Task management techniques

4 ways to better manage your tasks and time

John Pilbeam, Web/Digital Officer, Sainsbury Library, December 12, 2024

Overview

- Introduction

- Methods to Master Your Time

  - 1: Getting Things Done

  - 2: Kanban Board

  - 3: Time Blocking

  - 4: Pomodoro Technique

- Conclusions

Introduction

- Disclaimer

- 4 separate techniques

- All 4 can be used to form a workflow

Image: Productivity books and resources. John Pilbeam.

Methods to Master Your Time

https://go.glam.ox.ac.uk/master-your-time
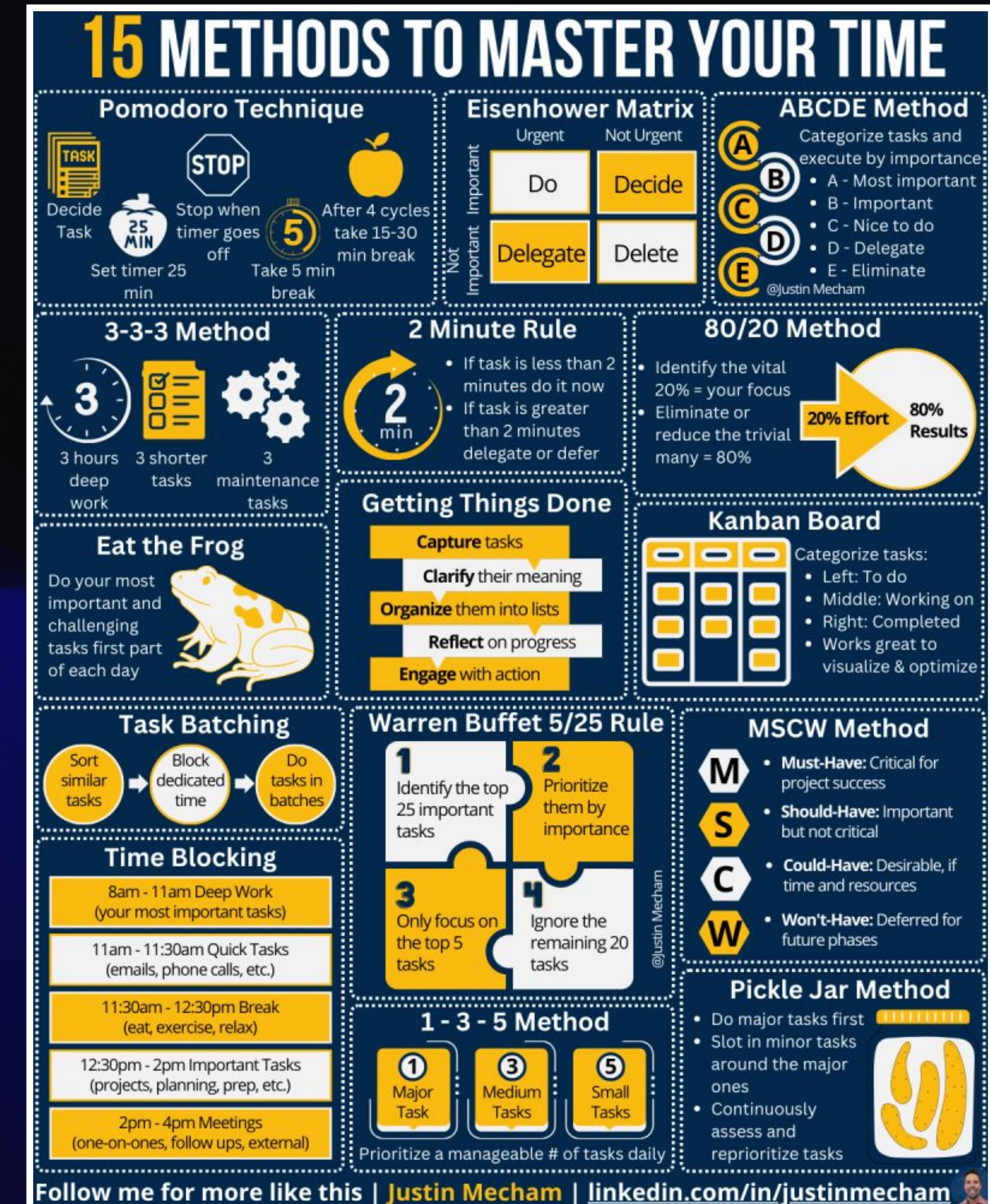
Image: Justin Mecham - https://www.linkedin.com/in/justinmecham/

