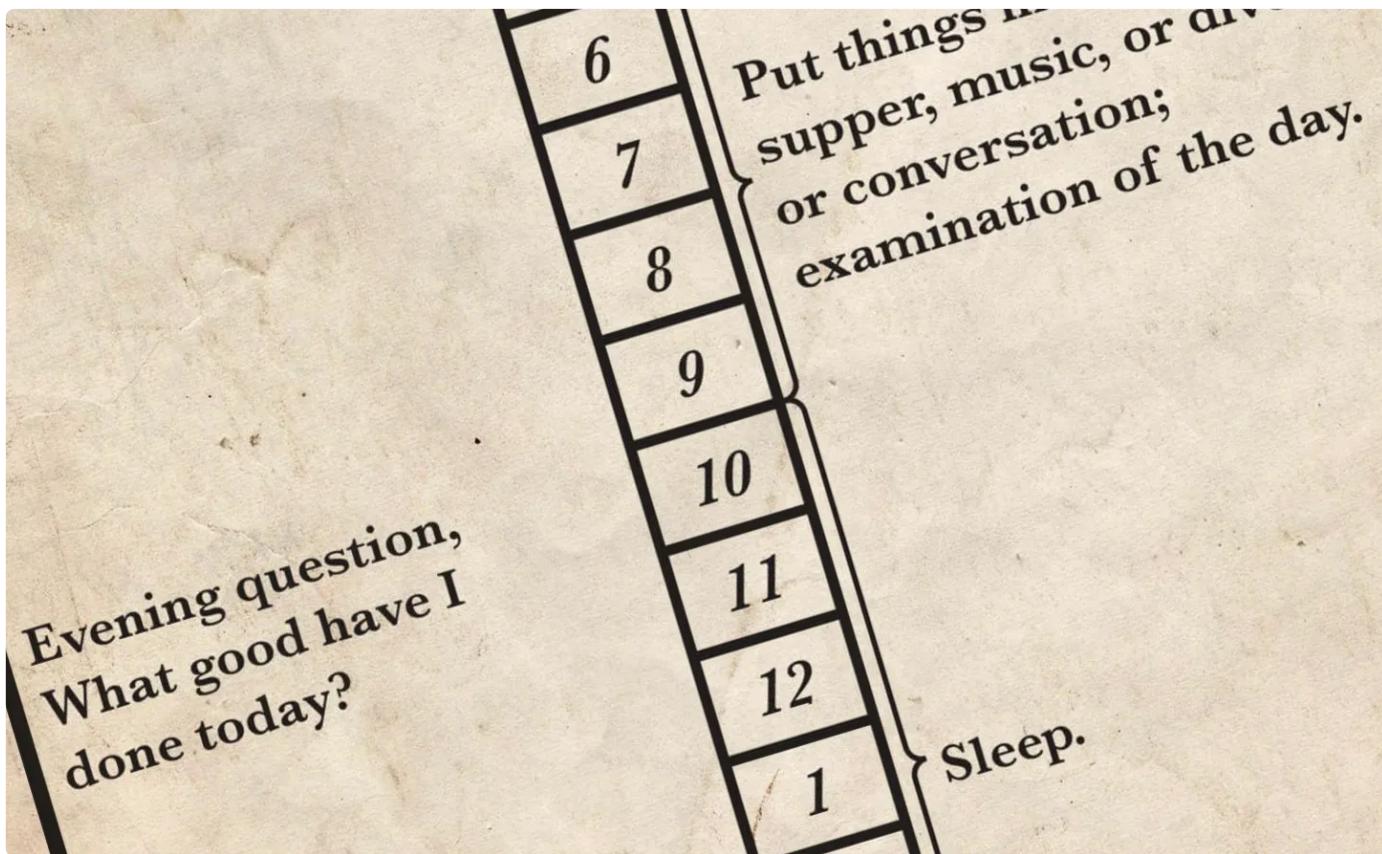


Capture to do.

[Geet Duggal](#) • 24 mins

[Dec 15th 2023](#)

Unlock the simple, satisfying, and energizing secret to task management ‘productivity’



🎄 Happy holidays if this catches you towards the end of 2023!

If you decide to read through the whole article, you're gonna wanna get out the the popcorn 🍿 and join me on a bit of a journey 🏔. If not, help yourself to a skim ⚡ !

I'm a little ashamed to admit that I've somehow gotten quite far in life

while still flailing at three key areas of productivity:

1. task management,
2. habit formation, and
3. prioritizing calendar events.

I believe this is largely because I *am* good at deep, focused work and other things often seem like distractions. This is why this article is part of a trilogy where I'm focused on improving on these three areas. (This idea of focusing on areas for self improvement draws directly from Benjamin Franklin's autobiography.)

After years of experimentation, I finally feel like I have a system for task management that works for me. I now feel at peace with all the small and big tasks I have to do (that aren't related to habits or scheduled events) and have much more clarity about what to do and when.

My system turns out to be very simple: it's based on plain text files and folders. It emphasizes more visual and spatial thinking with files and folders and helps me to unlock the well known secret to productivity: just *do*. The best productivity strategies are consistent with this advice. They are also surprisingly consistent on *how to do*.

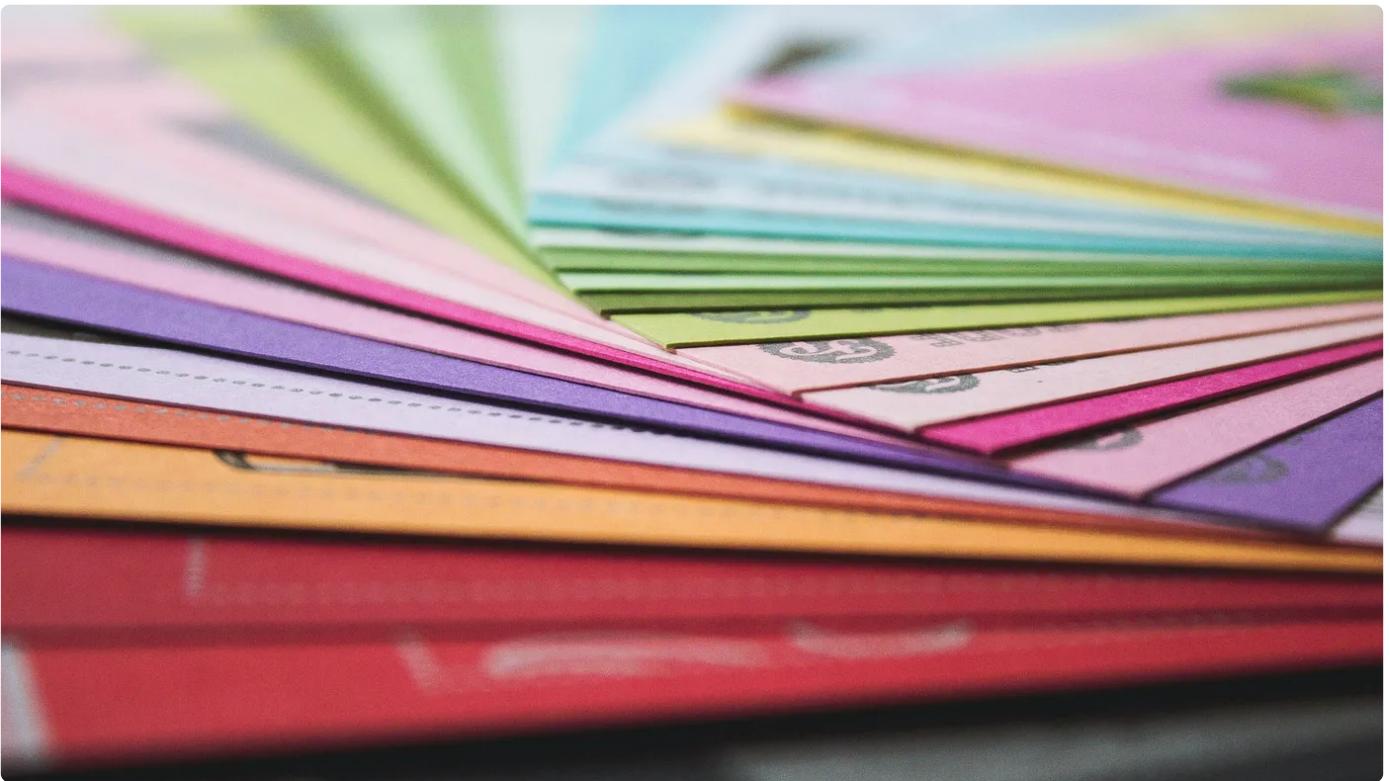


Photo by [Andrew Pons](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Therefore, nothing I say here is terribly original. Except it is. It's my take with its own unique twist that may or may not resonate with you. The same holds for your approach to productivity.

