



Work Smarter, Not Harder: 25 Must-Know Productivity Tips

25



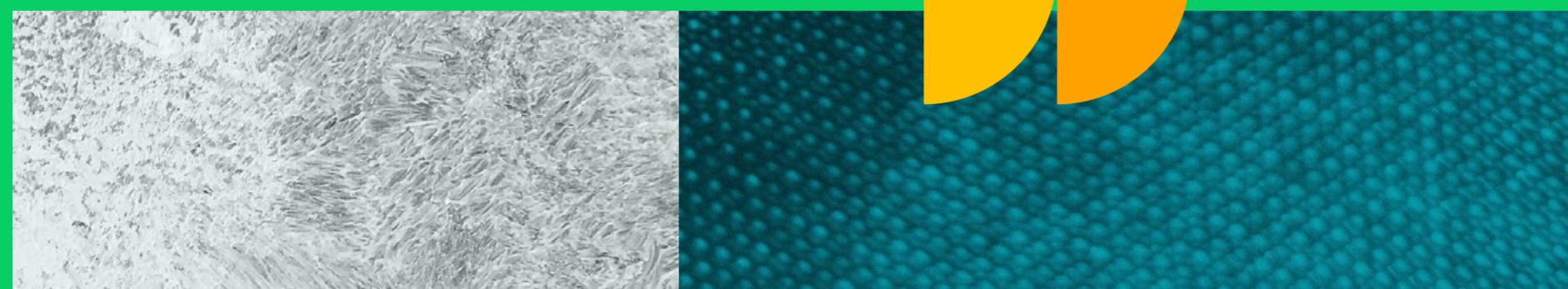
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Introduction

While much of the world's workforce moved away from the confines of the office in 2020, another less obvious shift was happening behind the scenes – we wondered how to be more productive at work. Time management gave way to attention management. Managers and employees no longer watched the clock; they sought effective productivity tips that would significantly impact their work.

Fortunately, we at Wrike have spent years building, researching, and curating the productivity hacks that help teams in 20,000+ organizations worldwide to work smarter, not harder. And we figured it was time to share a few of our secrets to help your team unlock better results and use their time more wisely each day.



How to be more productive at work

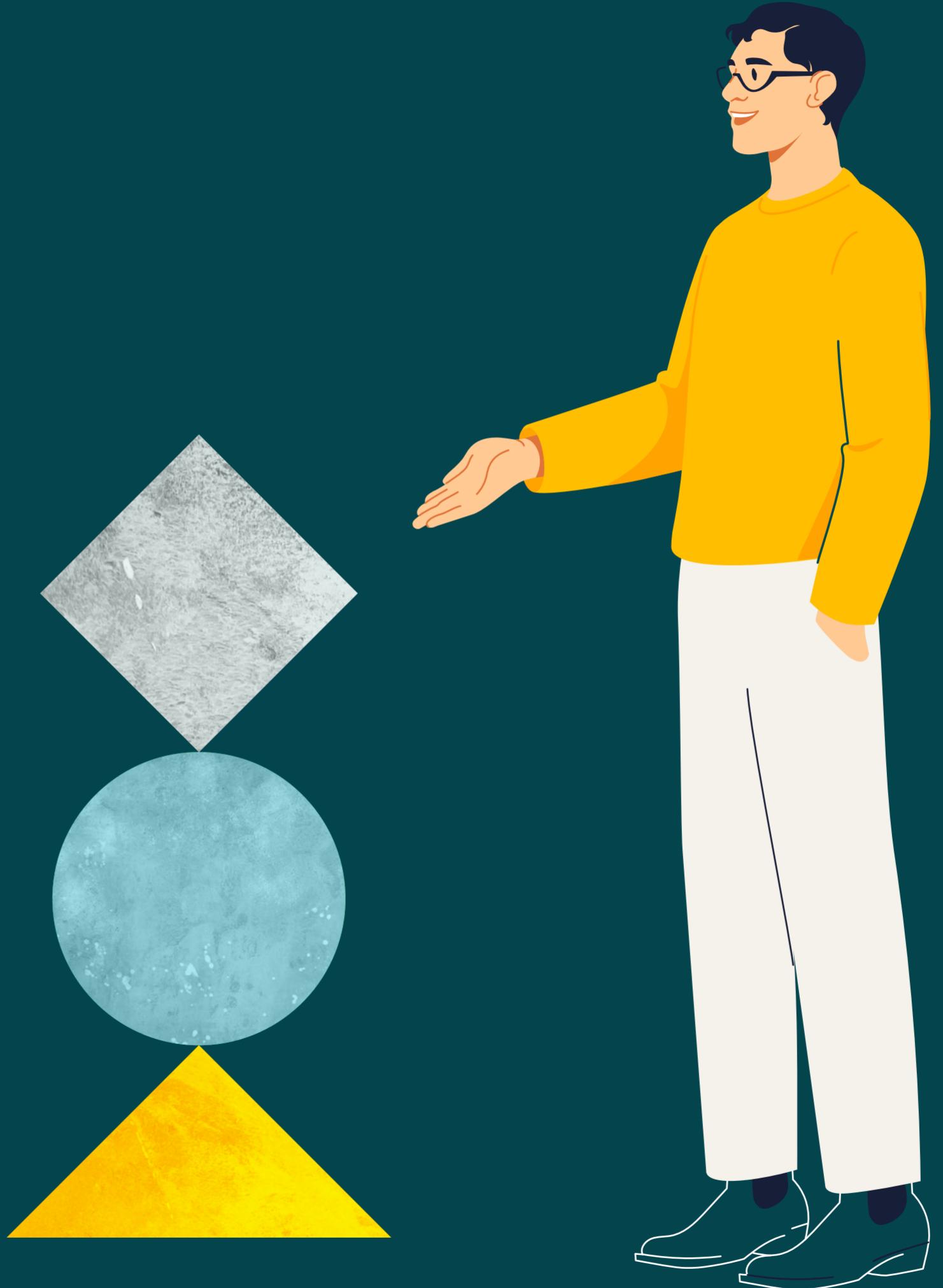
We've divided this guide into three key, easy-to-use knowledge areas that have been proven to help you save time at work. You'll learn the best productivity tips to help your team to:

- Structure their work
- Automate their processes
- Use Wrike to power productivity

Since we know time is always of the essence while you work, let's get started.

Section 1

How to structure your work



1

Embrace smarter planning

Productivity tip #1: Try the 52/17 trick

What's the one trick you think enhances your productivity? Starting early? Ruthlessly prioritizing tasks? The answer might surprise you. Researchers from the [Draugiem Group](#) found that employees who get the most done each day are the ones that take the most breaks. Specifically, they found the most productive employees worked for 52 minutes followed by a 17-minute break (an improved version of the [Pomodoro Technique](#), which follows a 25/5 minute work/break pattern).

