Set the timer for 25 minutes.
- 3 Work on the task until the timer rings.
- 4 Put a checkmark on a piece of paper.
- 5 Take a short break (grab a cup of coffee, take a short walk, etc.).
- 6 Every 4-5 Pomodoros, take a longer break of 20-30 minutes.



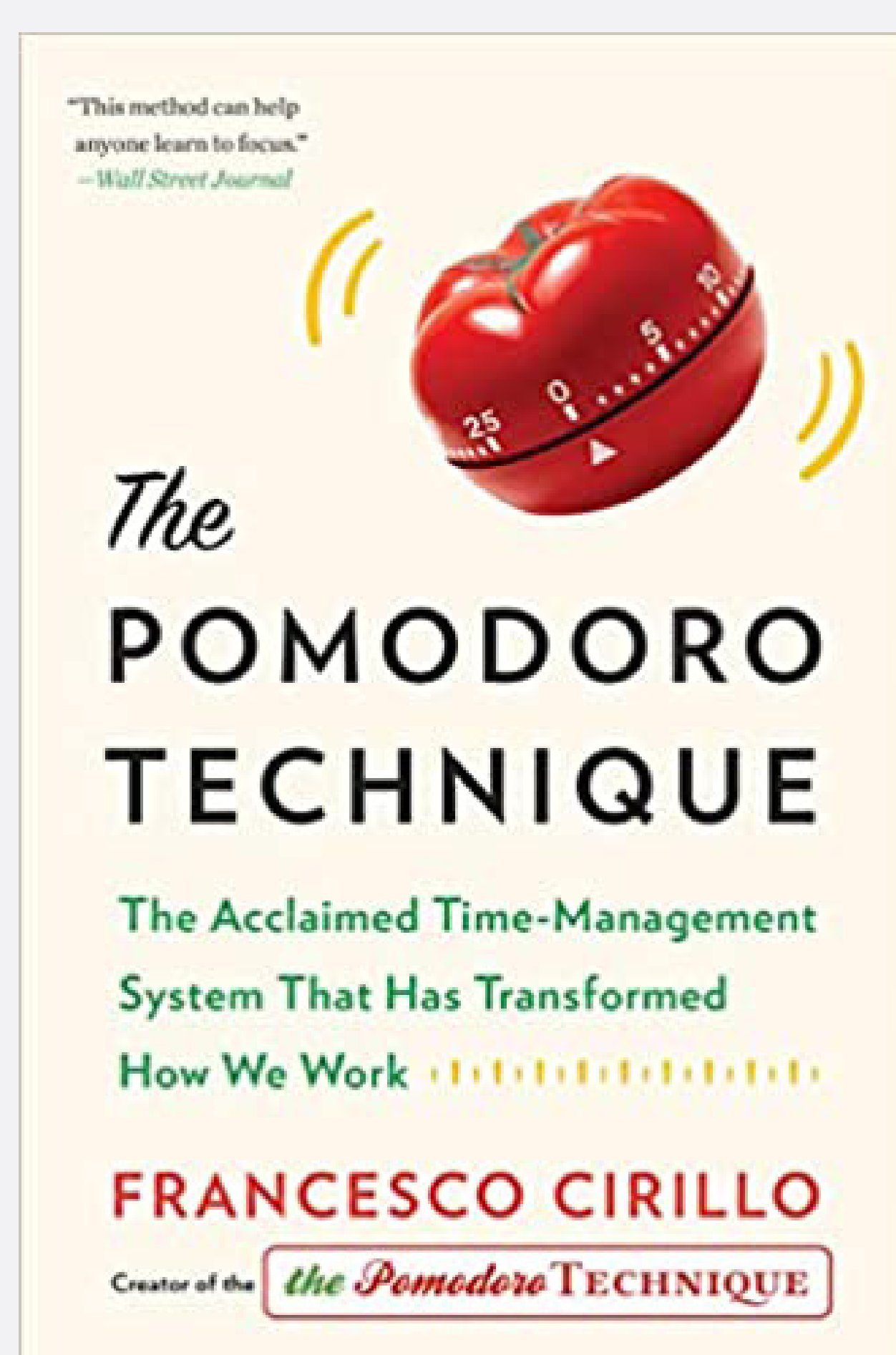
“The Pomodoro Technique is a time management system that encourages people to work with the time they have—rather than against it. Using this method, you break your workday into 25-minute chunks separated by five-minute breaks. These intervals are referred to as pomodoros. After about four pomodoros, you take a longer break of about 15 to 20 minutes.”

