

26. Effort Activity: Twenty-Five Minute Sprints

There's a very famous book by Italian entrepreneur and author Francesco Cirillo called *The Pomodoro Technique*. Pomodoro is Italian for tomato. (The tomato in question is one of those novelty kitchen timers, not a real one!) We'll come back to the tomato in a bit.

In his book, Cirillo argues that we can generate lots of energy and effort by working in short bursts, even on long tasks that we don't feel motivated to do. Think of all the tasks you've got to do that you just can't bear to begin – there might be revision notes, essays to write, jumbled notes to file away or a piece of coursework to start.

Choose one that's become a bit of a nightmare for you – that's hanging over your head and you just don't want to do. Make a note of it here:

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Step 1

Now for the tomato. By which we mean getting hold of either a kitchen timer (needless to say, it doesn't have to be shaped like anything in particular!) or the timer on your phone.

Find somewhere quiet. Arrange the things you need to begin. You're going to do a twenty-five minute sprint. It's important to tell yourself this: *twenty-five minutes – that's all*. You're allowed no distractions whatsoever in that twenty-five minutes. Don't worry. You can be back on social media in twenty-five minutes' time, checking updates and messages. Now start the timer and go!

Step 2

Congratulations! You've got that nightmare task started. All of a sudden, this job is going to seem less frightening. You'll be able to come back to it. Some suggestions for messing around with the Pomodoro Technique:

1. The 'Quick Sprint': try **twenty-five** minutes on, **twenty-five** minutes off, twenty-five minutes on. It takes one hour and fifteen minutes in total, and you can do it at a regular time each night after school.
2. The 'Serious Sprint'. Try twenty-five minutes on, five minutes off, twenty-five minutes on, five minutes off, twenty-five minutes on. It takes about one hour and thirty minutes, and is a useful technique for really attacking a difficult piece of work.
3. Try measuring tasks in sprints. How many will it take? This way, you'll develop a sense of how you work, and you can begin picking off scary tasks more quickly and easily.
4. Try using sprints to review work. Suddenly you'll find yourself ahead and on top of things. It's a great feeling!

Setting Up A 'Quick Sprint':

Preparation	25 minutes on!	25 minutes off	25 minutes on!
<div>» Find somewhere quiet.</div> <div>» Gather everything you need.</div> <div>» Put phone on airplane settings.</div> <div>» Bring up timer, set countdown and alarm.</div> <div>» Tell yourself: "Just 25 minutes. That's all."</div>	<div>» Go!</div> <div>» Imagine it's an exam.</div> <div>» Stay intense, keep going.</div>	<div>» Set timer and countdown.</div> <div>» Enjoy yourself.</div>	<div>» Tell yourself: "Just one last 25 minute blast. That's all."</div> <div>» Put phone back on airplane settings.</div> <div>» Return to the task.</div> <div>» Go!</div>

Final Thoughts

One Quick Sprint per day for a week is nearly six hours' independent work per week.

One Serious Sprint per day is nearly ten hours' independent work per week.

Try using a Mission and Medal weekly planner to scope out what a week with:

- » 6 hours' independent learning,
- » 10 hours' independent learning
- » 15 hours' independent learning

	Before school (early morning – 7am–8.30am)	During school (morning and early afternoon – 9am–3pm)	After school (twilight – 4pm–5.30pm)	Evening (7pm–9.30pm)
Monday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Tuesday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Wednesday				
Mission:				
BONUS medal:				
Thursday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Mission:				
BONUS medal:				