Why it works

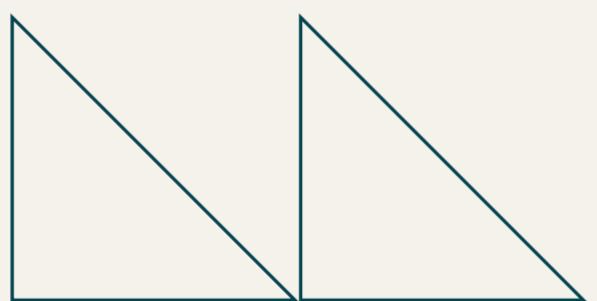
As [Quartz](#) explains: "For roughly an hour at a time, [the employees] were 100% dedicated to the task they needed to accomplish. They didn't check Facebook 'real quick' or get distracted by emails. When they felt fatigued, they took short breaks, during which they completely separated themselves from work. This helped them to dive back in refreshed for another productive hour of work."

How to do it

You can use [free 52/17 timers](#) on your desktop, or if you would prefer that the time you spend on each task is automatically stored within that task, try Wrike's [built-in time tracking software](#).

Productivity tip #2: Start with the hardest task

It turns out that Mark Twain was right when he insisted: "Eat a live frog first thing in the morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day." The truth is a lot of us tend to stay busy as a delay tactic for critical tasks that aren't very pleasant. The result? With an unappealing task looming over you, your focus tends to dwindle, and it's hard to stay productive.

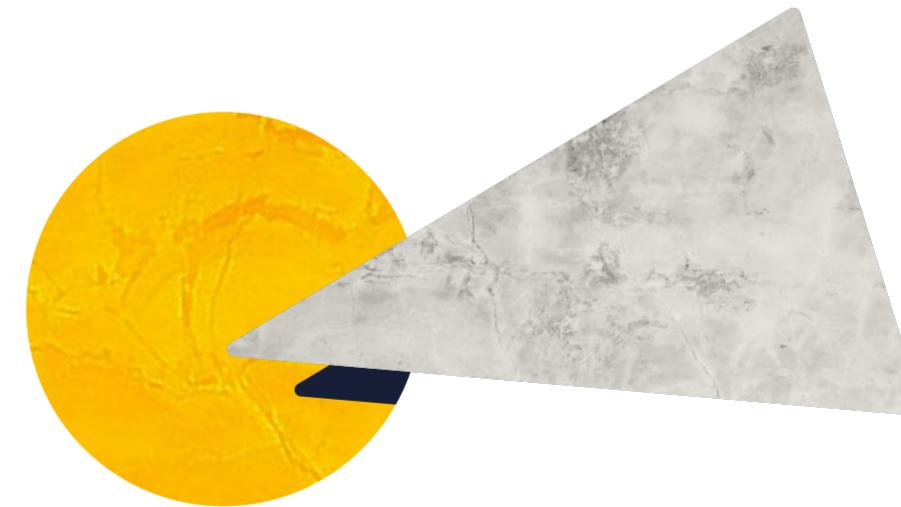


Why it works

As Tim Ferriss summarizes in [The 4-Hour Workweek](#), if you accomplish your worst task first, the rest of your day will be easy in comparison. Tackling the task you are most likely to procrastinate on can help eliminate further procrastination for the rest of the day.

How to do it

You won't have to face a 'frog' every morning, but it helps if you prepare the previous day. Gather any last-minute questions or information you will need before you begin so you can get your task out of the way as quickly as possible.



Productivity tip #3: Pick your 'big three'

Losing time to dozens of smaller tasks rather than focusing on the ones that will move the needle? Try this trick from [Sujan Patel](#), co-founder of Web Profits: pick your 'big three' each day. Focusing on getting three target tasks done can eliminate time being wasted on smaller, less meaningful tasks.



Why it works

It's an idea called the Rule of Three, first made popular by author [JD Meier](#), who argues that one task does not allow us to balance any other goals while two forces us to choose between them. When there are only three tasks to prioritize, our brains tend to be better at balancing them.

How to do it

At the beginning of your day, write three goals at the top of your list and schedule your day around them. Block out specific time periods for these goals, minimize your notifications, and (as far as possible) try to limit interruptions from the people you share your workspace with during these specific times.



Productivity tip #4: Focus on one task at a time

Not a great multitasker? Here's a secret: no one really is. As [the New York Times](#) explains, we only have a limited amount of cognitive bandwidth. In fact, Earl K. Miller, a neuroscience professor at MIT, says: "Multitasking is not humanly possible." No amount of late nights will beat the fact that your ability to get things done depends on one main factor – how well you can concentrate on one task at a time.



Why it works

According to Dr. Miller, focusing on one task at a time enables us to make fewer errors and be more creative.

Because the brain is like a muscle, this allows us to strengthen our mental connections, increase performance, and stay productive.

How to do it

Even five minutes of 'monotasking' can create great results. Try the following:

- Remove access to unrelated social media
- Work on just one screen. Place your phone out of reach and turn off your second monitor, if possible
- Get up and walk around when you're getting stuck on something
- Work in timed intervals

Productivity tip #5: Tackle tasks in batches

Tend to get completely distracted by an email? According to the [New York Times](#), it takes an average of 25 minutes to return to a task following an interruption. [Task batching](#) involves grouping similar tasks together to reduce time switching perspectives and, ultimately, minimize stress.

Why it works

By organizing tasks by the level of concentration needed (light for email, moderate for meetings, deep for writing documents, for example), our brains are already prepared to focus on the task at hand before we begin. Task batching also allows us to predict exactly when our brains are likely to need a break and factor these into our day.

How to do it

Take 10 minutes at the beginning of your day to code your tasks into light concentration, moderate concentration, and deep concentration. Schedule breaks after tasks that require deep concentration or when you've completed two 'moderate' batches together. See below for an example of what your day might look like:

Time	Tasks to be completed
9.00	Emails and meeting prep
9.30	Meetings
10:00	Finalizing documents
11.00	Break
11.15	Meetings
12.30	Lunch break
1:30	External communications
2.30	Prioritizing upcoming tasks
3.00	Break
3.15	Meeting
4.00	Emails
4.30	Preparing for the following day

Concentration level required:

- Light
- Medium
- Deep
- Break

Productivity tip #6: Practice the art of time blocking

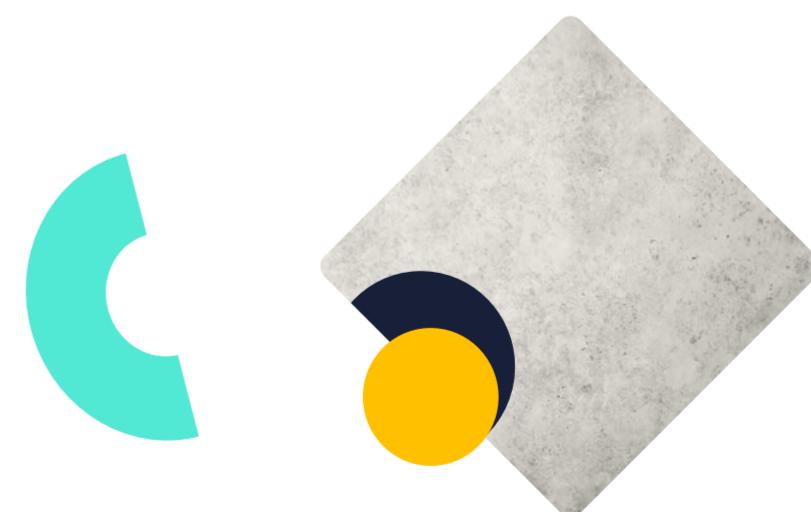
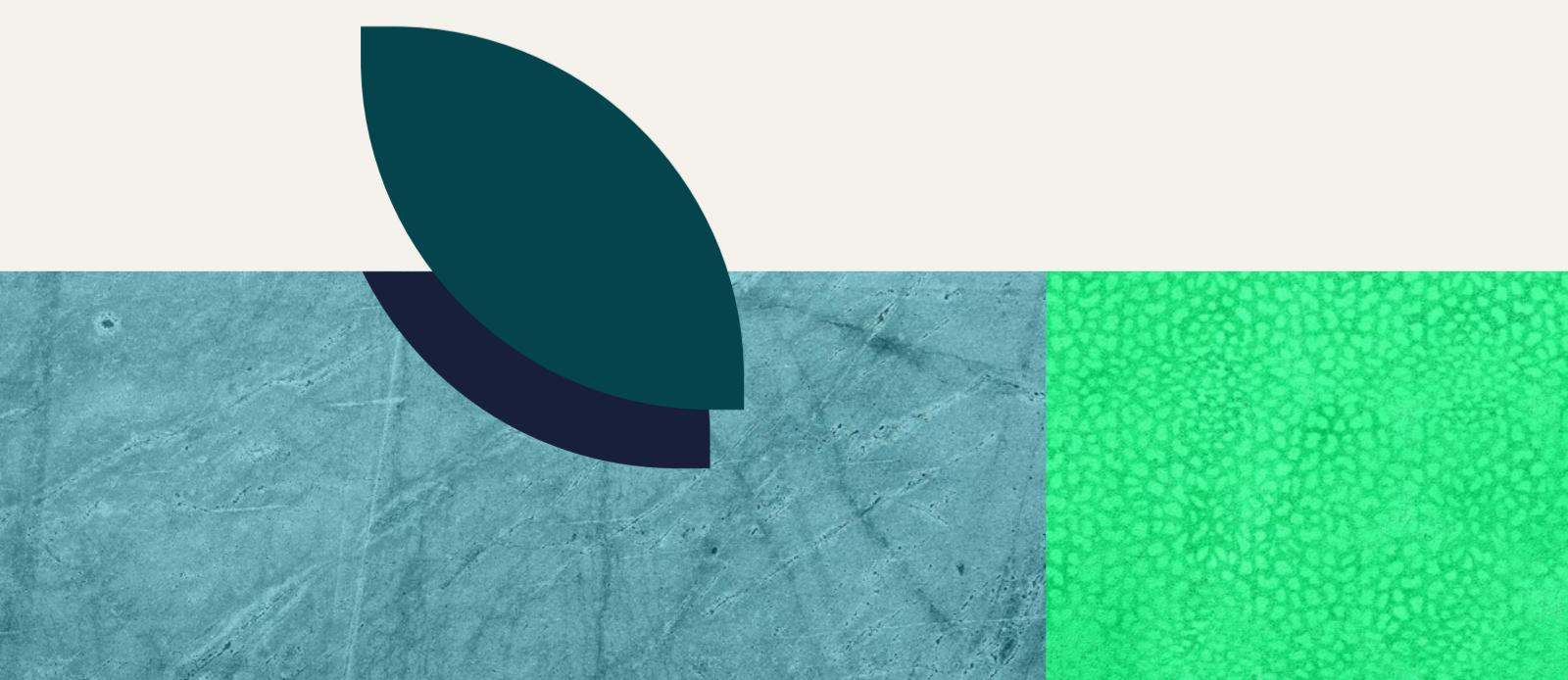
Want to save yourself 20 hours a week? Cal Newport, author of Deep Work [argues](#): “A 40-hour time-blocked work week produces the same amount of output as a 60+ hour work week pursued without structure.” Sometimes described as “the cousin of task batching,” [time blocking](#) is when you divide your day by the time required to complete tasks. Each block is dedicated to achieving that task or group of tasks and nothing else.

Why it works

Time blocking enables us to create more moments of uninterrupted focus (or ‘deep work’), in which we have a dedicated time to check our email, messages, or notifications (‘shallow work’). It also eliminates having to make decisions around ‘what next.’ The result? We are no longer constantly being dragged away from tasks by unnecessary contact.

How to do it

Decide exactly when you will address ‘shallow work’ (emails, messages, notifications), and when you will focus on ‘deep work’ (documents, meetings, prioritization, planning). To save time, you can have a rough, standard ‘daily’ plan and adjust as needed.



2 Minimize your meetings

Productivity tip #7: Try the 30-minute challenge

Ever find that meetings have a big impact on what you're able to accomplish during your day? Often, switching between meetings and individual work can have a huge impact on focus. To avoid this, [Forbes](#) advises minimizing the number of people who have to attend ([engagement decreases](#) the more time is spent in large groups) and setting 30 minutes as the maximum time for a meeting.

Why it works

By minimizing both the number of attendees (Jeff Bezos swears by the 'two pizza rule' that no meeting should have more than 6-8 people) and the length of the meeting, it prevents attendees from switching to 'offline mode' or checking emails or messages.

How to do it

Firstly, communicate an agenda ahead of time so that attendees can gather any necessary information. When selecting who to invite, try [Pixar's 'Brain Trust'](#) trick that only people who can actually contribute should be invited. The rest can catch up on the minutes. Keep it short and sweet – scheduling for 30 minutes should keep the meeting as efficient as possible.



Productivity tip #8: Maximize your breaks

What do your breaks look like? If they tend to be five minutes checking your favorite sites, chances are your brain isn't getting a real break. According to [Harvard Health](#), regular aerobic exercise appears to boost the size of the hippocampus, the part of the brain involved in verbal memory and learning. As this is amplified even further when it [occurs in green space](#), breaks can be much more beneficial when swapping your social media scroll for an outdoor stroll.

Why it works

Exercise produces chemicals that [affect the health of brain cells](#). It also improves mood and sleep and reduces stress and anxiety that often contribute to cognitive impairment. [Being outdoors](#) can improve sleep, reduce stress, increase happiness, reduce negative emotions, and promote positive social interactions.

How to do it

You'll need to be disciplined with this tip, but it's worth setting alarms to get up and stretch your legs outdoors, fitting in a walk or run at lunch, or even taking some of your meetings while walking.