- Kat Boogaard, [The Muse](#)



“The Pomodoro Technique is probably one of the simplest productivity methods to implement. All you’ll need is a timer.”

- Alan Henry, [Lifehacker](#)



► **Additional reading:**
[Pomodoro Method by Francesco Cirillo](#)



Zen to Done

TL;DR:

Designed by Zen Habits creator, Leo Babauta, as an addition to David Allen's Getting Things Done system.

Unlike the preceding systems, this is a series of habits that you adopt to make your life and work simpler.

These are meant to be added to your life one at a time in 30-day increments.

Babauta suggests trying each habit and sticking with the ones that prove most effective at improving your productivity, rather than adopting all these habits.

Here are the 10 steps to Zen to Done from zenhabit.com:

- 1 **Collect** ideas, to-dos, and information in a notebook
- 2 **Process** small tasks (like email, responding to voicemails, etc.) as soon as they occur—instead of letting them pile up.
- 3 **Plan** the big things you want to accomplish each week by putting them on your calendar.
- 4 **Do** one task at a time, without distraction.
- 5 **Simple trusted system**—create lists for the things you need to get done, separated by category.

- 6 **Organize** incoming information into different predetermined slots. For email, this might be different folders like “follow up” or “delegate.”
- 7 **Review** your systems and goals weekly.
- 8 **Simplify** your workload. Zen to Done is about essentialism, which means cutting back on the tasks that are not important.
- 9 **Routine**—create routines around the tasks you wish to do regularly to make small steps toward larger, long-term goals.
- 10 **Find your passion.** Constantly seek out things you’re passionate about to lead a curiosity-first career.



“ZTD teaches you how to take a simple approach to improving your productivity by encouraging you to focus on forming one habit at a time.”

- Jessica Greene, [Zapier](#)



“Experiment and find the ones that work best with your working style.”

- Leo Babauta, [Zenhabits.com](#)



► **Additional reading:**
[**Zen to Done by Leo Babauta**](#)

Time Blocking

TL;DR:

The calendar is your boss.

Instead of taking on tasks as they hit your inbox, you plan out each day in a calendar.

Each time block is dedicated to a single task that you must work on during that period.

Organize your day and week by prioritizing your most important tasks and giving them the most time.

Time blocking is all about letting your calendar rule your day. Instead of waiting until you're sitting down to work to decide what to do, you give each hour of your day its own task in advance. This means taking the time to plan what each day will look like in advance, based on everything you have on your agenda.

Time blocking in 3 steps:

At the end of your next workday, **consider the remaining responsibilities you have for the week.**

Open your calendar (digital or analog is fine) and **give every hour of the next workday a strict job.** Fill every block in your calendar—even with blocks called “administration” or “lunch.”

When you start work the next day, **follow the calendar as closely as possible.** When you have to adjust because a task runs long, remember to designate more time for this same task in the future.



“Instead of keeping an open-ended to-do list of things you’ll get to as you’re able, you’ll start each day with a concrete schedule that lays out what you’ll work on and when.”

- Laura Scroggs, [Todoist](#)



“You’re able to accomplish your most important task quicker and more thoroughly. This is because you’re not dividing your attention between 15 different tasks. Instead, you’re devoting 100 percent of your focus to the task at hand.”

- John Rampton, [Entrepreneur](#)



Eat that Frog®

TL;DR:

Eat that Frog is about accomplishing the most important task of your day first.

It is a defense against the often-sneaky procrastination that keeps us from doing our most important work.

Since you must accomplish the most important task first, every day you are forced to evaluate tasks to determine which is truly the most important.