Methods to Master Your Time

https://go.glam.ox.ac.uk/master-your-time
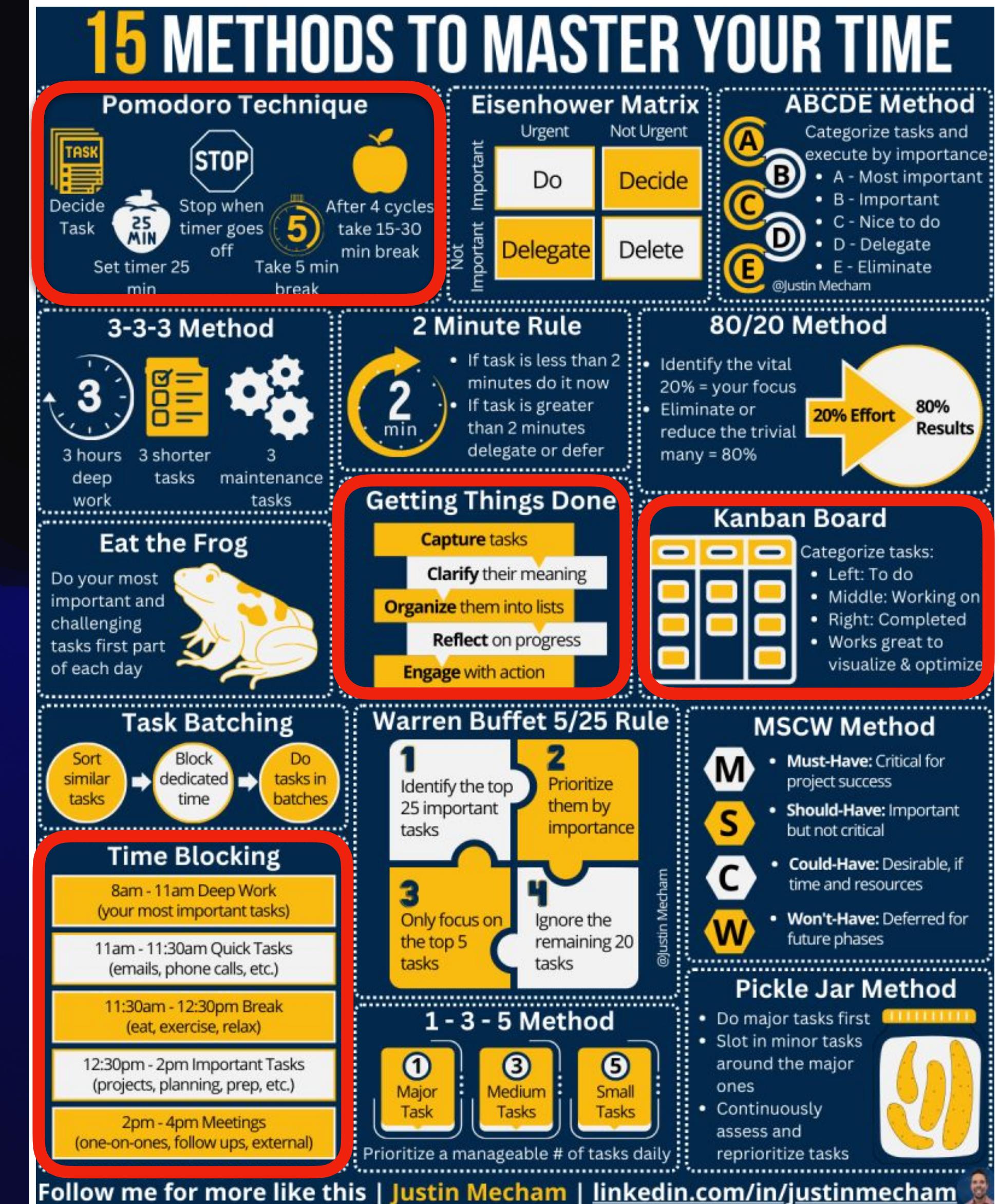
Image: Justin Mecham - https://www.linkedin.com/in/justinmecham/