Productivity tip #9: Try meeting-free days

How long will you spend in meetings this week? [One Harvard study](#) found that, for C-suite leaders, it can be up to 44 hours. But, as management author Peter Drucker says: "Meetings are a symptom of bad organization. The fewer the meetings, the better." They can serve as another source of distraction, hence why some companies opt for [meeting-free days](#).



Why it works

According to Hector Aguilar, President of Technology at [Okta](#): "When meetings interrupt your day, you're switching between the two sides of your prefrontal cortex to multitask and it can take up to 40% longer to complete the same tasks." Okta has enforced a meeting-free day for seven years: "Removing meetings provides a window for completely uninterrupted time for more complex, time-consuming work, and they tackle smaller, more manageable projects the rest of the week."

How to do it

[The Harvard Business Review](#) recommends to:

- Block off your calendar
- Discuss your strategy with your manager and colleagues
- Pick the right type of work to do (deep concentration work)
- Delay emails and routine tasks until the next day

3 Become an inbox hero

Productivity tip #10: Limit email time

[It's not a new concept](#) that email is ineffective ([our CEO called it six years ago](#)). Yet, according to Harvard Business Review, we still dedicate almost a third of our day to it.

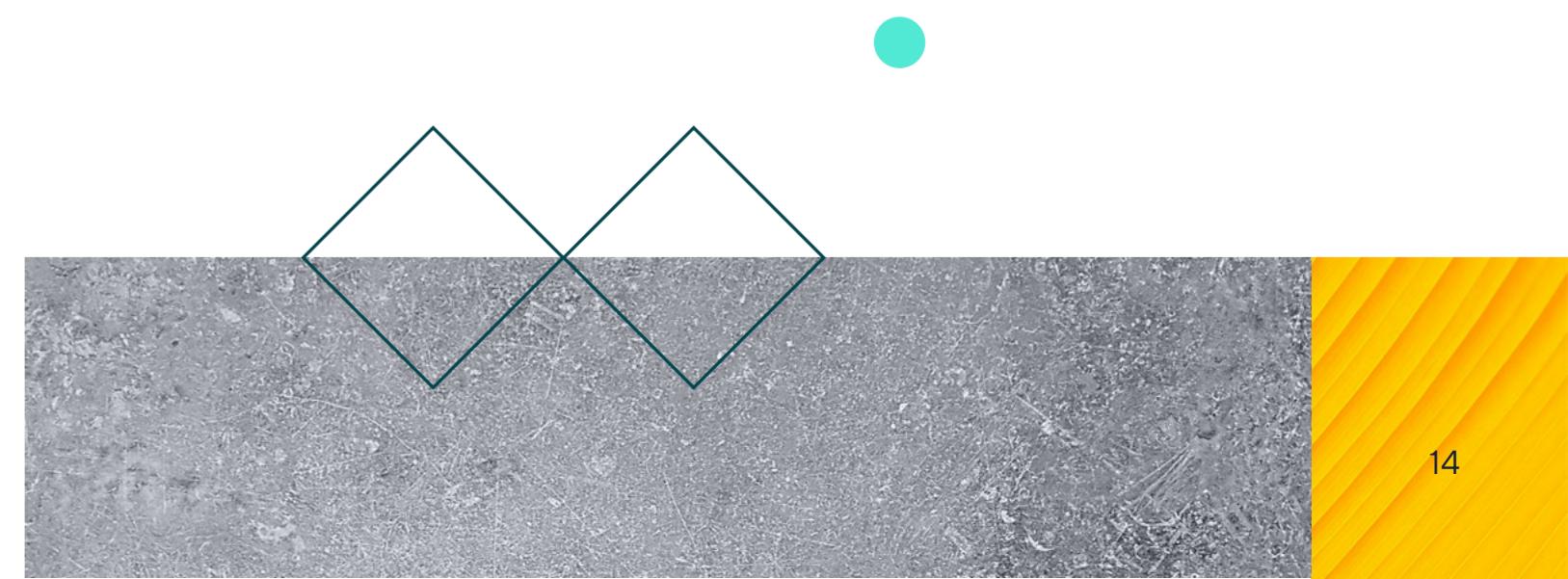
[Entrepreneur](#) advises writing your to-do list before you open your inbox. As author Stephen Covey says: "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule but to schedule your priorities." Try to stop automatically reading every email as it arrives and schedule dedicated email blocks instead.

Why it works

Again, it's a method to eliminate that 25-minute time vacuum that happens every time we pause a task. Eliminating [2.5 hours a day](#) on email lets us tap into the uninterrupted focus we need for deep concentration (and often our most important work).

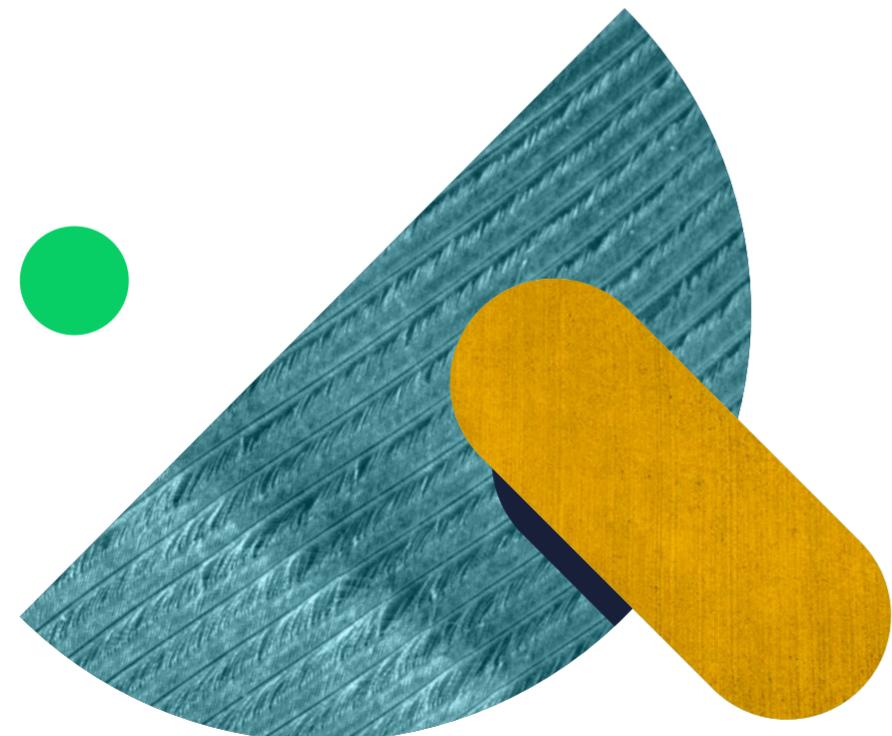
How to do it

Create blocks in your calendar each day to stay disciplined about the time you spend on email. Depending on your role, these can be at the beginning and end of your workday and after lunch, if needed. Outside of these times, try to minimize your emails and disable notifications.