If you do nothing else today, you've at least done your most important work.

This is the simplest productivity technique on our list. It's almost a philosophy to your workday. Instead of letting procrastination get in the way, Eat that Frog forces you to deal with the most important thing first. Accomplishing anything else is secondary.

Eat that Frog in 3 steps:

- 1 Identify your “frog” (i.e. the most important task of the day).
- 2 Eat it first thing in the morning. In other words, complete the task before anything else.
- 3 Repeat every day.



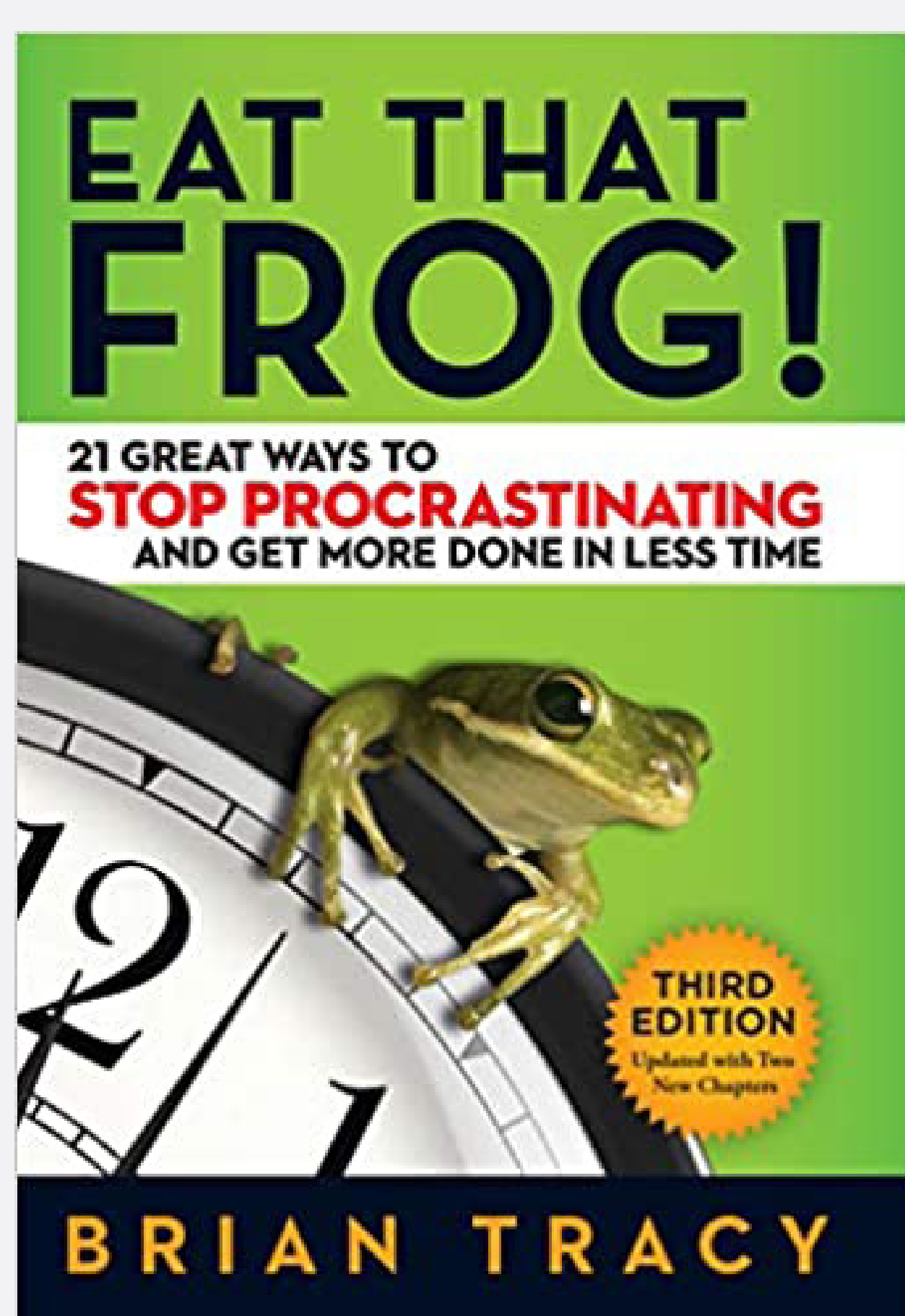
“Mark Twain once said that if the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst thing that is going to happen to you all day long. Your ‘frog’ is your biggest, most important task, the one you are most likely to procrastinate on if you don’t do something about it.”

