

encounter in this planner: those dedicated to weekly planning. Every week's worth of daily pages is accompanied by a two-page spread for weekly planning. Unlike their daily counterparts, however, the weekly planning pages contain few preformatted elements. You're instead presented with two empty pages on which to craft your plan for the week ahead in whatever format you prefer.

As I wrote in a 2014 essay on the topic, “I’ve found it’s crucial to embrace flexibility. The style or format of your plan should match the challenges of the specific week ahead.” As these challenges shift, so will the format of your plan. In my own weekly planning habit, for example, I find that for some weeks I want to sketch out a plan for every day individually, as shown in this abbreviated case study:

Monday

- Start with a focused task block to get out ahead of the small things on my lists for the week. Be sure to finish merit report.
- Prepare a lecture for my class, then research work.
- End the workday with a 1-to-2-hour writing block.

Tuesday

- Head into the office early to work on upcoming paper submission.
- Teaching/office hours/meetings dominate the midday.
- End day with 1.5 hours in the science library, where the first hour is writing and the last 30 minutes are focused on small tasks.

This weekly planning format provides detailed guidance for the time-block schedule I’ll build each day of the week. During other weeks, however, I might

decide that something higher level is more appropriate. For example, when facing weeks already filled with meetings and appointments, I sometimes instead use my weekly plan to provide a few heuristics about how to make use of whatever free time remains each day. For example:

Research

The goal this week is to try to find enough time to fix the correctness proof for the new gossip algorithm. Brainstorm during commutes. Try to carve out one additional hour every day to give the proof concentrated thought.

Small Tasks

I have a lot of small things lurking on my lists. Do 30 minutes each morning on my task lists first thing before heading into campus. End each day with 30 minutes as well. Include email checking into these blocks. Sixty total minutes should be enough to keep my head above water until this busy week ends.

Meeting Strategy

Add 15–30 minutes onto the end of each scheduled meeting this week to try to process and make sense of any new obligations it places on my plate. Otherwise, these obligations will pile up and cause stress.

This weekly planning format doesn't detail exactly what will happen each day but instead gives me a couple of pointers about how to fight to make use of the scraps of free time that remain. These case studies show only two possible

formats out of many ways for crafting these weekly plans. The key is to embrace whatever format seems most useful for the particular week you're planning.

Regardless of the format you use, you should craft your weekly plan either over the weekend before the week begins or first thing Monday morning. When crafting the plan, look over your calendar and whatever system you use to track your obligations, projects, and goals. Some people like to empty their email inbox as part of this planning process so that they feel as if they're starting the week fresh. For other people, this goal might be infeasible. Regardless, crafting these plans takes time. I usually spend, for example, between thirty and sixty minutes to get completely up to speed on what's going on for the upcoming week and to decide how to tackle it.

You might feel at first that this time is wasted—like you're throwing away an hour you could dedicate to actually completing concrete tasks. I urge you to resist this reaction. The planning may take time up front, but it will return much greater productivity for the entire week that follows. Among other benefits, it will identify important patterns that can help you plan to get much more accomplished. If you see, for example, that Wednesday through Friday are very busy due to a visiting client, then you can compensate by squeezing in more uninterrupted deep work on Monday or Tuesday. Or if you know you'll be off-site all day Friday, then you can adjust your Thursday schedule to make sure loose ends are tied up before the trip.

Sometimes your weekly planning habit can motivate you to change the appointments already on your calendar. After trying and failing to fit in enough hours to finish an important project, for example, you might realize that you need to cancel or reschedule a few non-urgent appointments—coffee with a colleague, or perhaps a brainstorming meeting for a speculative project—to make room for the more urgent work.

Weekly plans are also important because they allow you to tackle objectives that require more than a day to complete. If you decide at the beginning of the week, for example, to write an article that'll require around ten to fifteen hours of research and writing, your weekly plan can help you figure out how to spread this work out across the upcoming days. It's much less likely that you'd end up getting all of this required work done if you instead just planned each day as it arrived.

It's this combination of high-level weekly plans with detailed daily time-block schedules that unlocks the full potential of this productivity system. The weekly/daily approach is what allows you to move around obligations like pieces on a chessboard and construct configurations of your schedule that enable you to accomplish head-turning amounts of work, all while staying on top of the various small requests and tasks pulling at your time and attention. While your peers react frantically to inputs and deadlines as they arise, often putting in late nights to try to compensate for their haphazard schedules, you'll approach each day with a justified confidence.

Build smart weekly plans. Use these plans to develop effective daily time-block schedules. Execute those daily schedules with intensity, and then when done for the day, shut down completely. This is the rhythm of an extremely productive and satisfying professional life. And it's exactly what this planner is designed to help you achieve.