Productivity tip #11: Reduce your notifications

Referred to as ‘a slot machine in our pockets’, it’s been well-documented that smartphones do not aid high productivity. As the [Harvard Business Review](#) explains: “Push-notifications are sapping our ability to get into flow, to do our best work, and to leave the office feeling truly accomplished.” Sound familiar? Try a notification reduction.



Why it works

Here are the astonishing statistics of notifications: The average executive checks their phone [2,617 times a day](#), emails [74 times a day](#), and receives [46 smartphone notifications](#) a day. It’s unlikely we can reach ‘flow’ (where we can focus on one task at hand) at any point during our day. Minimizing notifications helps our brains switch from multitasking to deep thinking.

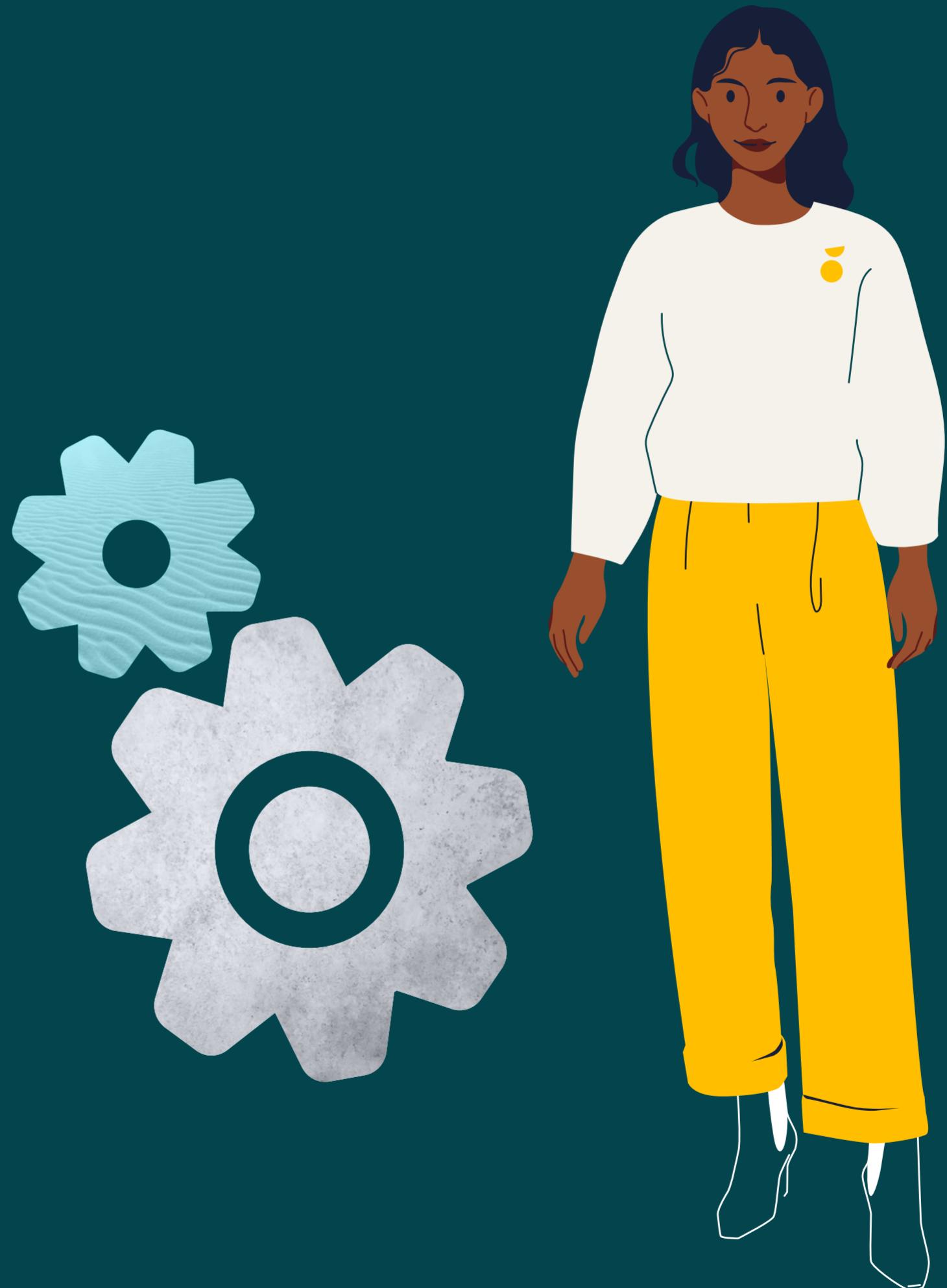
How to do it

[Harvard Business Review](#) recommends to:

- Disable notifications on desktop and smartphone
- Set your phone to Airplane mode for periods of time
- Block social media for set periods of the day
- Use Google Chrome’s ‘compose email’ plugin to circumvent your inbox
- Allocate time to batch-reply to emails
- Try timers to separate important and routine work
- Track your screen time

Section 2

How to automate your work



Productivity tip #12: Streamline your intake system

Where do your tasks tend to come from? A mix of emails, meetings, and IMs? It's estimated that office workers lose approximately [a third of their working time](#) to administrative tasks such as finding information or creating a paper trail. To free up teams for high-impact work, Wrike's [custom request forms](#) automatically create and assign detailed tasks to the right teams. These can be used as creative or marketing briefs, HR or IT requests, or anything your team needs to achieve quickly and efficiently.

Why it works

Case study: Siemens increases productivity by 10%

By implementing custom request forms as their intake process, Wrike helped [Siemens](#) to increase productivity by 10% by eliminating repetitive, time-consuming tasks such as project creation.



"Once a project is booked, it is automatically created in Wrike with the right project template and filled with data. Then in Wrike, we have an automatic assignment of the project manager, who is also set in SAP."

Christina Fischer, Global Product Manager

How to do it

Build your first custom request form with [our easy-to-follow walkthrough video here](#).

Productivity tip #13: Automate your admin tasks

Let's face it; no matter where you're working, a lot of companies tend to have similar types of tasks to complete. However, building documents, tasks, and folders for them can be a complete time vacuum. To target this, [Wrike's easy-to-use templates](#) supply you with everything you need for common tasks such as:

- [Agile teamwork](#)
- [Employee onboarding and offboarding](#)
- [Incoming requests and approvals](#)
- [OKRs](#)
- [Project scheduling](#)
- [Remote work](#)

Why it works

Case study: Fitbit saves 200+ hours a year

By using Wrike's templates to save precious time after initial project meetings, [Fitbit](#) quickly saved about 200 hours of project management time to set timelines.



"We work faster, update key dates more quickly, and eliminate human error. We've likely saved around 200+ hours per year. I could confidently say that having timeline templates and dynamic timelines have cut down on PM time by at least 50%."

Brynné Roberts, Director of Creative Operations

How to do it

We have a [dedicated template section](#) in our help center, or you can watch how to [create your own templates here](#).