1
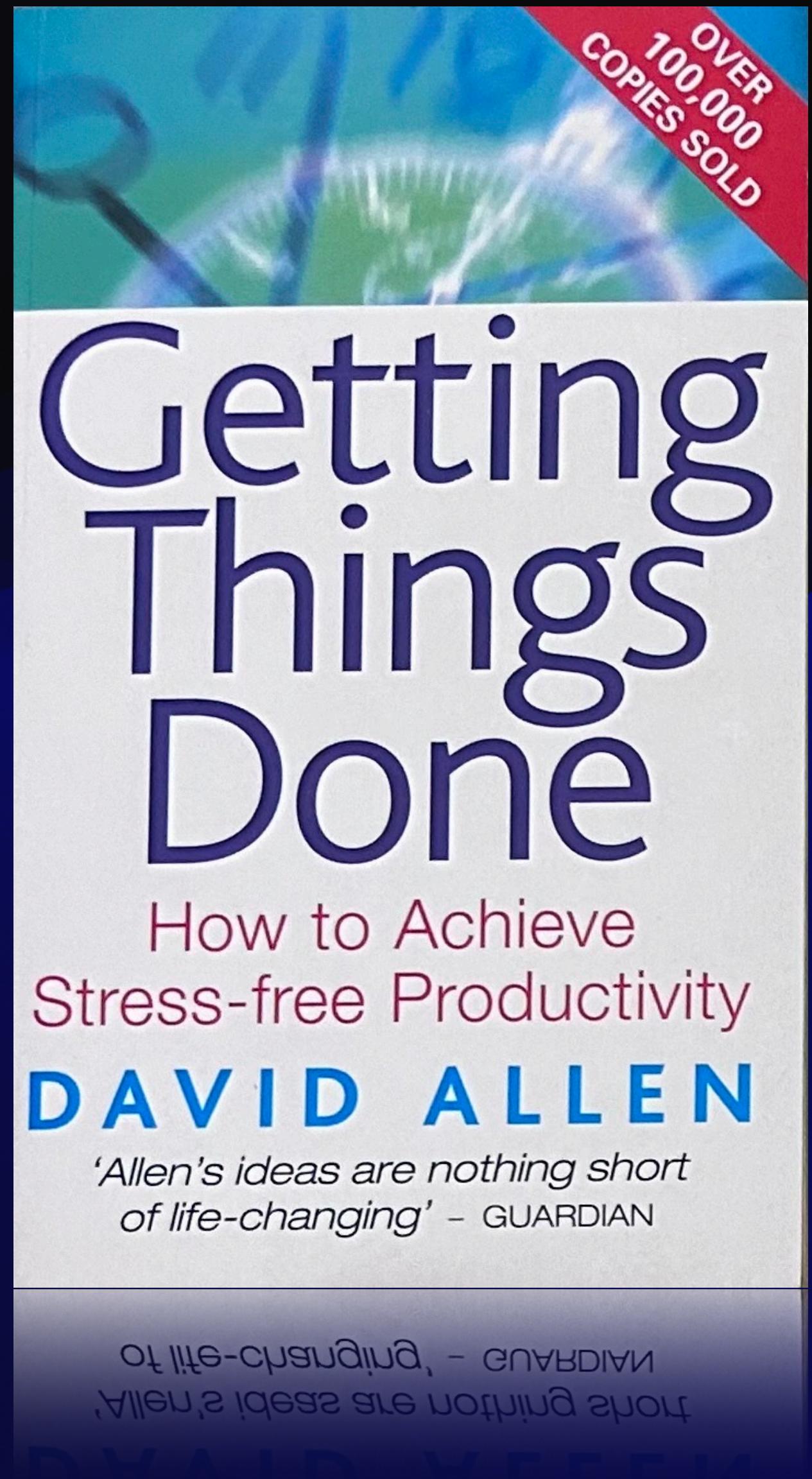
Getting Things Done (GTD)

1: Getting Things Done (GTD)

Overview

- A self-contained personal productivity system created by David Allen in 2001.

- Manage tasks.

- Reduce stress.

- Organise tasks clearly into actions.

1: Getting Things Done (GTD)

The 5 Steps

1. **Capture:** Write down everything on your mind (tasks, ideas, reminders) in one place.

2. **Clarify:** Decide what each item means and what action is needed, if any.

3. **Organise:** Sort tasks into categories, like "To Do Today," "Waiting For," or "Someday."

4. **Reflect:** Regularly review your list to keep it updated and prioritise tasks.

5. **Engage:** Focus on doing tasks, one at a time, based on what's most important or urgent.

Image created with www.recraft.ai

1: Getting Things Done (GTD)

Implementing

- Apps:

  - Nexus 365 (e.g. OneNote, Outlook and Planner)

  - Trello (trello.com)

  - Any Text Editor or todo list app

- Analogue:

  - Notepad and pen

- Resources:

  - Getting Things Done: Book, Audiobook and website (gettingthingsdone.com/)

Image: Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain CC0 License.