Some productivity gurus lately are real hot on the fact that productivity literature and systems can be a bit repetitive. Don't waste your time reading too much about productivity. Don't get caught-up in what the next new 'shiny app' or tool will allow you to do. Don't spend so much time thinking about your productivity system and do what your system is designed to do. Just do.

I say, Okay. But also, *so long as it resonates* with you:

- Read the latest and hottest strategies.
- Play with the new app that catches your eye.

- Be inspired by someone doing something interesting and new.
- Do new and interesting things yourself.
- Refine the crap out of your productivity system or demolish it for an entirely new one (if you're willing to make the sacrifice).

I say this because surface level platitudes can only go so deep. The devil is in the details. What people yearn for is to be captured and inspired in a specific way. They want to see themselves and others use their creative energy specifically to solve problems that they can relate to.

Obsidian is a great example of an app that remixed old and new technologies to do just that. It combined the best features of locally stored plain text files with the power of modern web technologies to create unexpectedly powerful and even delightful experiences at times. Who would have imagined even five to ten years ago that the plain text movement would be productivity Zeitgeist today?

So cozy-up on the couch. Let's talk productivity, organization, and Obsidian. Again.

Capture to do.

You know that feeling you have when you're so excited to do something it just can't help but be done?

When we moved into our new house I had a glimpse of what our living room could realistically look like within the first week of moving in. Subconsciously, this vision told me that I could create a cozy and inviting

place to relax, and this was doable soon. It wouldn't be perfect, but it would be a start.

Then, without quite knowing how it all happened, little tasks and dependencies piled up. With each little task, I could see the benefit of completing each one and its contribution to the whole vision. Unpack this box here. Install all the gadgets for the entertainment center there. Set up the lighting like so. etc.

At some point it became clear that the end was in sight. Tasks started to finish more quickly. Before I knew it, I was basking in the glory that was our new living room.

It was — and thankfully wasn't — everything I hoped for. I learned from what I didn't predict. For example, the built-in lighting we installed was 'warm' and set at a temperature of '3000K'. It turns out that the difference between '2700K' and '3000K' is enough to make a meaningful difference in the ambience of the room. I learned more and had fun seeing the impact of these kinds of little details.



Not my living room.

The little project described above could have been just another mundane task amongst many others to complete as a part of a move-in task:

- Lorum ipsum dolor sit*
- Unpack living room*
- Tenetur quod quidem in voluptatem*

Instead, unpacking the living room ended up being a fun process: a ‘mini

project’ of sorts that, to this day, pays dividends to me every time I’m relaxing in the room. But I got lucky.

Until recently, most of my tasks never seemed to look like that living room unpacking. They were often “to do’s that seem like chores. Worse, there were times I felt that as if simply writing down what needed to be done sucked the fun out of actually doing the thing! What, then, was so magical about setting up the living room vs. these other tasks?

With the living room I always had an inspiring vision of the end result. Without consciously knowing it, I had captured what truly resonated with me about the project, found a way to do it, and just did the thing. I’ve since discovered that with just a little discipline, this same magical experience can apply to almost any task I need and want to do.

“Capture to do” (CD) is a command to myself. It is simple, powerful, and encodes the secret to being “productive” without getting too philosophical. It is a straightforward reminder on how to stay focused on what matters without requiring a complicated system.

CD starts with “capture.” Capture *all* your thoughts and distractions that resonate. It’s kind of like meditation: simply watch these thoughts disappear from your mind to a place you trust.

It ends with “to do.” Don’t just capture “to dos”. “Do.” Lose yourself in the deep work of actually doing a thing. Allow yourself to enter a state of ‘flow’ even for an instant. You’ll see that as you do, you also create.

Key ideas

Capture everything in one place

Useful or interesting information comes in all forms and at any time.

Some example categories include:

- the thoughts in your head,
- notes from meetings and courses,
- articles you've read,
- snail, e-, voice mail,
- chat messages,
- feeds from social media,
- feeds from “read it later” apps,
- everyday chores,
- etc.

I argue that, to the extent possible, *everything* that resonates should be captured in one primary place as the ‘source of truth’. It is then much easier to see these items in the context of all the others and prioritize accordingly.

All things captured are tasks. All open tasks should be frequently visited. When visited, they are processed as either completed, or deleted. An example set of captured things or tasks:

- Get milk
- Unpack living room
- Read *Economist* article on Maui fires: [[URL](#)]
- Get extension cord for living room
- Set up lighting in living room
- Watch video on new iOS feature: [[URL](#)]
- Interesting that Marc Andreessen's company is remote-first and focused on leisure for in-person events. Should we do that? Why is this a good/bad idea? ([[Podcast URL](#)])
- Spear and McKay pants (sp?, [[Podcast URL](#)])
- Captain's log: it's about 8:30 in the morning and I'm way more tired than usual and have a headache. I also didn't drink enough water. Related?
- [[Annotated photo of front yard landscaping ideas](#)]
- Replace water heater
- The fable retold by FitzGerald can be traced to the first half of the 19th century, appearing in American papers by at least as early as 1839.^[6] It usually involved a nameless "Eastern monarch". Its origin has been traced to the works of Persian Sufi poets, such as Rumi, [Sanai](#) and Attar of Nishapur. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_too_shall_pass
- Cancel subscription to YouTube TV
- Fix water heater
- Piece together the Rivendell theme music [[Lord of the Rings Movie](#)] from memory. Focus on the rhythm and basic chords.

Example capture list

Hopefully this example shows that a capture list is decidedly *messy*. In general, it should be

- **available:** it is easy to quickly offload information into (eg. a pocket notebook, phone, post-it notes),

- **unstructured:** there are no obvious rules about how to organize the list or elements within it (eg. no requirement for priorities, no categories/tags/backlinks, items can be anything from tasks to thoughts to fleeting notes),
- **complexity-agnostic:** it can contain both big projects and small tasks (eg. ‘Get milk’ vs ‘Replace water heater’), and
- **multimedia:** it contains anything from text, images, audio, and video (eg. text extracted from a Wikipedia article vs an annotated photo).

It is very important that there is no “re-discovery of what matters” or “doing the thing” when a task is captured. The beauty of the capture is that there is a clear boundary. You’re not supposed to be doing anything with what you’ve captured now or in the past.

Tasks are quickly offloaded so you can move on in the moment and trust that the real work in processing what you’ve captured will be done properly at another time. You may notice that it is very tempting to work on something you just captured. Ignore that temptation. I can’t emphasize enough how much obeying this boundary simplifies the situation and provides a sense of stillness at key moments when you CD. (This is the “mind like water” feeling described in *Getting Things Done*.)

Re-discover what matters

This is what makes CD a meaningful command. It’s the space between “capture” and “do”. In CD, we capture *in order* to do. We seize what truly resonates with an intent to create.

Shamelessly repeat.

First, don't worry about re-capturing what you already have captured before. If it resonates, let yourself be a broken record. It's probably a sign that you're naturally excited about whatever it is. In the spirit of repetition:

All open tasks should be frequently visited. When visited, they are processed as either completed, or deleted.

For example, when frequently visiting my open tasks, the 'Fix water heater' task listed above is very close to 'Replace water heater'. When reading what was written, it is clear I'm mostly repeating myself. That's OK. Perhaps at one point I thought it would be good to jot down my intent to replace the water heater, but later I thought that since it subsequently broke, maybe I could simply fix the heater and avoid that cost. Maybe I forgot I placed the 'replace water heater' task in the list in the first place. In any case, I didn't let this potential idea of duplication increase the friction during the capture process earlier.

Repetition also implies that tasks can exist in places other than your source of truth. For example, if you use an app (eg. Google Keep, Todoist, Reminders, etc) as a source of truth, you may have a task called "take clothes to dry cleaning" that resides in that app. There is nothing that stops you from using a sticky note on your entrance door or even hang the clothes on the doorknob as a reminder to do the thing.

In fact, a similar process can apply to using your memory. It's actually a fun exercise to see if you can remember the things you need to do without the pressure of relying on your memory. Just like with sticky notes, you

can treat your memory as a *secondary* source of thoughts you've captured.

The repetition helps to underscore where and when the task needs to be done, but you can rest well knowing that you still trust one primary source for all tasks.

Seize what resonates.

Consciously identify what truly resonates with you with the task you captured. Can this contribute to something you might one day be excited to do? After some honest introspection, you might be surprised at your true motivation. This truth will be your fuel and guide through the whole project. It may even inspire you to *not* do the task.

Replacing the water heater is a great example of a task where brief reflection provided me clarity and energy. Beyond the obvious fact that I would have better showers, I realized I really like the idea of learning how water heaters — especially the newer tankless electrical ones — worked. I thought it would be really fun to work with one of my family members and a friend to realize this vision of a new water heater.