Productivity tip #14: Streamline your intake system

Unfortunately, post-COVID, we are, on average, putting in an extra 2.5 hours of work a day, [according to Bloomberg](#). Uneven workloads can impact employee [health, productivity, and morale](#). To avoid this, [Wrike's workload view](#) enables managers to see real-time capacity in one click.



Why it works

Case study: House of Design saves 16,600+ hours in three years

Before they started using Wrike, [House of Design](#) had no visibility into current team workloads and as a result, struggled to plan capacity for future projects. Using Wrike's workload view to balance resources more efficiently, their teams save 16,600+ hours (two hours a week per employee):



"Being able to forecast when tasks will be complete helps us know when to accept more work. We can also identify where there might be a lull to strategically fit in smaller projects. Without Wrike, we would have to address projects chronologically rather than strategically."

Ryan Okelberry, COO

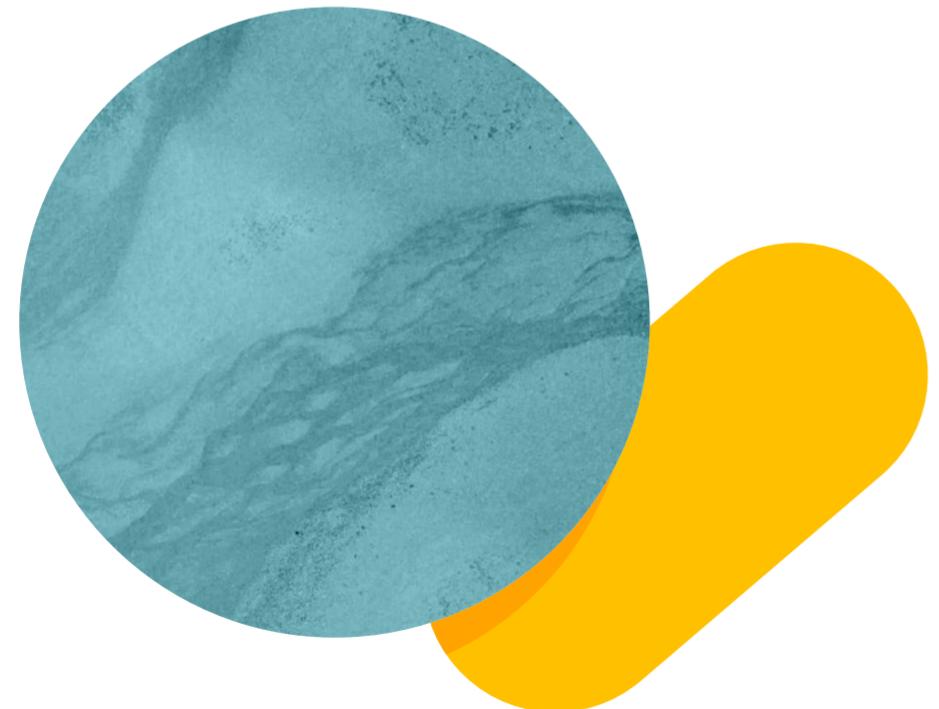
How to do it

Check out our help center [section on workloads here](#).

Productivity tip #15: Share updates automatically

Always being asked for updates? [According to CNBC](#), almost 60% of emails are sent to provide a status update.

But what if, instead of interrupting your work to read an email, write and send a reply, you could just enable the requester to check independently? Wrike's [custom workflows](#) help you to do exactly that. Create team- or project-specific workflows to share the exact status of tasks with teammates, clients, or management.



Why it works

Case study: Moneytree accelerates approvals by 75%

By implementing workflows, the team at Moneytree is now able to gain real-time visibility into the progress of their work, making approvals 75% faster:



"We're all working collaboratively together instead of alone waiting for emails. With our compliance team using Wrike, I can now see when projects are in the final step of the approval process. I have visibility on all projects and don't need to bother anyone else for updates."

Denise Ramsey, VP of Marketing & Training

How to do it

Learn how to create a custom workflow in one minute with [this video tutorial](#).

Productivity tip #16: Start tracking your time

Ever look up at your clock and wonder where the day went? Using [time tracking software](#) is another powerful trick to minimize multitasking. On a team level, it has the added benefit of spotting bottlenecks or delays. On an organizational level, it can make for more accurate invoicing.

Why it works

Case study: Regency Lighting spends 50% less time chasing updates

For [Regency Lighting](#), time is money, as most of their work is completed on a fixed rate basis. By using Wrike's built-in time tracking, they made their pricing more accurate and cut time chasing updates in half:



"One of the biggest gains was the time tracking. It's given us really good historical information on what we've done in the past and how to price properly. My team definitely knows that I don't want any projects going into the red. It keeps them very much in tune and on top of work."

Jeremy Ames, Director of Design

How to do it

Learn how to track your time in our [simple two-minute video tutorial here](#).

Learn more at [wrike.com](#)

Do you like this book? Share it!



Productivity tip #17: Connect your apps

You may not think inputting new requests or sending files takes long, but it's estimated we spend [636.6 hours a year](#) (a third of our working year) on administrative tasks. While we are often dependent on particular apps, these can be set up to sync with each other and eliminate unnecessary dependency. A notification in one app (such as an inquiry or a sale) automatically creates and assigns tasks in Wrike or vice versa.



Why it works

Case study: UNSW Sydney increases communication by 250%

By syncing their apps with [Wrike Integrate](#), [UNSW Sydney](#) were able to automatically notify stakeholders of the status of their requests and increased their reporting capabilities by 90%.



"I am so glad that we have Wrike as opposed to having information in hundreds of spreadsheets going around thousands of emails or worse, just in people's heads. It enables a lot of simplified interactions between our departments and clients, which is a game-changer."

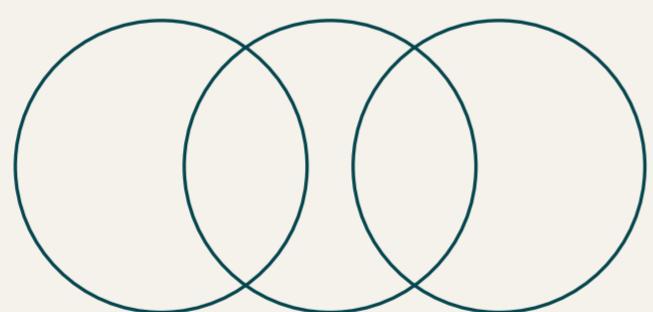
Dave Rorke, Project Officer

How to do it

Read our detailed, easy-to-follow section on integrating apps at [Wrike's Help Center here](#).

Productivity tip #18: Reduce your notifications

Not only do notifications cost you 25 minutes of focus, but a [Florida State University](#) study also found that any audible interruption can be as distracting as a phone call. With this in mind, it is essential that you only see the information you need to see. Wrike's Dashboards enable you to narrow your focus to essential work, without risking an information overload.



