Becoming More Productive: Workflow Strategies for Graduate Students
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1pm - 2:30pm

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Abstract: I will discuss how I discovered a workflow that’s allowed me to balance my academic research with a variety of non-academic interests. This software-assisted workflow incorporates both accountability and flexibility needed for experiments and analyses that don’t always finish in the allotted time.

- To identify your ideal workflow, consider your task needs and your personality.
  - Task considerations
    - Lots of little tasks on different timescales (like a jigsaw puzzle)
    - One long-term project, dependent on previous steps (like building a tower)
    - Predictable or unpredictable?
    - Time: open block of time or interruption prone?
  - Personality and preference considerations
    - List maker
    - Scheduling style
    - Time management
- Every evening, in preparation for the next day, review what you did today. When making your next day’s list, recognize your efforts at the end of each day, including things that weren’t on your to do list (but you addressed that day). It’s good for motivation!
- Have automated emails delivered at 5am with the day’s to-do list (Todoist) and agenda (Google calendar).
- Things that need to get done should be firmly scheduled on your calendar.
- Take short breaks between tasks.
- Characteristics of good to-do lists:
  - Tasks are based on effort not output.
  - Each task is 30-45 minutes maximum. This can vary from person to person. Ideally, each task can be accomplished in one sitting.
  - Spread out tasks that require emotional or physical energy.
  - Be ambitious, but not overly so.
  - Use software that can re-schedule and expand tasks.
  - Be accessible anytime, anywhere.
If you’re having a bad day, it’s worth calling it quits, if you’ll have energy for tomorrow. Note: “bad days” are often days when you did do a lot of work, but for various reasons did not get through much of your list. Acknowledge that work!

Software recommendations:
- Habitica, gamification of your to-do list. Win points, train for new habits.
- Todoist, project management software.

Pierce Gordon
PhD student in the Energy & Resources Group

Digital Productivity: How I Corral My Data in Research
Abstract: Finding what works for you is a difficult task. Some tools work perfectly, and some tools you have to make yourself. A favorite book of mine - Bit Literacy - opened up the possibilities of deep organizational capacity. From there, I used - and developed - my own personal network of data to ensure I stay on top of as much as I can. I can’t wait to share my tactics - and learn about yours.

- Recommended Book: Bit Literacy by Mark Hurst.
- Systems help us be productive. Personal digital systems needs to be systematic, useful, accessible, and appropriate to you.
- Everything in its place: mail, tasks, notes, calendar, productivity tasks, need to have their own place.
- Email tips
  - Clear your email inbox daily. Respond, schedule for later, or archive messages by the end of each day. Try Inbox by Gmail. Use Boomerang for Gmail to schedule an email to be sent later or create easy email reminders.
  - Check email once a day. Reduce distractions.
- Create a task list. Try Asana for cloud-based lists that sync across devices.
- Have a single document that indexes and connects all your notes. Try using a spreadsheet to organize ideas and summaries of papers.
- Try the Pomodoro Technique. Many timer apps available.
- For white noise to help with concentration, try Rain Rain.
- For setting goals and rewards, try Forest.

If you’re interested in the presentation, here it is!

Virginia Markham
PhD student in Plant and Microbial Biology

It’s All in Your Head: Using Your Time More Effectively With Batching
Abstract: Study after study has indicated that multi-tasking can severely reduce productivity. Meanwhile the technique of ‘batching’—performing related tasks all at once—is all the rage. In
transitioning my productivity strategy from ‘winging it’ to batching, I’ve found batching has dramatically improved both my productivity and peace of mind.

- Task switching incurs a “switching cost” to both speed and accuracy (Monsell 2003). Additionally, multitasking is difficult, and there is a neurological basis (Dux et al. 2006).
- Batching tasks could be our best defence against switching costs. Batching = batch processing.
- Make time to focus on one task without distraction, and then put that task aside until the next session.
- Use a task manager like OmniFocus. The ideal task manager is one that can handle any task, big or small, simple or multi-step. Have deadlines. Keep tasks small. Delete stragglers (if it’s meant to be, it will return).
- Eliminate distraction. Don’t do other things while working. Ditch technology like your phone or wifi.
- Simplify your environment. Be in a quiet place. Close apps that you’re not using. Work somewhere without wifi.
- Write evening to-do's/batches before heading home.
- Reduce the frequency of tasks (e.g., email/social media, groceries, housecleaning, cooking, tv).
- Make time for mindfulness. Hone your concentration. The goal of batching is to reach a flow state where you are highly focused on your work, and mindfulness exercises can help you get better at this. Example: Try focusing on your breath. Count up to ten and back down to zero in time with your breath. Observe whether you can do this without your mind wandering.
- Recommended software: TagNotate: Tag and annotate PDFs. Find papers by tag or Smart Folder, or search through your annotations at a glance. Go full-screen with a PDF reader to further eliminate distractions.

Victor Villalobos
Public Health Doctoral student in Behavioral Design

Circadian Clocks, Habits and (in)tellectual Productivity
Abstract: “Circadian Clocks, Habits and Productivity” - Human bodies are biological machines. Recently, the concept of “habit formation” has spread across the “pop” psychology literature. I will discuss these two concepts around the idea of intellectual optimization.

- Try biological and habit adjustments that might influence performance. Diet, exercise, breathing, and sleep adjustments may lead to intellectual optimization.
- You can focus for a period of time, then you need to switch to another task for efficiency.
- Breathing is key to modifying your brain activity. Spire is a tool for feedback on your mindfulness and activity.
- Anatomy of a circadian habit
  - Motivation → Intention
- Algorithm → Ability
- Context, Trigger
  - Habit = Frequency + Automaticity
- Work during quiet times. Consider eliminating internet access.
- Meditation may help with focus and could improve brain activity.
- Develop habits in sync with your circadian rhythms.