

# This Simple Journaling Method Could Change Your Life

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I am using a journaling technique that I can honestly say has changed my life and I've also been sticking with it like nothing else before.

In this post, I'll first describe the ridiculously simple method and why it

works. That's honestly all you really need to get going, but if you're interested in getting the most out of it or are just a tech nerd 😊, I subsequently explain how I use certain techniques and tools to really give the method superpowers. 🦧

## The Method

1. 📖 Choose a medium that you will write this journal. It could be anything:
  - A physical notebook
  - Evernote
  - A Post-It note
  - Google Keep
  - Roam Research
  - Notion
  - Obsidian
  - ...
2. ✍️ Whenever you end some task (for example: checking email, your messages, scrolling through social media):
  - Visit this journal.

- Take some time to jot down the time and
- write something brief about what you did in complete sentences.
- Next: write about the next thing you want to do (also in complete sentences).

*That's it.*

It's called [Interstitial Journaling](#) (IJ for the rest of this post). It may not work for everyone, but for me this technique resonated almost immediately because of its simplicity and flexibility.

## Why it Works and Helps to Fight Procrastination

When we — often subconsciously — transition quickly between tasks, our brains are still thinking about the previous task and we therefore don't think effectively about the task we are supposed to be doing. IJ forces you to briefly reflect on what you have done and consciously decide on the next best thing you can do.

And if you find procrastination a problem, you might also find that this helps, especially if you extend the method to journal while you work on a task ("Stitial Journaling"? 🤔). It's a lot like meditation. For example, in meditation if you find yourself lost in thought or distracted, you simply go back to non-judgmentally observing that thoughts are appearing in the first place. A similar practice of meditation focuses on following the

breath. Analogously, if you go back to your journal often you more easily catch yourself when distracted and get back to the task at hand.

## IJ Super Powers

Ok time to get a little more nerdy 😁

Newer software tools like Roam Research, Obsidian, LogSeq and a host of others allow this technique to be taken to the next level. This super-power comes primarily from three features:

1. **Daily notes:** the ability to easily append whatever is on your mind to the current day's note
2. **Backlinks:** the ability to see what notes link to the current not
3. **Queries:** the ability to find and filter notes with particular patterns, e.g. tasks for work.

The focus on daily notes combined with IJ allows you to quickly offload your thoughts and tasks, links to media and focus on the best thing you can do moving forward.

Crucially, backlinks and queries let you subsequently review your data so:

- tasks don't slip through the cracks (you can easily create a global task board or a context-specific one) and
- you can review topics you want to dig deeper into.

I have been using Obsidian as my preferred note taking application. Obsidian allows you to enter your daily note by default when you open the application and also provides a handy calendar plugin that makes it really easy select a day's note. The simplicity of a daily note has allowed be to consistently create daily notes for over 21 months now.

## May 2022

< Today >

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1 ●●○	2 ●●○	3 ●	4 ●○	5 ●○	6 ●○	7 ●
8 ●	9 ●○	10 ●○	11 ●○	12 ●○	13 ●○	14 ●
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11

## Calendar Plugin for Obsidian

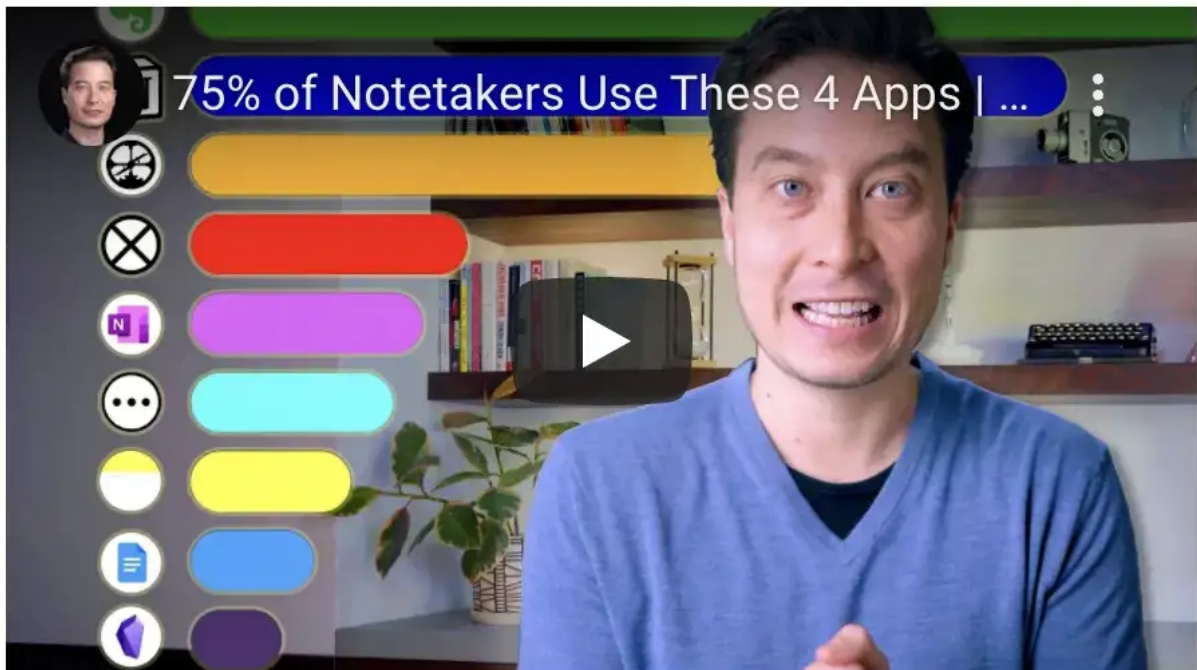
Here's an example of how an IJ entry looks in my Obsidian Vault:

### Journal

- 08:36

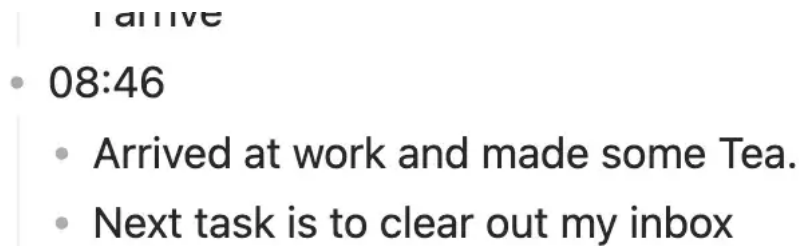
- Just finished watching a [Tiago Forte](#) video that had interesting results for people's choice of apps when taking notes

- 



- Interesting to see Obsidian's rise and Evernote's dominance. Oh those fuzzy memories of using Evernote for so many years 🥰
- Next task: head out to drive to work and charge my car when I arrive



- 
- 08:46
    - Arrived at work and made some Tea.
    - Next task is to clear out my inbox

You can see it's super nice and visual (I'm using the Minimal theme in Live Preview mode). Obsidian even has plugins that allow you to embed content like YouTube videos for easy access.

The calendar and time stamps are useful for two reasons:

- Time stamps give an idea as to how long certain tasks take and allow more flexibility than blocking off a fixed amount of time in advance. Briefly reviewing how long a task takes helps me better predict how long a similar task will take place in the future
- The calendar provides a natural way to review recent entries since often times I will want to revisit something I saw recently and I can see some of the context around it for inspiration.

You can also see that the text "Tiago Forte" (the creator of the video in the entry) is a link. This is an example of how I use backlinks. For example, if I click on that link here's what I get:

## Tiago Forte



Pretty cool guy who teaches a course on "Building a Second Brain" (soon to be a book release). His technique is a bit like Zettlekasten ([Zettlekasten Overview](#)), that I discovered from the [Book How to Take Smart Notes](#).

### Linked mentions



#### ✓ 2022-05-13

- Just finished watching a [\[\[Tiago Forte\]\]](#) video that had interesting results for people's choice of apps when taking notes

#### ✓ Choosing a Note-Taking App

[\[\[Tiago Forte\]\]](#)

#### ✓ PARA

[\[\[Tiago Forte\]\]](#)

This is my brief note on Tiago Forte. You can see where he appears in all my notes, and this feature of backlinks has come in handy more times than I can remember when trying to recall something interesting I



thought of or read or saw or heard on a topic.

The key to the technique is I don't have to be in the Tiago Forte note to jot down thoughts. I can simply mention him in my IJ: the default place I go to jot down thoughts.

*The frictionless-ness of this method is the key to how IJ has changed my life.*

One of the reasons I like Obsidian in particular is how I can place notes side by side, which really helps me enjoy exploring a topic based on past notes. See in the image below how backlinks related to Harry Potter ⚡ can be placed next to some images I have collected of Hogsmeade:

The screenshot displays the Obsidian journaling interface. On the left, a sidebar shows a task list for '2022-05-15' with one task: 'Take out diapers (Home)'. Below this is a 'Journal' section with a timestamp of '08:22' and a note: 'Found some new [Hogsmeade](#) images'. The main note area is titled 'Hogsmeade' and contains three images of the village: a snowy mountain view, a street scene with people, and a green field. On the right, a calendar for May 2022 is visible, showing the current date as the 15th. At the bottom right, a status bar indicates '0 backlinks 40 words 274 characters'.

# IJ & Task Management







You can also use these more ‘modern’ note taking apps to combine task management with IJ (see, e.g. [this](#) inspiring way you can do it in Roam Research).

Here is a twist on that method that has really been a game-changer for me to get things done and avoid having tasks slip through the cracks.

I created a daily note template that looks like this using the [tasks plugin](#) for Obsidian:

## To Do

### Overdue Tasks

- ☐ Select PL for timeout project ([Work](#))  17  
- ☐ Review budget spreadsheet ([Work](#))  17  

2 tasks

### Due today

- ☐ Get replacement contacts ([Home](#))  17  

1 task

### Done recently

...

## U tasks

## Journal

- 08:55
  - Just finished getting ready. Visiting To Do list to see what the next best thing to do is. I could do the overdue tasks but there may be something more pressing that I didn't consider.
  - Oh yes, I need to get contacts ASAP, so I'll schedule that for today.
  - Going through my email and doing that next.
  - Clean out Inbox ([Work](#))

You can see that I can add tasks right in my IJ just like the post I linked to above. One key note is that I label tasks by the area of my life they correspond to an “[Area of Responsibility](#)” (e.g. “Work” above).

I have a separate note that groups task by area of responsibility that I can visit to see if there are any important tasks I need to address today. For example, the “Get replacement contacts” task above is part of my “Home” area of responsibility and I scheduled to do it today so that I can make sure it’s on my radar. Also if, for some reason, I don’t get to the “Clean out Inbox” task, it will show up next time I review my areas of responsibilities.

To summarize my ‘addition’ to the technique of IJ:

After writing about the task I just completed, I often review tasks in the IJ for today and, crucially, across my areas of responsibility to decide what the best task to schedule will be.

I find this particularly useful because often times my energy/excitement in any moment is in a particular area of responsibility. This helps to really align what I should be doing with my intrinsic desire to work on it.

## **Will IJ Work For You?**

*It's so easy to do, why not try?*

My 'superpowered IJ' might seem a bit involved, but you of course don't have to start out like that. I started out with the 'powerless' approach described at the beginning and at least 80% of the benefits of IJ came from that 20% effort to IJ in the first place. Would love to hear from you if you have tried IJ and how it has worked for you or if you are inspired to try it out!