Why it works

Case study: IURO saves two hours every day

Using personalized Dashboards, [IURO](#)'s teams successfully saved two hours a day. With 360° visibility across projects, teams were able to source updates independently, preventing unnecessary emails, messages, and notifications:



"I can zip over to see what my team is doing and get updates. It's raised everybody to a new level of interaction and control. When something changes and priorities shift, not just one person knows. Everybody knows. You don't have to call 18 million different people."

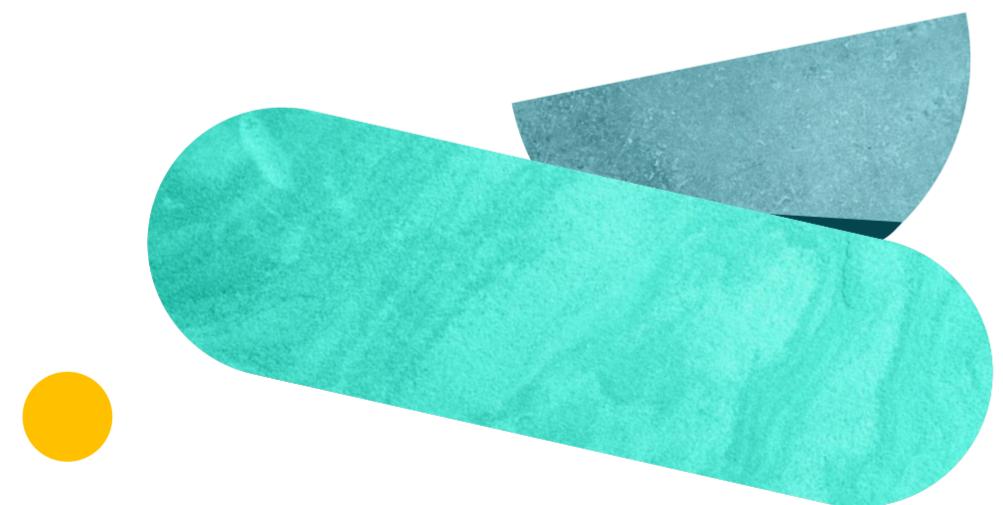
Charlie Hawthorne Flaherty, Founder

How to do it

Read everything you need to know about Dashboards [in our Help Center](#).

Productivity tip #19: Learn from other departments

Taking on a new type of project? It's likely that someone in your organization has worked on something similar that could help as a guide. In fact, interactions between departments [are known to improve productivity and problem-solving](#). Wrike's organization-wide Dashboards enable you to not only see what the rest of your team is working on, but to access processes and files, and ask questions about projects across your department and organization.



Why it works

Case study: Chosen Foods saves four hours of meetings a week

By using Dashboards to disseminate information across teams, [Chosen Foods](#) were able to swap endless meetings for additional training:



"I was instantly able to remove four hours of meetings a week through the use of shared Dashboards. I refocused this saved time on providing education opportunities for the team, which improved our process for project initiatives, supported team growth, and had more time to focus on producing the best output in our team's work."

Jessica Wooding, Kaizen Manager

How to do it

Read everything you need to know about Dashboards [here](#).

Productivity tip #20: Automate your approvals

What does your approval process currently look like? Do you attach relevant information to an email and wait a few days (and follow up) until the person responsible signs off? Wrike's [approvals](#) enable teams to automate that process, meaning you can build a workflow in which reviewers and approvers are automatically tagged with in-context information and can quickly accept, reject, or share change requests. No emails or nudges needed.

Why it works

Case study: Marketing Architects completes projects 25% faster

By creating an automated sign-off process for clients with Wrike's [approval features](#), [Marketing Architects](#) accelerated their projects by 25%:



"All assets go out through Wrike because we want that feedback and those client comments pulled back into the system. We have found that client adoption has been fantastic. It used to take days to get a client approval. Now we can send something out and, within an afternoon, we'll get a turnaround approval."

Eric Pilhofer, Senior Vice President of Creative

How to do it

Read everything you need to [set up your own approval process here](#).

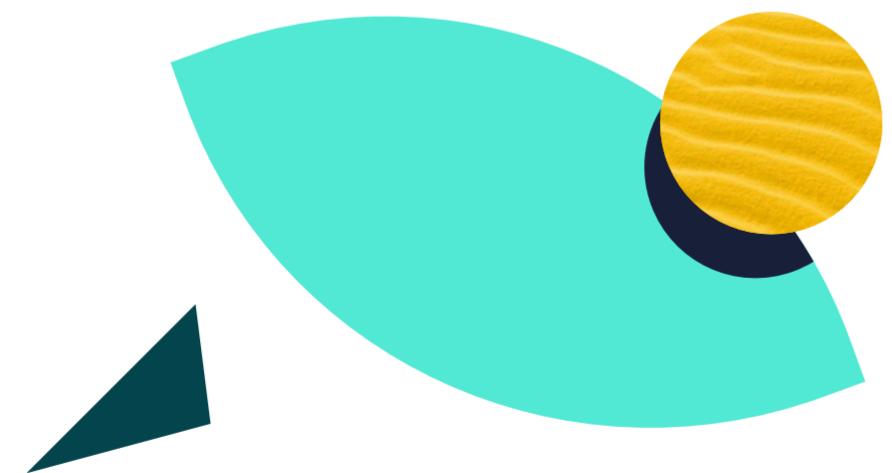
Learn more at [wrike.com](#)

Do you like this book? Share it!



Productivity tip #21: Streamline your proofing process

If you have ever worked on a creative team, you've likely experienced endless feedback cycles, multiple versions of files, and many other inefficient ways of working. Wrike's [online proofing software](#) integrates directly with your usual creative tools so reviewers can share in-context, visual feedback that can be implemented in seconds. All decisions, changes, and file versions stay on-record and organized.



Why it works

Case study: OSF Healthcare makes proofing 50% faster

By streamlining their proofing with Wrike (and our smart integration with Adobe Creative Cloud), the team at [OSF Healthcare](#) were able to accelerate their process by 50%:



"It's so nice. From InDesign, I just go into the Wrike extension, see what changes need to be made, and upload a new proof until we land on a final version. I no longer have to adjust my settings, export, start an email, attach assets, and send. I just click the add button in Wrike directly and it's out there."

Heidi Wessler, OSF Graphic Design Coordinator

How to do it

Read more about how to use [Wrike's proofing here](#).

Productivity tip #22: Keep files accessible at all times

Missing details can be one of the all-time biggest killers to productivity. How can you begin work if you don't have the relevant files? What if everything could be auto-organized according to team, quarter, or project? Wrike's Spaces enable teams to build hierarchical folders of all of their important files and documentation and customize exactly who has access to each.



Why it works

Case study: Arvig manage 250% more projects

By implementing Wrike, [Arvig](#) were able to decrease their time spent finding information and take on 250% more projects as a result:



"Having a single source of truth makes it easy for leadership to stay in the loop or get a new team member up to speed. Just last week during our senior leadership team meeting, there was a question about a project. I was able to go into Wrike and find that data in a minute. Something that I could not have done prior."