2

Kanban Board

2: Kanban Board
Overview

- Kanban 看板 ("signboard" or "card")

- Developed by Toyota, Japan, 1940s

- A scheduling system for lean or just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing

- Improve efficiency:

  - Visualise workflows

  - Control inventory

Image: Toyota Production System (TPS). Source: toyota-global.com

2: Kanban Board
History

- Kanban 看板 ("signboard" or "card")

- Developed by Toyota, Japan, 1940s

- Lean or just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing

- Improve efficiency:

  - Visualise workflows

  - Control inventory

Image: Example of a Toyota Kanban Card for delivery of axle hub and bearings from JTEKT to the Takaoka plant of Toyota.
Photo taken with permission by Toyota. https://www.allaboutlean.com/

2: Kanban Board
History

- Kanban 看板 ("signboard" or "card")

- Developed by Toyota, Japan, 1940s

- Lean or just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing

- Improve efficiency:

  - Visualise workflows

  - Control inventory

Image: Example of a Toyota Kanban Card for delivery of axle hub and bearings from JTEKT to the Takaoka plant of Toyota.
Photo taken with permission by Toyota. https://www.allaboutlean.com/

2: Kanban Board
Concept

- Like a to-do list on a noticeboard.

- Board divided into columns e.g.

  - To Do

  - Doing

  - Done

- Each task is written on a card

- Cards move through columns as work progresses.
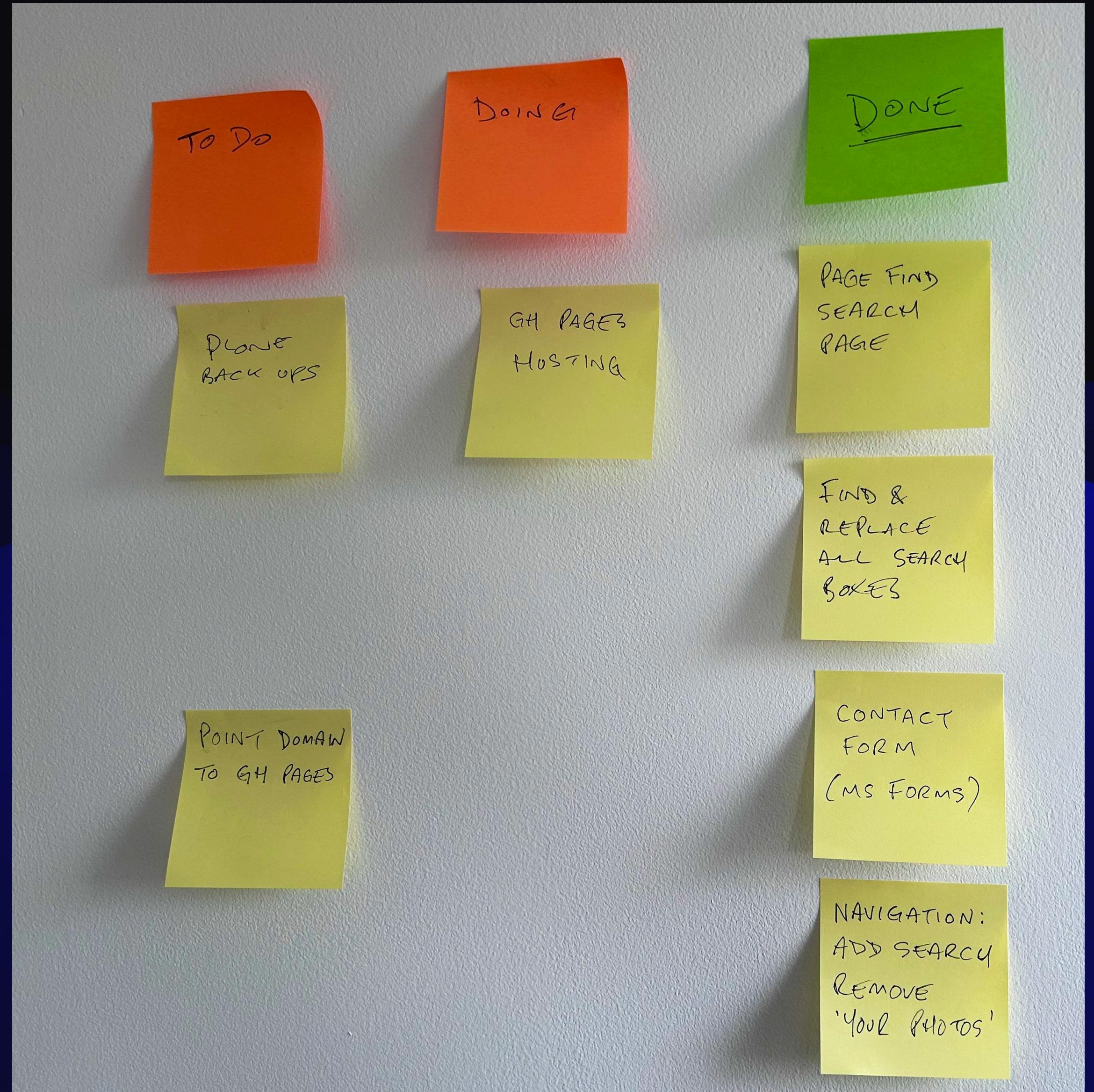
Image: Kaban board for managing a web development project. John Pilbeam.