- Brian Tracy, [BrianTracy.com](https://www.briantracy.com)



“Eat The Frog requires us to push back against all of those distractions—both external (others interrupting us) and internal (us interrupting ourselves)—and prioritize the actions that will actually bring us closer to our goals.”

- Becky Kane, [Todoist](https://todoist.com)



► **Additional reading:**
[*Eat That Frog!* by Brian Tracy](#)

1-3-5 Rule

TL;DR:

The 1-3-5 Rule is a strategy for handling to-do lists more effectively.

Similar to Eat that Frog, you start with the biggest task of the day. Unlike EtF, you then have other tasks to accomplish in descending order of size or importance.

This system is ideal for people who have several tasks to accomplish every day. It limits you to 9 items to keep things realistic while forcing you to focus on your highest priority.

The 1-3-5 Rule nudges you to complete your most important work while also providing you the joy of accomplishing smaller tasks throughout the day.

The 1-3-5 Rule is a new structure for staying productive—by using the most basic tool in productivity: the to-do list.

Grab a notebook or your favorite to-do list app. Organize it in the 1-3-5 Rule style and follow it every day.

Have nine items on your daily to-do list:

1 Big Thing

3 Medium Things

5 Little Things





the**muse**

“Understand that you can’t accomplish an endless number of things each day. Instead, accept that you can reasonably get one big thing, three medium things, and five small things done. So keep your daily to-do list to just those nine items.”

- [The Muse](#)



“The idea is that by narrowing your list to just nine items and assigning them a level of importance, you’ll have an easier time staying on track.”

- Mark Abadi, [Business Insider](#)

Bullet Journal®

TL;DR:

The Bullet Journal is an analog system for planning your day, tracking ideas, and improving productivity.

Keep your ideas organized with a strategic notebook structure for quickly writing and recounting inputs.

Use different symbols for different actions to distinguish tasks from notes and events easily.

Get a more flexible system with less friction than productivity apps.

Maybe the best productivity tool isn't something you find in the app store. It might be the same notebook you used in college—or still use—to pen poetry on the weekends.

The Bullet Journal is a formal process and methodology for organizing your life and staying productive by using a simple notebook.

Here's how to set up a Bullet Journal:

- 1 Use the [standard Bullet Journal](#) formatting to create a notebook for building a calendar, tracking to-dos, and planning for the near future.
- 2 Use the index at the front of your journal to remember how your journal functions—and where certain pages are.
- 3 Carry the journal with you to easily store ideas, cross tasks off your to-do list, and remember what's coming up on your calendar.