This made a house repair that would normally be a chore a fun little project to work on. My true motivation had less to do with fixing a problem in the house and more to do with higher order values such as education, competency, collaboration, and camaraderie. It also motivated me to treat the project with a bit more respect than I would have if it was just another task on my list. In fact, in the end, I actually created a note that captured all of my research and kept photos of progress made throughout the process. We ended up saving a lot of money, and I still have a nice

record of the experience. It gives me a lot of pleasure to subsequently share my experience with friends and colleagues when casually discussing the project. It is so nice to have a system where I can pull up these details with visuals and all on demand.

Ruthlessly delete.

Delete what no longer resonates. If it's important enough it will come up again. Just don't let the thing take up any sort of unnecessary space in your head or on paper.

Continuing with the water heater example: when frequently visiting open tasks, it eventually made sense for me to replace the water heater as opposed to fix it (long story). I therefore could delete the 'fix water heater' task.

But even if the 'water heater' task wasn't duplicated, at some point I could decide that this is such a low priority that I might as well remove it from my capture list. If it comes up again for any reason, then it'll be back in the running for a project to actually do. The rule-of-thumb should be, "delete unless you have really good reason not to."

The key benefit to ruthlessly deleting is that you're forced to be honest with yourself about you can realistically get done. You don't have to permanently delete the task. You can trash it somewhere you can visit again, but keep in mind that there is no part of CD where you visit the trash.

Do the thing now.

This part is the simple and magical part. Doing tasks you are consciously motivated to do is the fuel that will keep you going. There's nothing like the feeling of even incremental progress on these tasks or calling a project complete with something substantial to refer to as an end result. While doing the task is great work, I want to emphasize that the harder, less obvious work is really done in “re-discovering what matters”. The key is to earnestly reflect on why the task resonates.

For example, because I knew I wanted to learn more about water heaters and their installation, and I knew a family member had done it before, the concrete task of reaching out to him after some initial research was way more appealing to actually do. The underlying reason was it would be a fun project that made sense to work on together regardless of the details. That fact alone freed up my mind to focus on the details.

The power of this system increases dramatically when you are similarly conscious of other tasks. If I know in advance why the ‘unpack living room’ project above truly appealed to me, I set future me up for success in the sense that it will be more motivating to work on it at any given time. Imagine the change in motivation for even mundane projects if you now have five or ten projects like this.

Next physical action

A core idea of “do” is to literally have the “next physical action” in mind for any given task that you deem resonates or matters. For example, for the “replace water heater” task, it makes sense to treat it as a project with a first task to research the options first to see eg. what fits within our requirements and budget. Or better yet, a task like “create a project note and determine requirements for new water heater” could make sense.

The concrete nature of a next physical action is crucial to motivating you to actually do the bigger thing.

This point also can't be emphasized enough because the single largest demotivator when working on a project like this is the urge to just do it all at once. I call that "do big", and that approach can make doing anything substantial overwhelming and uninspiring. So this is the way I think now: Think big. Do small. Small will add to big. (This idea of a 'next physical action' also draws directly from *Getting Things Done*.)

Finish line sprint

A second core idea of "do" is to harness the energy you have when you know you're about to complete a project. Keep in mind that at this stage, it's the visualization of the end product that will likely resonate most with you. Don't ignore that feeling. There is a clear light at the end of the tunnel and, as mentioned earlier, you can't help but to get the thing done.

I call this the "finish line sprint". It's often difficult to plan precisely when a project will complete, especially if there's no externally imposed deadline. Daily minutiae will always impose on some pristine idea you have of how much you can get done. Things don't always go according to plan, and that's OK.



Photo by [Stephen Margo](#) on [Unsplash](#)

If that's true, should you even strive to create 'internal' or 'self-imposed' deadlines? If so, should you relax the criteria for success to make a deadline? Even though I oddly like hard deadlines, there are enough of them in life. The idea behind a finish line sprint is to avoid a hard deadline if it's not necessary.

Pick the one project that simultaneously resonates strongly with you and is also reasonably close to completion. Choose to see it through quickly. Act as if you are sprinting to the finish line, but don't cut corners. Stick to the high, but not perfect, standard that makes your "do"ing like the painting of an artist who cares about his craft.

The finish line sprint is a way of knocking out projects with grace. It helps you find the middle way between poor quality work and uninspiring perfection. The finish line sprint preserves the momentum of a deadline without the anxiety that comes with it.

It is my favorite part of doing. This feeling comes from the unfortunate truth that once you've crossed the finish line after the sprint, you're left

with an emptiness like that when you finish a good book or movie or TV series. This is why “rediscover what matters” is so important. If you always have projects where a finish line is in sight you begin to not only *think* with an abundance mindset, but also *do* more in your most natural way.

Organizing Tasks in CD via ‘ALPS’

I’ll shamelessly repeat the core concepts of CD:

1. **Capture** everything in one place
2. in order **to** re-discover what matters, and
3. **do** the thing now.

I firmly believe the ideas above provide just enough structure and flexibility to work in a variety of personal task management systems and implementations. That’s why I call them “key ideas” or “concepts”.

At the same time, just having concepts is not specific enough to realize an actual, working system. This section tackles the next obstacle to task management productivity: organization of resources and tasks. It adds some “order” to the phrase “capture in order to do.”

I call the system ALPS. The core idea is to organize information for tasks in four top-level folders:

- Archives
- Log

- Projects
- Spaces

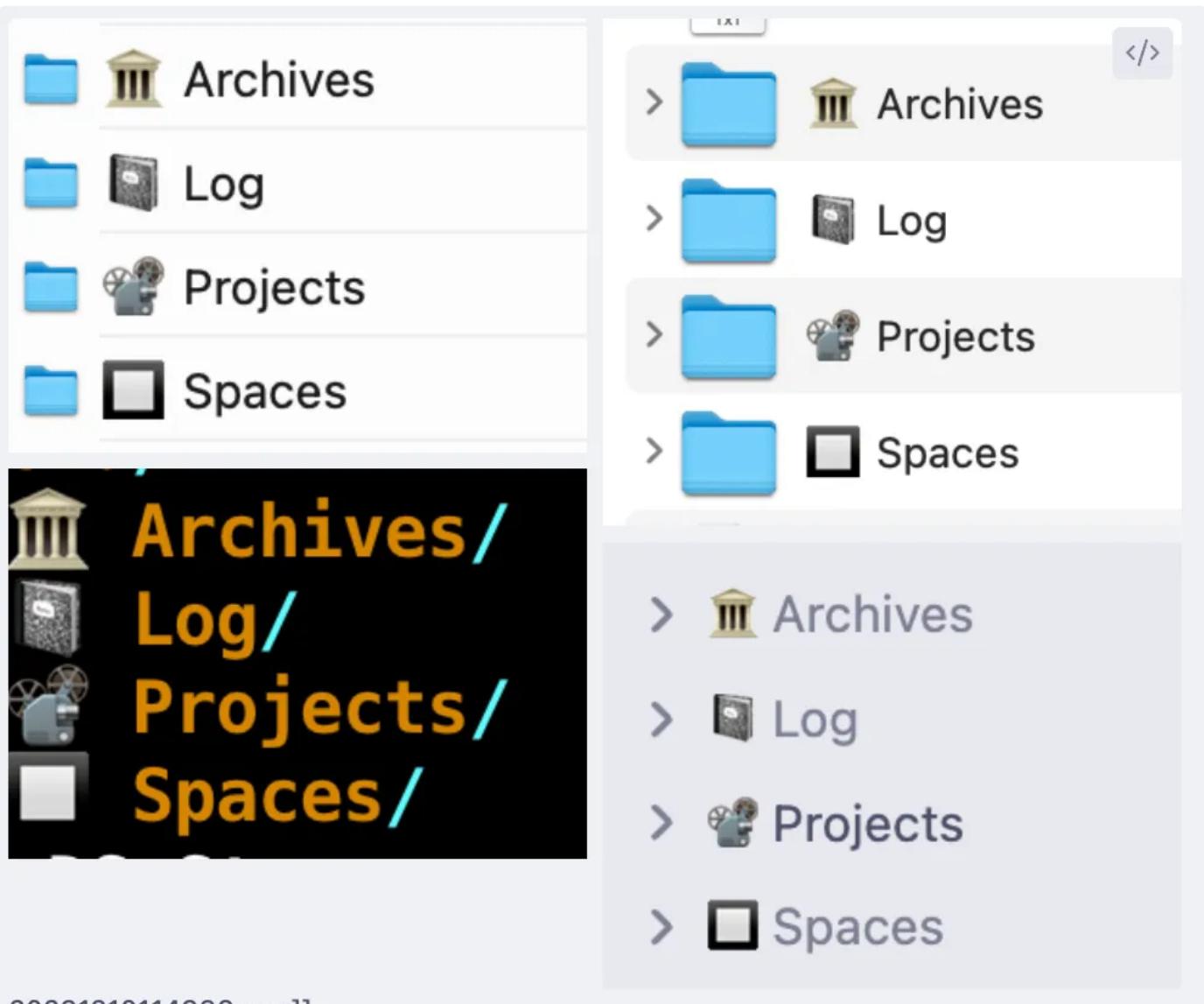
Every resource related to a task or project goes directly into one of these folders and each folder has a specific purpose. The organization generally doesn't deviate beyond folders one level below these top level folders. This helps to keep the organization scheme very simple, consistent across applications, and satisfying to use. (This system is a fun twist on *The PARA Method* and *Building a Second Brain*.)