2: Kanban Board
Concept

- Focus on one task at a time (to avoid being overwhelmed).

- See everything at a glance (to stay organized).

- Keep improving how you work (to be more efficient).

- Like organising books on shelves in the library – everything has a place.
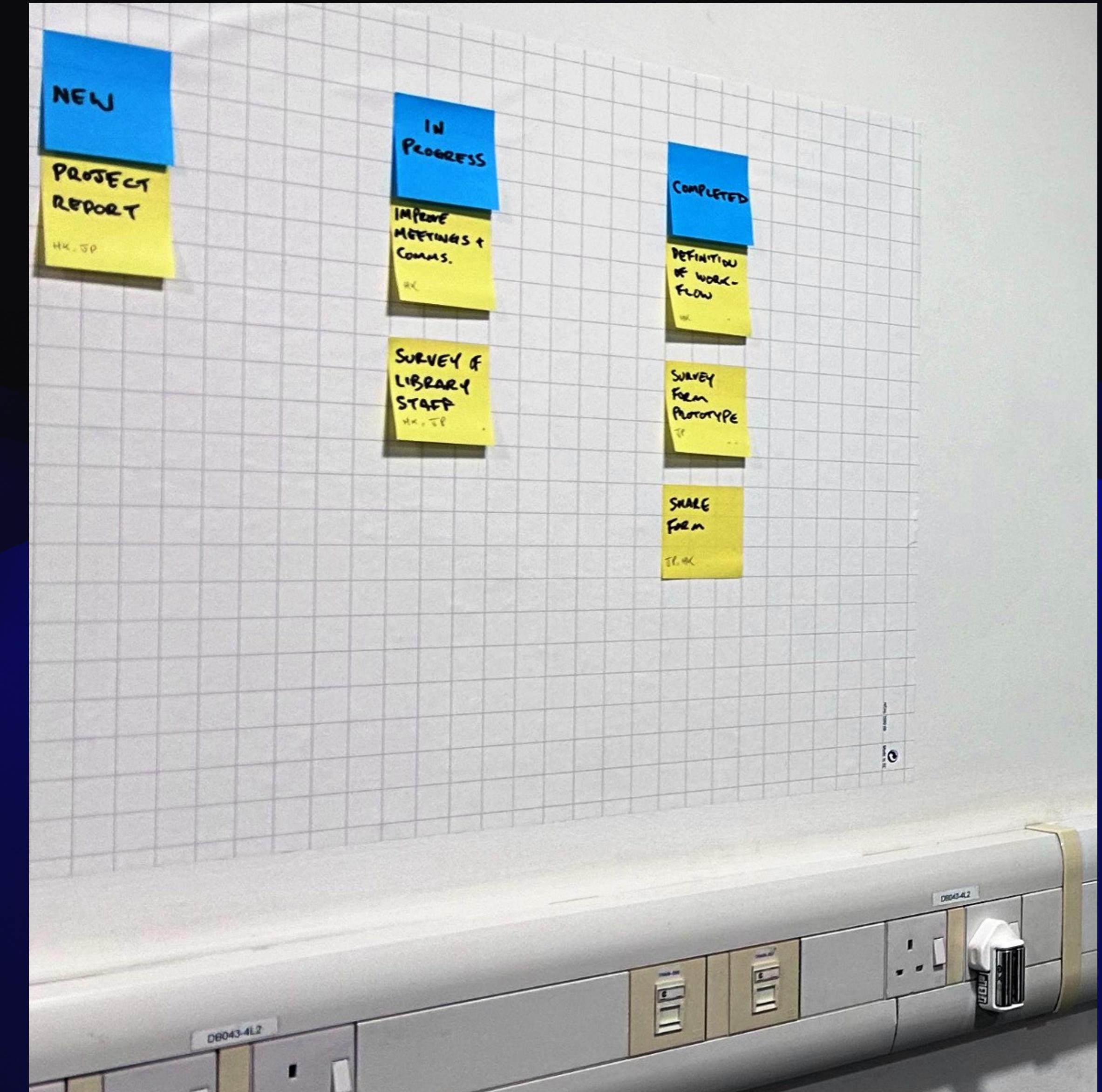
Image: Kaban board in library office. John Pilbeam.