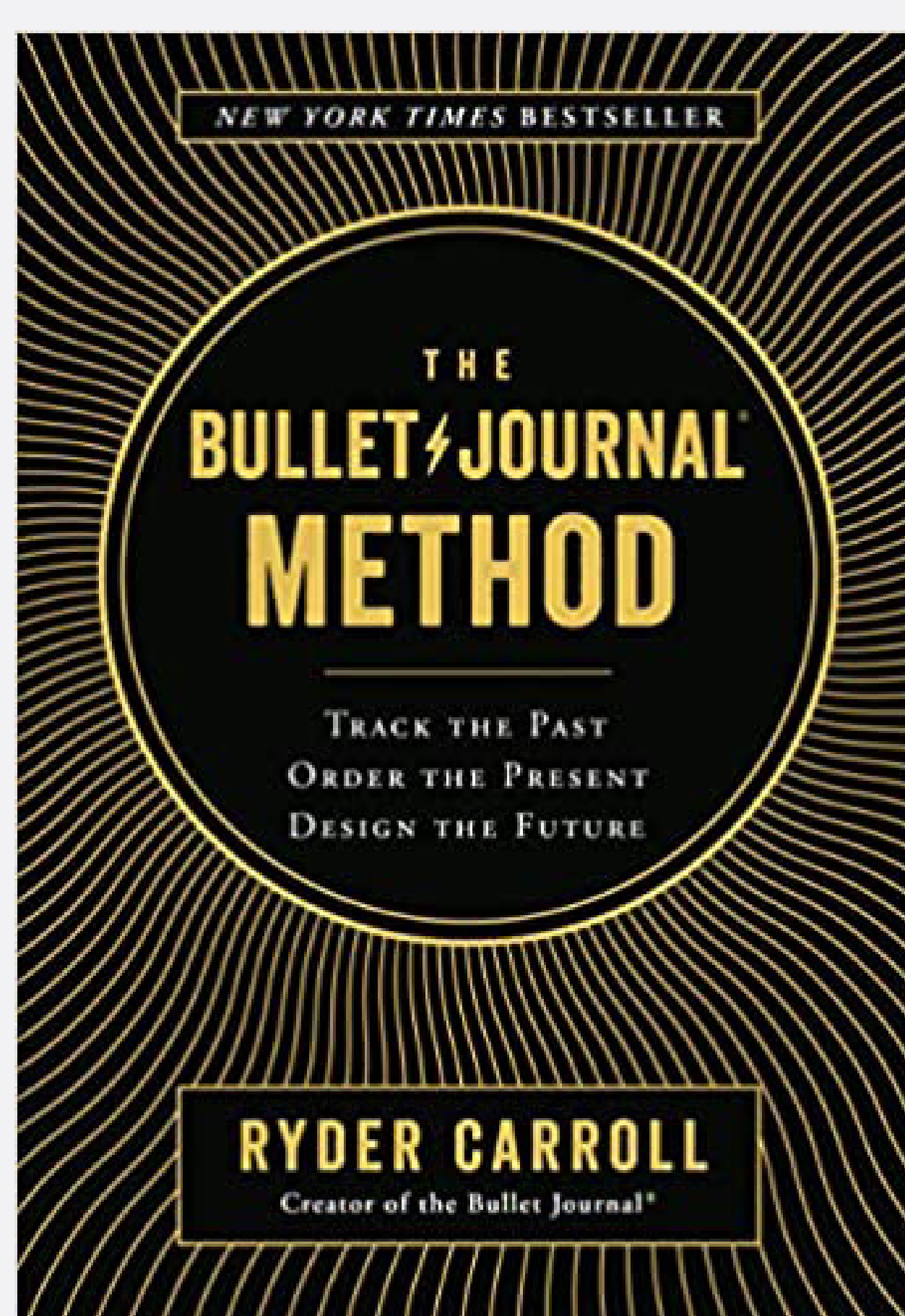
“We keep track of things: The things we’ve done, need to do, the things we aspire to. There’s a lot to keep track of. There are plenty of apps for that. I needed a system flexible enough to handle whatever I threw at it and fast enough that it wouldn’t get in the way.”

- Ryder Carroll, founder of [Bullet Journal](#)



“Equal parts day planner, diary, and written meditation, bullet journaling turns the chaos of coordinating your life into a streamlined system that helps you be more productive and reach your personal and professional goals.”

- Amanda Garrity, [Good Housekeeping](#)



► **Additional reading:**

[*The Bullet Journal Method* by Ryder Carroll](#)



Conclusion:

In our modern world of round-the-clock responsibilities and shifting priorities, using the right productivity system is like having a superpower. It enables you to get more done in less time, create consistency in the tasks that matter, and play the long game.

It's hard to know which productivity method will work best for you until you've tried a few. As you experiment, give each method enough time to sink in. Apply them to your work for more than an hour or a day. Try implementing these methods for a week or more for full immersion.

We're excited to see what you create.

