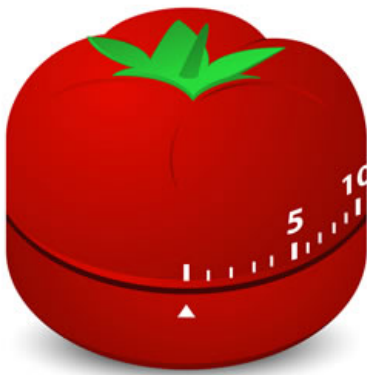


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Pomodoro Productivity: A Simple Time-Management Technique to Eliminate Procrastination

by Keith Bryant

Are you looking for a more relaxed, simplistic approach to time management? The Pomodoro technique may be just what you're looking for, especially if you're a creative type.

An Introduction

Work for twenty-five minutes, take a break for five, repeat: this is the premise of the [Pomodoro technique](#), a simple time management technique that skips minutely planned and prioritized task lists in favor of a simple, frugal approach to productivity.

The Pomodoro technique was invented in the late 1980s by Francesco Cirillo, an entrepreneur, mentor and instructor. Since then, it has spread its wings throughout the world, driven largely by favorable word-of-mouth reviews and wide-scale adoption among software programmers (who use a similar concept in software design, called *timeboxing*). It has since spread to many other professions.

The Conceptual Foundation

The Pomodoro technique works on a simple premise: all the possible tasks for a day are written down in a to-do list. Subsequently, each task is worked on in 25 minute intervals until completion. After 25 minutes of continuous working, you are allowed a five minute break. After four such 30-minute sessions, you take a longer break, usually 15 to 30 minutes.

The act of initiating a count-down timer and working within a small time frame enforces single-tasking and reduces procrastinating tendencies. Since each interval is a mere 25 minutes long with a 5 minute break in-between intervals, the technique also improves concentration levels and

helps to manage stress.

Cirillo originally used a kitchen timer shaped like a tomato (*pomodoro* is Italian for *tomato*) to time the intervals, hence the name for the technique. Cirillo recommends using a similar kitchen timer, since the physical action of winding the timer and its subsequent ticking sounds not only create a sense of urgency, but, over time, become associated with urgent, furtive, focused and productive action itself.

In the Field: Using the Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro technique is decidedly low-tech in nature; to put it to use, you'll need nothing but a sheet of paper, a countdown timer, and a pen or pencil.

The technique protocol begins with the user writing down a list of the day's tasks onto a 'to-do list' at the start of the day. The user then picks one task from the list and starts the timer. As part of the technique, the user must work on the task at hand interval after interval (each interval is called a *pomodoro*) until the task is completed; it is then checked off the list.

Larger tasks that take longer than 5-7 pomodoros must be broken down into sub-tasks. Smaller tasks that take less than one pomodoro are combined and condensed into one task.

While this is enough to start off with the Pomodoro technique, advanced users prefer to record a list of all possible tasks onto a longer 'activity sheet.' Each morning, a bunch of these tasks are pulled from this activity sheet and placed on the to-do list for the day, along with any other more pressing tasks.

Reviewing and recording efforts are a crucial aspect of success with the Pomodoro technique. At the end of each day, you record each completed task and the number of pomodoros required to complete it. The actual time spent completing a task becomes irrelevant; only the number of pomodoros worked in a day remains important. Each pomodoro becomes a unit of time itself – but it's a unit of productive, focused time, not just time in general. This marks a crucial shift in the perception of time as a temporal force; since traditional time ceases to exist, it also ceases to be a source of anxiety and stress, thus enhancing productivity.

Interruptions and Interpretations



Dealing with interruptions is an integral part of the Pomodoro technique. According to the technique, interruptions can be broken down into two broad categories: external and internal interruptions.

External interruptions often occur in a work environment where an unplanned meeting or request from a colleague shifts the focus from the task at hand. According to Cirillo, each such interruption must be marked with a dash (–) on the to-do list and recorded under a new heading – *Unplanned*. Recording interruptions allows the user to review where time was actually spent and improve productivity henceforth.

Internal interruptions – getting up to grab coffee or a cola, for instance – are far more common and harder to control, yet they are the most

detrimental to productivity. Cirillo recommends that each internal interruption be marked with an apostrophe (') in the to-do list and recorded under a new heading – *Unplanned & Urgent*. The mere act of recording the interruption under such a heading often betrays its trivial nature, thus discouraging its recurrence.

Ideally, trivial interruptions – calling a friend, reading a Facebook message, grabbing a coffee, etc. – must be put off until the breaks.

Cirillo recommends reviewing all of your recorded tasks weekly to locate bottlenecks in your workflow and productivity and to identify possible ways to overcome them. Reflection and interpretation of the technique's results plays an important role in improving time-management skills over the long term.

Tools & Resources

While using a physical timer is recommended for the Pomodoro technique, you can also download a host of software programs to simulate the pomodoro timer on the computer. Chief among these is [Tomighty](#), one of the more popular free tools that sits in the computer's system tray and mimics the pomodoro timer. [FocusBooster](#) is another popular productivity app based on this technique.

A good starting point to learn more about the Pomodoro technique is the creator's own [free eBook on the subject](#). A shorter summary can be found in [this cheat-sheet](#).

Have you successfully used the Pomodoro technique? Do you have any helpful tips or variations for getting the most out of it? Please share in the comments below!

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