2: Kanban Board
Implementing

- Apps:

  - Planner (planner.cloud.microsoft/ - via Nexus365/Oxford SSO)

  - Trello (trello.com)

- Analogue:

  - Flat surface + PostIt notes

- Resources:

  - Personal Kanban (go.glam.ox.ac.uk/kanban-101)

2: Kanban Board
Implementing

- Apps:

  - Planner (planner.cloud.microsoft/ - via Nexus365/Oxford SSO)

  - Trello (trello.com)

- Analogue:

  - Flat surface + PostIt notes

- Resources:

  - Personal Kanban (go.glam.ox.ac.uk/kanban-101)

2: Kanban Board
Implementing

- Apps:
  - Planner (planner.cloud.microsoft/ - via Nexus365/Oxford SSO)
  - Trello (trello.com)
- Analogue:
  - Flat surface + PostIt notes
- Resources:
  - Personal Kanban (go.glam.ox.ac.uk/ kanban-101)

3

Time Blocking

3: Time Blocking
Overview

- Old concept, nearly as old as calendars.

- 18th-century, Benjamin Franklin popularised.

- 2000s onwards became popular with technologists and writers such as Cal Newport.

- A method of managing the day by scheduling specific blocks of time for different tasks.

- Decide when you'll do each task and set aside time for it in your calendar.

- Replaces reactive working from your inbox or to do list.

Image: Time block planners.

3: Time Blocking
How It Works

1. List Your Tasks: Write down everything you need to do.

2. Block Your Time: Divide your day into blocks and assign tasks to each block (e.g., 9–10 AM for emails, 10–11 AM for research).

3. Stick to Your Plan: Focus only on the task for each block, without multitasking.

It's like reserving a study room in the library—you know when and where you'll work on something, which helps you stay focused and manage your time better.
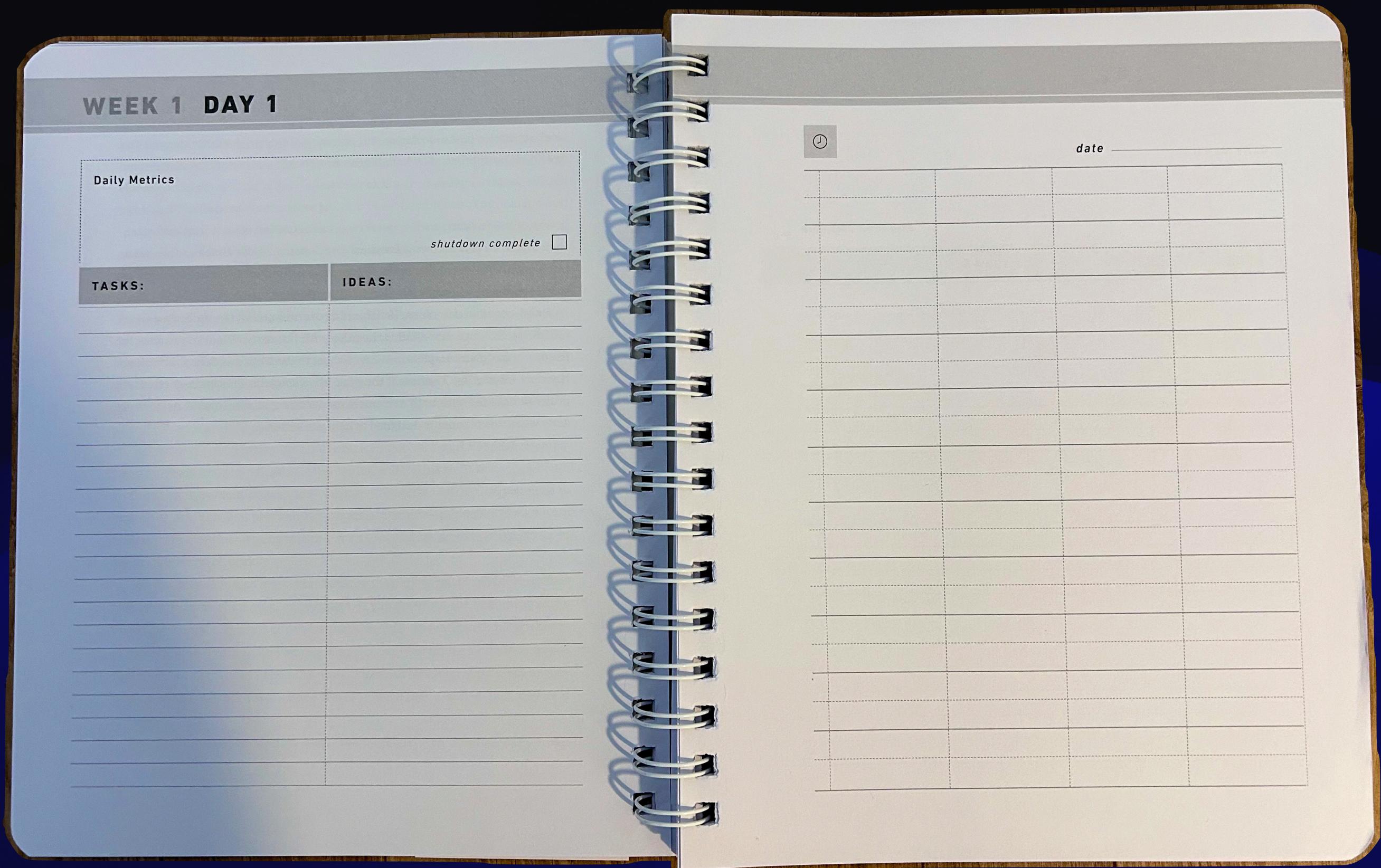
Image: Time block planner example pages.