Shaun Carlson, Director of R&D and Continuous Innovation

How to do it

Read [everything you need to know about Spaces](#) here.

Learn more at [wrike.com](#)

Do you like this book? Share it!



Productivity tip #23: Create reports automatically

According to [Hubspot](#), some teams can spend around 3.5 hours of their week collecting and analyzing data.

Fortunately, we now have the technology to automate that work. Wrike's [reporting software](#) gathers and analyzes data on everything from team productivity to project progress, and you can receive the reports straight to your inbox automatically each week.



Why it works

Case study: F5 Networks increases on-time project delivery by 33%

By deciding to have Wrike do the heavy lifting on their reporting, [F5 Networks](#) managed to increase on-time project delivery by 33%:



"I can't live without reporting. I can pull a report and, within minutes, pivot it any way I want without exporting it to Excel. At the end of the event, we can pull a report to see how it performed. This has been a very positive thing for us; we were able to get things done faster than we would normally have in any other year."

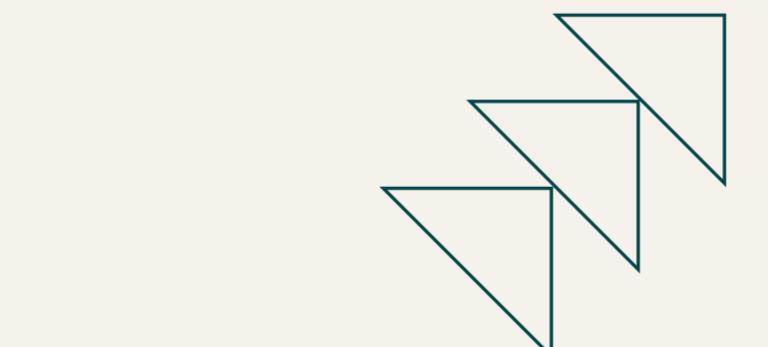
Patricia Davis, Manager of the PMO

How to do it

Learn how to use Wrike's reporting with our [quick video tutorial](#).

Productivity tip #24: Visualize your priorities

Sometimes, it can be difficult to stay productive when everything seems to be a number one priority or when two major deadlines clash. The good news is that [Gantt charts](#), one of Wrike's most-used features, can help you visualize your workload (and your team's workloads) in just one click.



Why it works

Case study: Sony Pictures Television reduces email by 90%

By being able to quickly pick out priorities without having to clarify information, [Sony Pictures Television](#) managed to reduce emails by 90% and accelerate projects by 40%:



"The different views are super helpful. We use the Gantt chart to understand all of our overlapping projects and timelines. It's really valuable to understand the full scope of work happening against a calendar view."

Nicki Batelli, Vice President of Operations & Production, Creative Center

How to do it

Find out how to use Wrike's Gantt charts in [this simple video](#).

Learn more at [wrike.com](#)

Do you like this book? Share it!



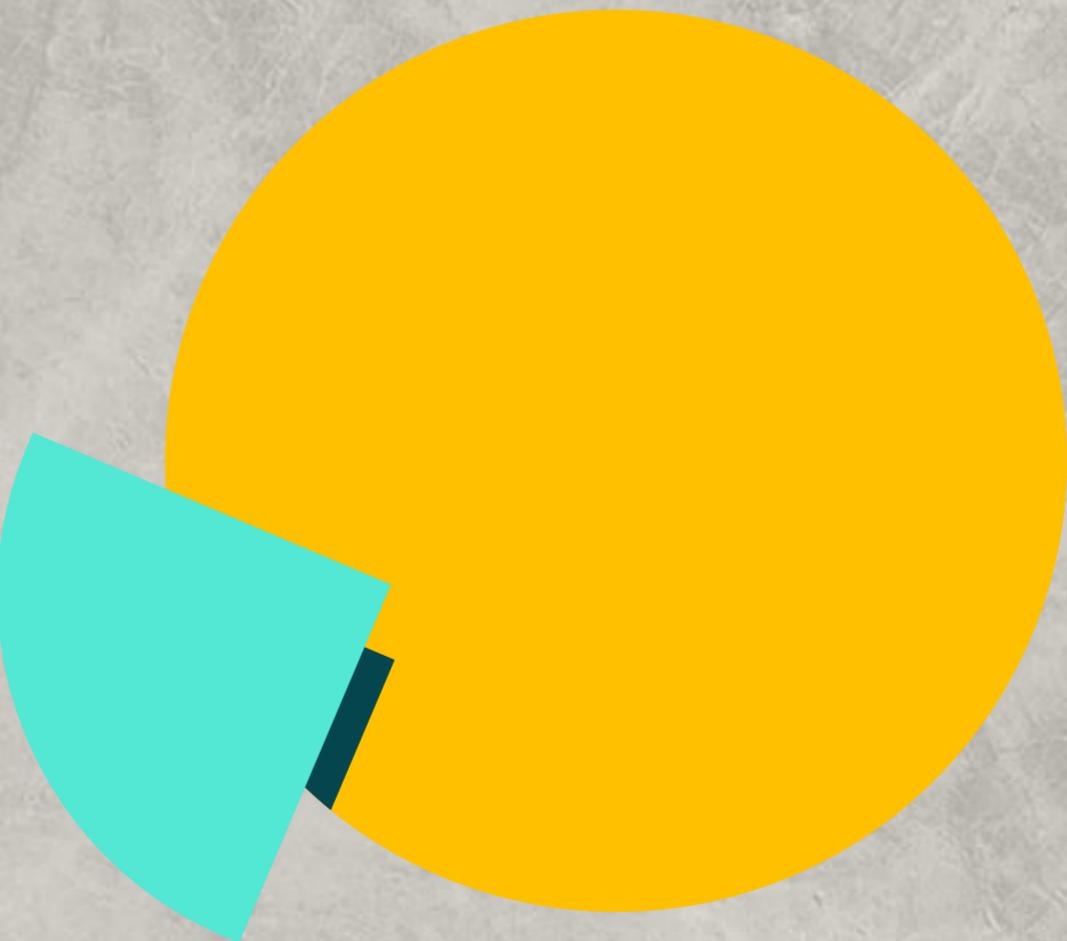
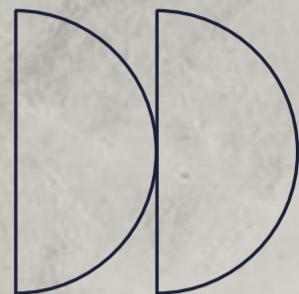
Section 3

How Wrike powers productivity



Productivity tip #25: See if Wrike can help, free

Now that you've learned how these simple productivity hacks can help, why not get these features in one award-winning work management platform? Wrike has helped 2.3 million customers in 140 different countries and dozens of industries to become more productive and drive better results at their organization.





Boost your productivity today – start your free trial.

[Start my Wrike trial](#)