How To Use Obsidian as Your Companion for Ultimate Creativity

Building a second brain in Obsidian that works for you ...

[medium.com](https://medium.com/@joshuacollins/building-a-second-brain-in-obsidian-that-works-for-you-10f3a2a2a2d)

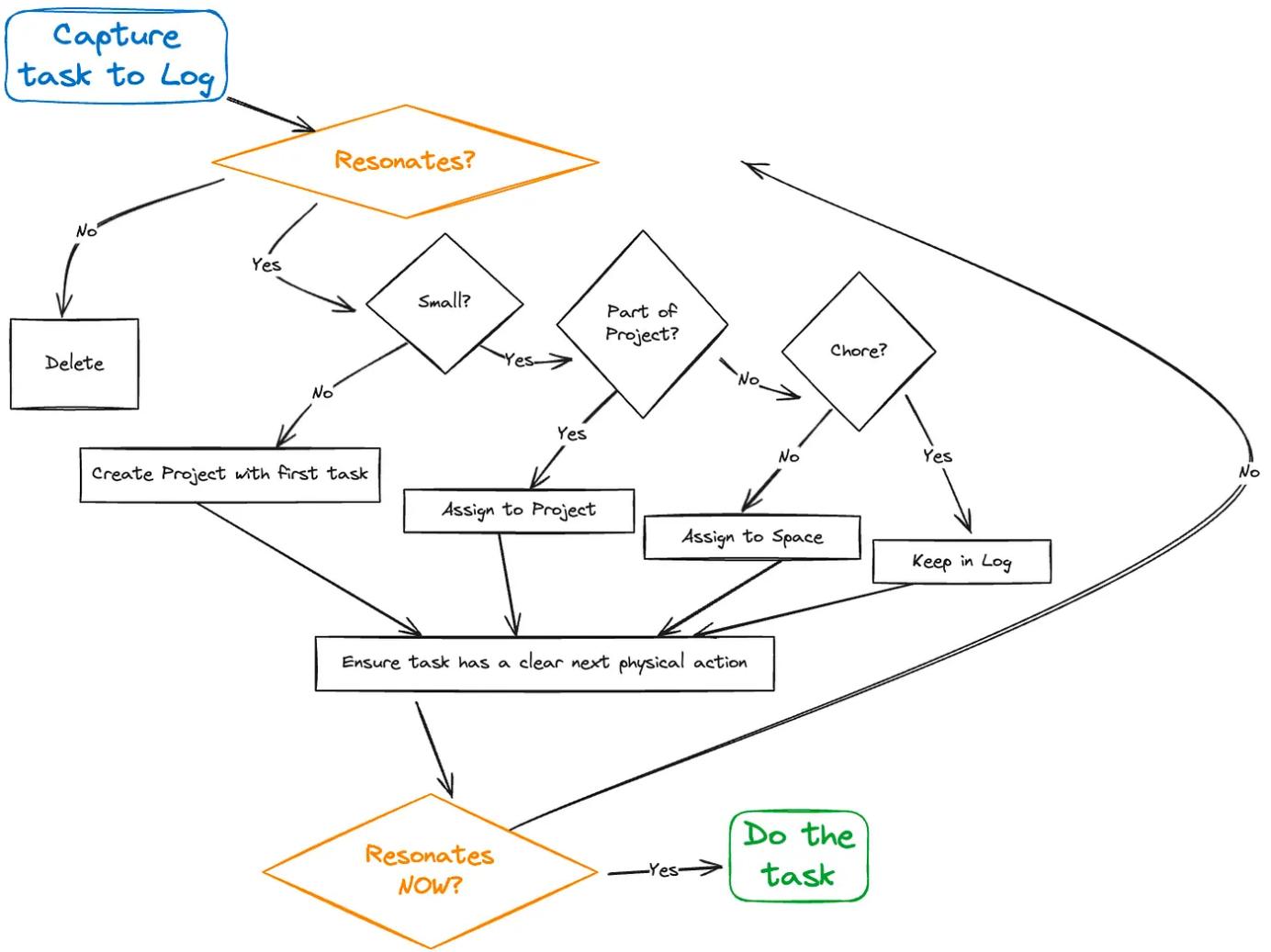
From an implementation perspective, I like to have emojis prefix the actual names of the folders. This indicates there's a certain level of importance to these folders. Here are a few examples of how the 'root' of ALPS looks in a variety of applications:



File Browser (MacOS Finder, top left), Writing Application (iA Writer, top right), Terminal (iTerm, bottom left), Note-Taking Application (Obsidian, bottom right)

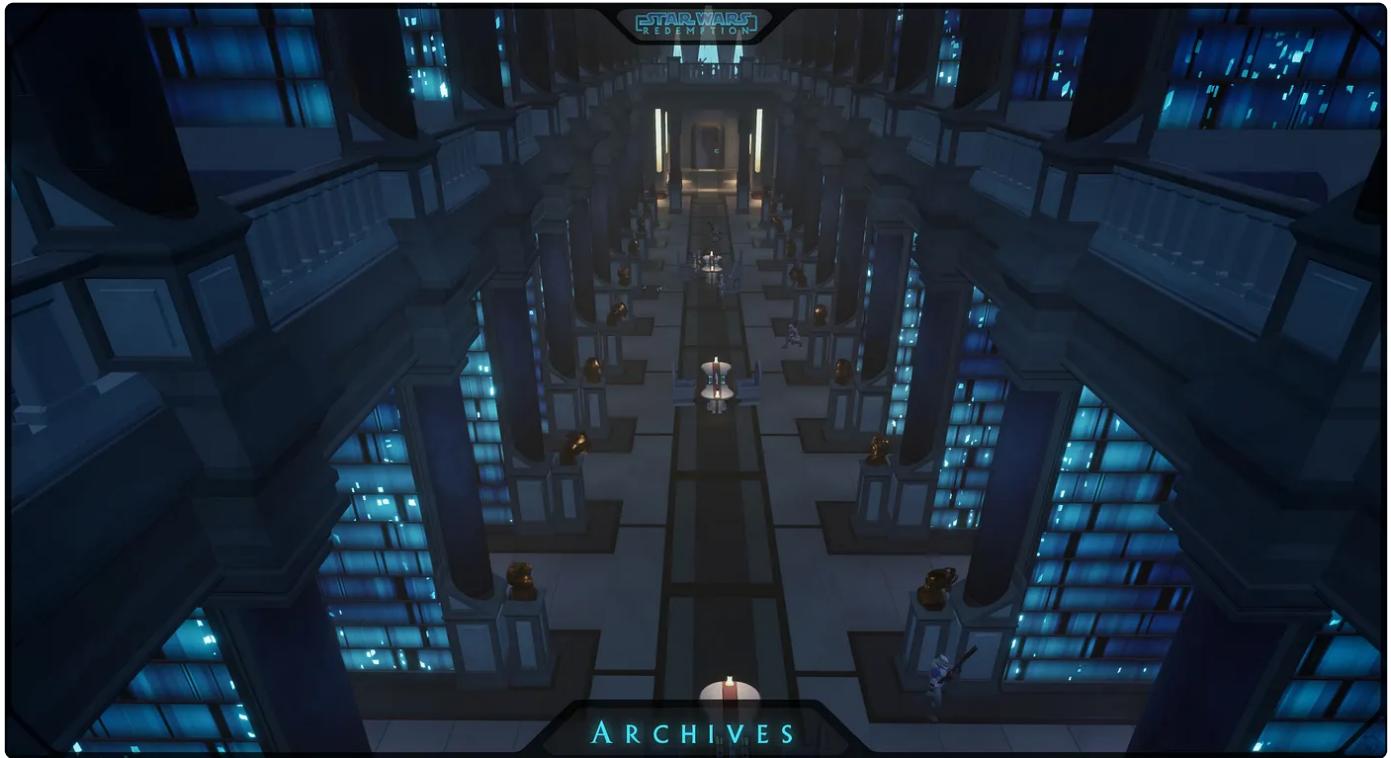
It's great to be able to see a familiar but appropriately different view of my organization in all these different applications and this consistency pays dividends over the long haul.

Here is the general workflow of how I manage the 'lifetime of a task' in ALPS:



ALPS workflow for the CD method. The concepts of tasks resonating is the meat of the work between capturing thoughts and doing projects and tasks. ALPS serves as a simple way to organize information in the spirit of PARA. The whole idea is not to over-complicate things and allow flexibility across many tools and platforms.

Archives



Source: [Vexod14](#)

The ‘Archives’ folder contains the folders of projects already completed. It is meant to highlight projects — big or small — you are particularly proud of and want to draw on for future inspiration. The folder is not meant to be just “cold storage” for old projects. It’s not where your projects go to die. It’s fine to have a cold storage folder, but it’s not a core part of ALPS.

Instead, I like to think of archives as my personal source of inspiration. This is why it’s the first folder on the list.

▼  Archives

- >  KubeCon 2019
- >  RWST Final Stretch
- >  Complete open enrollment
- >  Holiday Decorations 2023
- >  Kitchen Remodel

Example listing of my Archives folder. Completed projects that I find value in revisiting.

It contains projects I am glad I did. This list of projects served as a motivator to do more projects and raise my standards. In this way, I like to think of Archives more like the ‘Jedi Archives’ in Star Wars. It is a place that is beautiful and contains gems of knowledge from previous experience. Each project in it represents a summit I have successfully climbed and inspires me to strive for a new, interesting, and beautiful summit.



Source: Fandom, [Mountains of Moria](#)

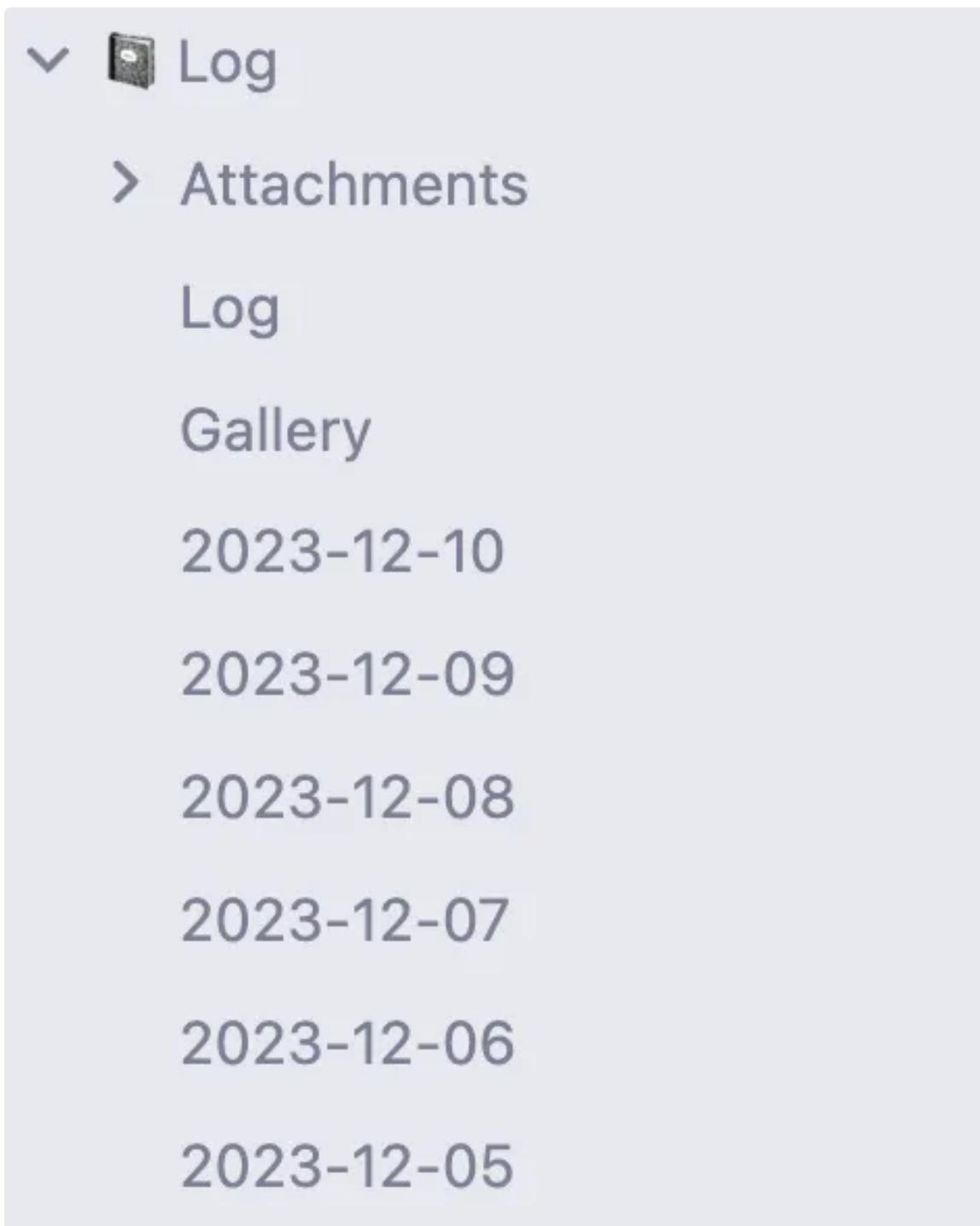
Log

The ‘Log’ folder is the place where most “Capture” happens. Pretty much every task I capture starts as a task in a daily note within the folder and eventually processed using the procedure I mentioned above.

I deeply like the idea of keeping a daily log. A daily log allows me to capture my thoughts and couch them in the most natural way I experience the world: time. I never have to think twice about where to put a thought. Grouping thoughts by day allows me to easily review or reference my thoughts on the time scale of a week or so which is convenient for quick reference. (As a bonus serves as an interesting time capsule.)

Pretty much the only alternative to a time-oriented log (like a daily log) to capture everything is an inbox. For practical purposes they are almost identical. The primary difference may be the grouping. For example, in a daily log many disparate notes are placed in the context of a day, while time may be completely ignored in an inbox. For example, in my ‘Log’,

daily notes are just plain text markdown files in Obsidian with file names that obey a common default format.

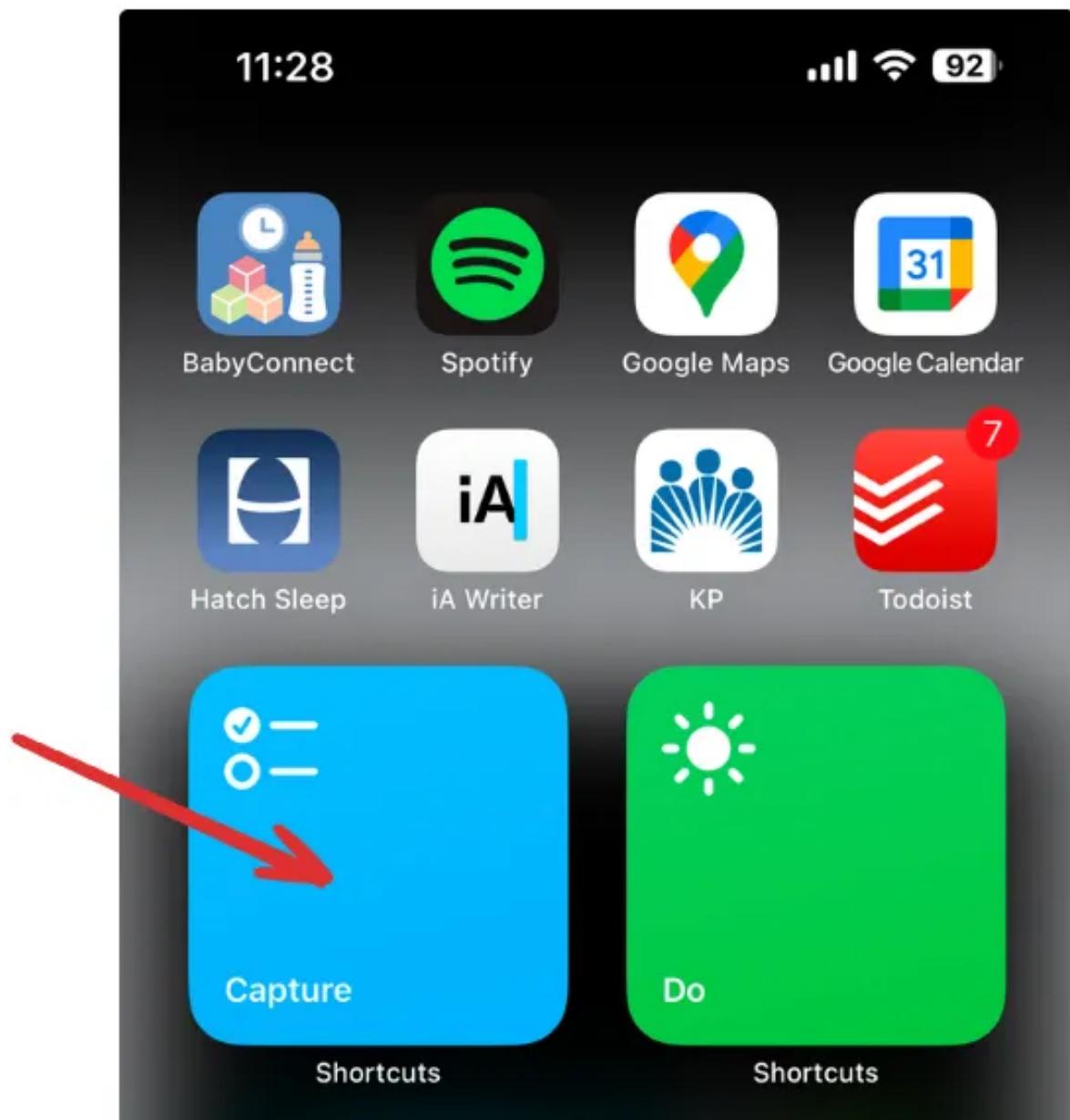


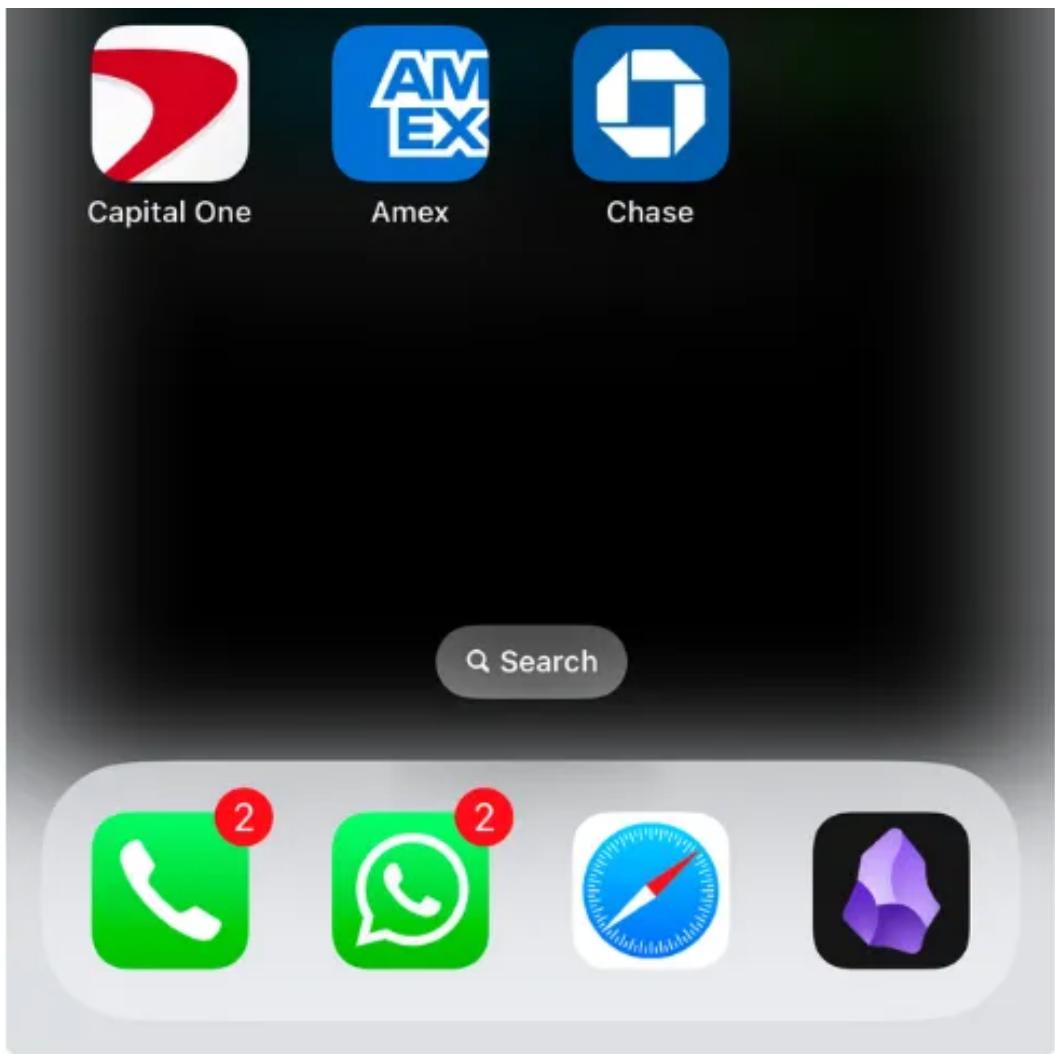
Log folder with daily note files

The single most important tool when logging thoughts is one that helps

me “quick capture.” I should be able to jot down a thought or task and trust that it will be in a place to process later. Here, there are also not too many obvious options. Either it’s a pocket notebook with sticky notes or my phone. Both can be on my person at all times and both are very convenient for quick capture. The phone is the most convenient for me because its easy to capture URLs, dictation, and other forms of media in one place.

Here is an example of how I quick capture on my phone:





iOS home screen with shortcut for quick capture

I'm using an iOS shortcut that will automatically prepend the text I provide it with a task checkbox. This task is then automatically appended to my daily log. It is surprisingly simple and my preferred way to capture information (even over sharing directly to an App).



Edit



Best of the Harry Potter Soundtracks

geetduggal



Prologue

John Williams



Harry's Wondrous World

John Williams



The Arrival of Baby Harry

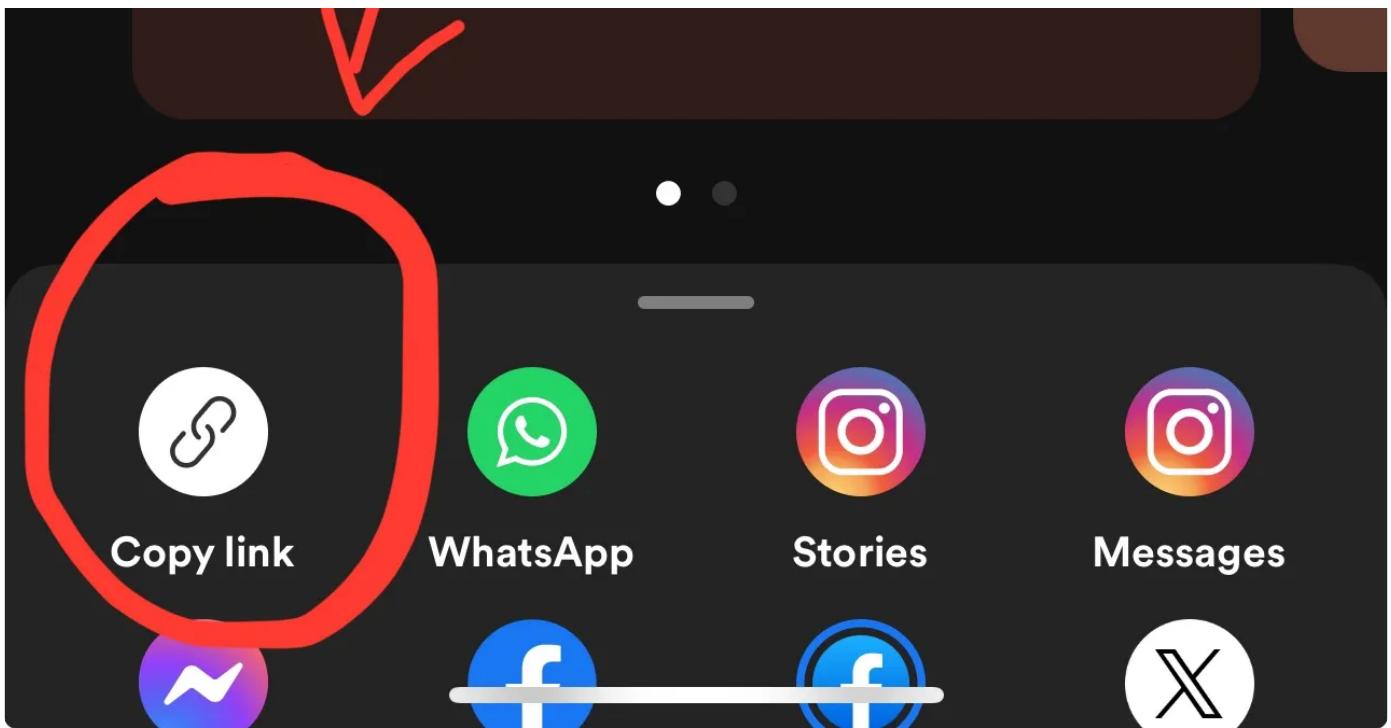
John Williams



Visit to the Zoo and Letters from...

John Williams

 Spotify



The beauty of this shortcut is that it works seamlessly with Siri and Airpods for example. The moment I invoke Siri, I can say “Capture”. If I have my Airpods on I can dictate simple things I need to do when I remember: e.g. Get milk etc.

(One thing to note, especially when capturing my thoughts: I’m increasingly less inspired by tags or backlinks. I have a new rule of thumb: if you can find what you want easily by a full text search, then there’s no need to tag or backlink. This makes the capture process that much more frictionless and easy to use with anything that can process plain text. I’m not saying that tags and backlinks are not meaningful, but my feeling is that they should be used sparingly. There is an supplemental chapter in *Building a Second Brain* that discusses this further, and I tend to agree with its sentiment these days.)

A superpower of using this approach is that it is essentially interstitial journaling on steroids (I wrote about the game-changing nature of inter-

stitial journaling and quick capture for Obsidian a while back). There's nothing that helps me feel more digitally at home than going back to my interstitial journal. It is here where I center myself and focus on the next thing I want to do.

This Simple Journaling Method Could Change Your Life

I am using a journaling technique that I can honestly say has changed my life and I've also been sticking with it like...

medium.com

The Most Useful iOS Shortcut for Obsidian

This one will be a quick post, but just wanted to share a super simple iOS shortcut I use for Obsidian that is pretty...

medium.com

Log / 2023-12-10

2023-12-10

Key takeaways

- Nice to spend a cozy Sunday working on work and hobbies

07:00 – 08:00 Another nice weekend morning. 2023-12-10

- Prepping scrambled eggs with onions on top of the usual oatmeal+ fruits+bread and butter and cheese. (+ tea and coffee) 2023-12-10

08:00 – 11:15 Morning play, breakfast, cleanup 2023-12-10

11:15 – 12:00 [Article on ALPS System](#) 2023-12-10

12:00 – 20:30 Family time 2023-12-10

20:30 – 22:15 Some work, relaxation and shower 2023-12-10

- [UKB Inactive Project Mid-December Summary#Stats for only non-UKB Robot generated hardlinks](#)
- Interesting that I have a lot of energy
- Feeling nice and cozy working at home

22:15 – 23:00 [Article on ALPS System](#)

- Create overall flow diagram ([CD Workflow](#))
Also used Mermaid to generate initial version
- Migrate text and rough images over to Medium

Another nice weekend morning. 2023-12-10

- Prepping scrambled eggs

Morning play, breakfast, cleanup 2023-12-10

[Article on ALPS System](#) 2023-12-10

Family time 2023-12-10

Example interstitial journal entry with Obsidian DayPlanner plugin to the right

My interstitial journal contains mostly tasks but remember: even fleeting thoughts are tasks. For example, see the note shown in the previous section where I captured about the headache. I can close the task by either placing it in the context of a project or space (eg. add it to some source where I'm tracking how I feel specifically), or I can simply mark it complete / delete it with the intent of it not contributing to anything more substantial.

I've even used my journal to jot down sentences that would go into an article like this. Here is an example:

Key takeaways

</>

• Early December Finances:

- Reviewed Chase transactions
- Got rid of unnecessary subscriptions

- 05:45 - 06:15  Article on ALPS System ✓ 2023-12-10

- 08:00 - 09:30 Morning duties ✓ 2023-12-10

Kiddos get ready ✓ 2023-12-10

Make Dasha's breakfast ✓ 2023-12-10

Put Nadya to bed ✓ 2023-12-10

- 09:30 - 10:30  Article on ALPS System ✓ 2023-12-10

- 13:00 - 14:00 Code blocks in Obsidian ✓ 2023-12-10

- Use dataviewjs for quick calculations as image shows below see  Early December Finances

```
let charges =  
[550, 68, 110.62, 77.37, 14.99, 13, 110.62, 33, 14.28, 292.88, 165, 60]  
dv.list(charges)  
dv.paragraph("$"+charges.reduce((a,b) => a+b, 0))
```

JavaScript

- 550
- 68
- 110.62
- 77.37
- 14.99
- 13
- 110.62
- 33
- 14.28
- 292.88
- 165
- 60

\$1509.76

Get Gatorade



"The single most important tool when logging thoughts is the idea of quick capture. I should be able to jot down a thought or task and trust that it will be in a place to process later. Here, there are also not too many obvious

Example distilled interstitial journaling entry. The bold items tend to be what resonate and the highlights make it easy to see what exactly this whole thing was about. It eventually ended up in some form in this article.

Another use of the log is to capture “mini notes” that can help serve a larger goal:

18:00 – 22:30 Family time 2023-12-09

22:40 – 23:10 Log 2023-12-09

- OK, so I'm thinking again I might need to redo a little bit of what I'm thinking. I had to write more like me speaking because the problem with writing is that I tend to have less of the enthusiasm and energy as I would like and get caught up in my text, but I want to emphasize how to organize my projects with respect to other tasks. Basically I should show examples of all the types of things I capture. Projects are about what resonated with me and now there's finally there's clarity and understanding about what to do and when. That's it. And it's kind of crazy because I feel like I have like after years of this and not being terribly good at it [productivity] I'm converging in the system but simple, but also satisfied certain

Example distilled interstitial journaling entry. The bold items tend to be what resonate and the highlights make it easy to see what exactly this whole thing was about. It eventually ended up in some form in this article.

Here there is some text in bold, and some of the bold text is highlighted in the context of the entire text in the journal. (This form of highlighting is discussed in-depth in *Building a Second Brain*.) When applied to my interstitial journal, this process takes my thoughts in their most raw form and distills them to the kernel of what matters. While I've used this distil-

lation technique on articles and books I've read, I have found it incredibly useful to process my interstitial journal.

I therefore call this combination of text summarization and journaling “Distilled Interstitial Journaling”. Some of our best thoughts happen at random times and, in their raw form, they can be very verbose and unfocused. Distilled Interstitial Journaling brings them into focus to help me harness my creative energy with the least amount of friction possible.

On my better days, I sometimes add a callout to the top of the daily log that highlights some key takeaways. This helps me to quickly look back on a day and see what was eventful and/or productive about it. I've found this useful when writing summaries and weekly reports. I have found a lot of value not only in planning a highlight for the day, but also “highlight my day” in this way. (Creating a highlight for the day is a technique encouraged in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography and *Make Time*.)

My journey into task management really started from keeping a daily log for on the order of years. If you don't do anything else other than keep a log to help you capture everything, you'll get incredible value from doing that alone.

In fact, I often find that I do most of my real and best work directly in the log itself and sort it out later. The subsequent folders, ‘Projects’, and ‘Spaces’ are really about how we take what we've captured and build them into higher level projects contributing to spaces that represent important parts of our lives.

Finally, I want to mention that I heavily use the powerful and unique service Readwise and its companion ‘Reader’ app to capture highlights and

notes on books, articles, and videos.

Readwise

Grow wiser and retain books better: Readwise sends you a daily email resurfacing your best highlights from Kindle...

readwise.io

In the spirit of capturing highlights to the daily log, the official plugin for Obsidian makes it super easy to just append highlights as tasks to process in my daily note. I find this a much more actionable way to review what resonated with me in the things I consumed.

I find it particularly useful to see, in any given day, the heterogenous mixture of highlights across sources that resonated with me. Readwise will always keep the categorization of highlights by book, article, and video. I don't need Obsidian as a pretty place to show my library off to myself. I want to use Obsidian to *do* something with the highlights I capture.

It is critical to remember that, despite showing how complex a daily log can get, the goal of the log is to keep things simple and to not structure it too much or make it a chore. I repeat that its OK to be *messy*. Any structure you add on any given day lives for that day and there's no pressure to do the same again. Keeping a log should be the most frictionless part of this whole process.

Projects

Projects are the heart of ALPS. They hit the sweet spot between small simple tasks you'll likely forget about and "lifetime accomplishments". They are substantial tasks you do that are specific, easy to explain, and often valuable to others.

Most importantly, the projects you do resonate with you. To maximize success of doing the project you should make the project as small as possible while retaining the core part of what resonates with you. Here are a few examples of captured tasks in my system that eventually turned into projects.

The screenshot shows a digital interface for managing tasks. A section titled "Projects" is expanded, revealing a list of six items, each preceded by a small icon:

- > 🚧 Article on ALPS System
- > 🏙 Favorite Things 2023-12
- > 🏠 Get garage couch
- > 🏠 Replace Dishwasher and St...
- > 👤 Cooler for Tesla
- > 👪 Family Baylands walk

Example listing of Projects

When processing tasks in the log, any given task may warrant the creation of a new project or fall into an existing project. Projects are the first place you should think of where to place something you capture. Projects are big tasks that matter on a longer timescale (eg. remodel kitchen) as opposed to mundane chores (eg. get milk).

Projects are also folders. I like to think of them as containers or ‘shoe boxes’ that contain pretty much all the things you need to get the project done and refer to it at later times. These folders can be moved around and potentially even shared with others as a unit.

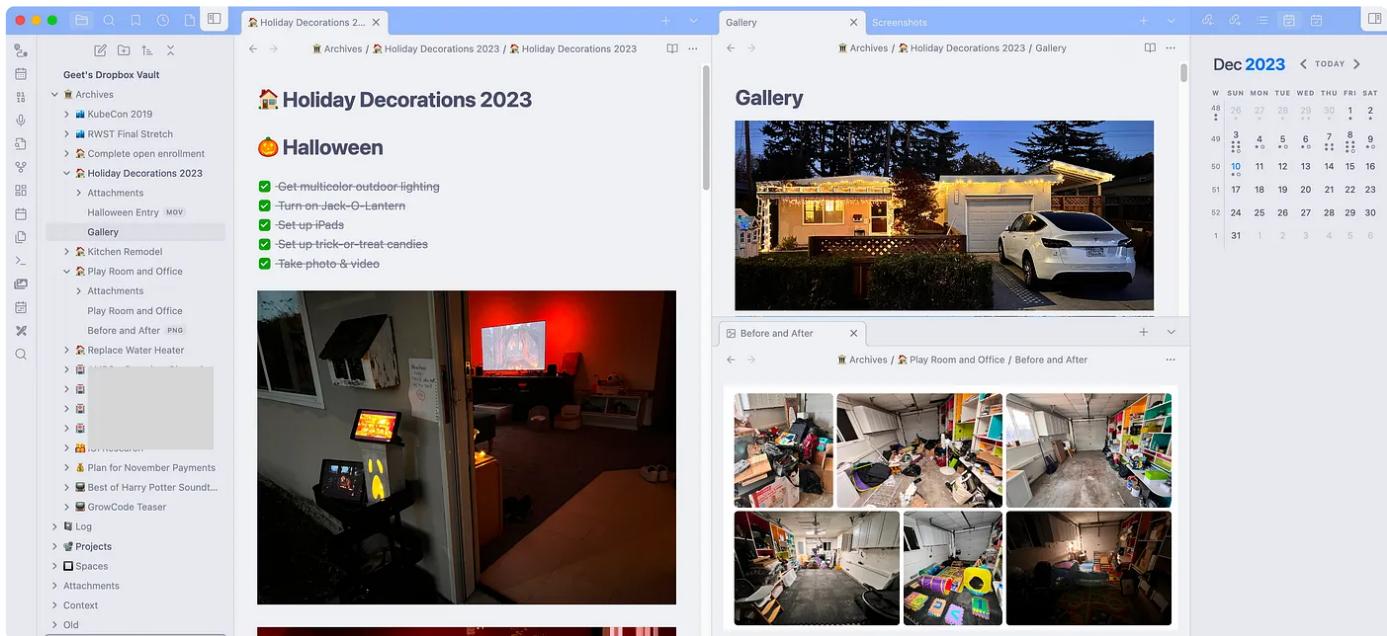
The ‘Projects’ folder shouldn’t have too many projects. These are all the things you’re actively working on that resonate with you. If there are too many things, you will be overwhelmed.

For me, most projects have ‘deliverables’ in this sense: they produce an output in a format that will stand the test of time. I call these ‘weather resistant outputs’. They are the types of outputs you could view years from now in the ‘Archives’ folder with confidence. There are a handful of digital files and formats that satisfy this criteria:

- Plain text and HTML files
- Image(s)
- Audio and video files
- PDF

Of course, many projects have non-digital “deliverables”. For example, with the water heater example above the main deliverable is obviously the water heater itself, but for me the primary *digital* deliverable was a

Markdown document (plain text file) with a collection of images.



Example project (Holiday Decorations) using various convenient layout features in Obsidian. This example shows how a simple digital deliverable is an image gallery in some form or another.

(The value of thinking of projects as containers or ‘shoe boxes’ and the value of seeing these meaningful units of work complete is discussed in depth in *Building a Second Brain* and *The PARA Method*.).

Spaces

If a task you’ve captured doesn’t fit well in an active project, it should fit in a space that encompasses a general area of interest in your life. Spaces are also folders. Here are my current spaces:

▼ Spaces

- >  Productivity
- >  Homebuilding
- >  Health
- >  Family
- >  Finances
- >  Reading
- >  Entertainment
- >  Oneness

Example listing of spaces. The emojis that signify spaces also prefix project names for quick visual grouping of projects by space.

You may have noticed that spaces are prefixed with emojis and that projects in the list above are also prefixed with the emojis for the spaces they're associated with. This makes it easy to tell at-a-glance what projects you are working on across your spaced.

It may be natural to organize project folders in their respective spaces as opposed to residing in a separate ‘Projects’ folder. You may even go as far as to allow projects to be associated with multiple spaces.

I’ve tried all three approaches over the span of years and strongly prefer just having all active projects in one folder. The primary benefit is that this organization is a forcing function for you to constantly see all your active projects simultaneously and ensure they are either making progress or are abandoned.

That being said, it’s totally OK if something you’ve captured doesn’t fit into a project. Spaces are a great catch-all for things that interest me that are processed more at my leisure and when I’m not in a zone focused on any particular project.

I like to think of spaces visually and imagine a casual stroll through a village where I can visit areas of my life that are meaningful for inspiration on what to do. Its like my own media feed as opposed to a social media feed.

The visual layout is expressed in a simple way by using emoji prefixed projects. For giggles, you can even go as far as creating a map of your digital village like it was in a fantasy novel.



2D layout of spaces in an Obsidian Canvas setting. The boxes have actual pages and it's kinda fun to just explore.

Here I am using Obsidian Canvas, but the main point is the list of folders in the spaces (with their appropriate Emojis) can be thought of as a linear/circular walk through the village. The Obsidian Canvas representation just makes it a little more fun.

(The notion of this kind of digital village was introduced as far as I know in a [tweet!](#)!)

Conclusion

“Capture to do” is a very simple system at heart.

First, keep one place to capture all your thoughts as tasks. The method I described here borrows from a lot of amazing thought on task management, but I think the way I capture everything to a daily log (I mean literally *everything*) as tasks and process it for what resonates is particularly powerful. As I mentioned above (and shamelessly repeat), simply keeping a daily log can go a long way (though the real dividends are paid in subsequent review).

(Given the more complicated setup in Obsidian I showed above, it may surprise you that the app Todoist or any simple task manager may be the most practical and powerful for most people. I’ve toyed with the idea of just simplifying things and going back to a simple app like Todoist or Reminders myself, but Obsidian is just too useful for my personal use cases. Perhaps an experiment for another day.)

Second, review everything you’ve captured under the lens of why it resonates. What excites you about why you captured what you did?



High priority

- Reply to Oracle email
- Return Apple TV remote
- Analyze finances
- Call repair for refrigerator
- <https://davish.github.io/obsidian-full-calendar/calendars/dailynote/>
- Get back to
- o investigation
- Start HP1
- Start LOTR1

9 tasks

Blocked

- Waiting for PE
- Waiting on Assurant to refund Condo insurance
- Waiting for 3rd shoe

3 tasks

Errands

- Return Apple TV remote
- Get back to
- Get yogurt
- Get raspberry star cookies

CD is very flexible. You don't need to use Obsidian or any particular app. This is just one example of how I cluster/group what I've captured using the Obsidian Tasks plugin (below in this same file there are also tasks in projects and spaces).

Finally, create projects and tasks with very concrete next steps and manage how you spend your time doing projects with the end result in mind. Each task or project will have a clear deliverable: a finish line that will be very satisfying to sprint across.

Rinse and repeat. Following this simple approach will make doing things an order of magnitude more fun. “Capture to do” acts like a flywheel for doing things. Once you start to capture everything and process what you’ve captured with the kind of deliberation described in this article, you will find your work is more prolific than you thought it could be. You will be constantly growing yourself, re-discovering why you do what you do, and enjoying the journey with others you share it with.

1. **Capture** everything in one place
2. in order **to** re-discover what matters, and
3. **do** the thing now.