3: Time Blocking
How It Works

1. List Your Tasks: Write down everything you need to do.

2. Block Your Time: Divide your day into blocks and assign tasks to each block (e.g., 9–10 AM for emails, 10–11 AM for research).

3. Stick to Your Plan: Focus only on the task for each block, without multitasking.

It's like reserving a study room in the library —you know when and where you'll work on something, which helps you stay focused and manage your time better.
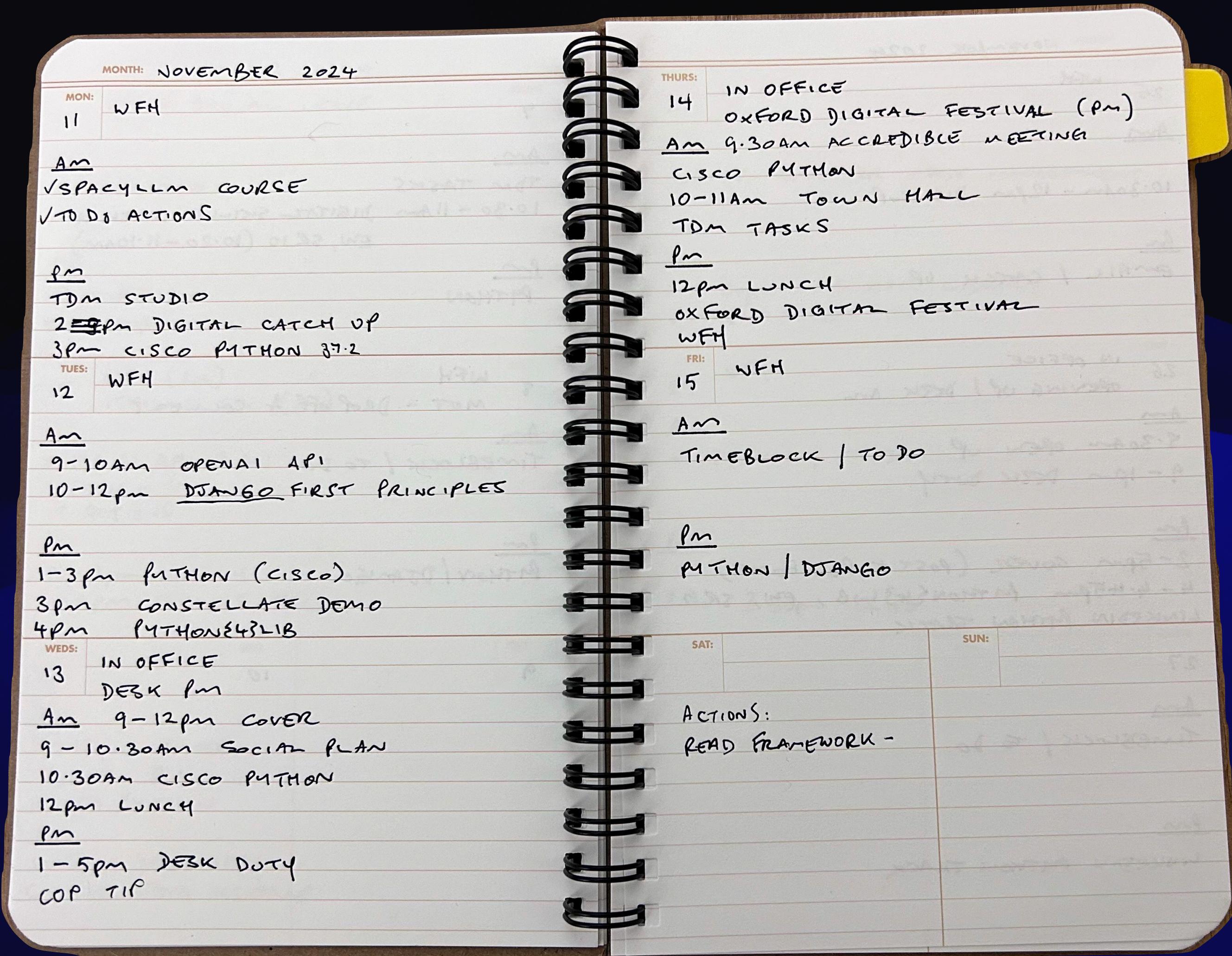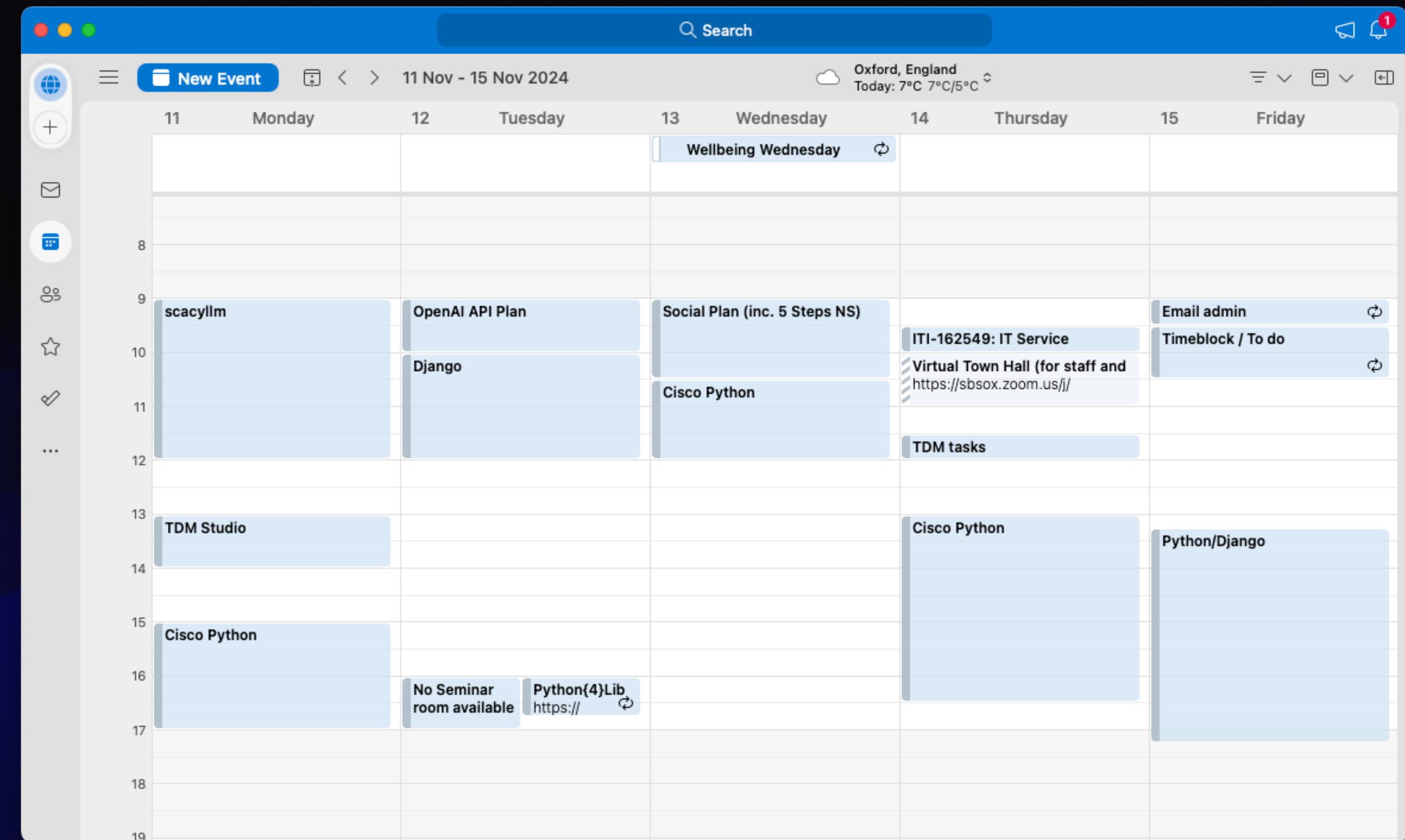
Image: Week planner. John Pilbeam

3: Time Blocking
How It Works

1. List Your Tasks: Write down everything you need to do.

2. Block Your Time: Divide your day into blocks and assign tasks to each block (e.g., 9–10 AM for emails, 10–11 AM for research).

3. Stick to Your Plan: Focus only on the task for each block, without multitasking.

It's like reserving a study room in the library—you know when and where you'll work on something, which helps you stay focused and manage your time better.

Q Search

New Event   11 Nov - 15 Nov 2024   Oxford, England
Today: 7°C 7°C/5°C

11 Monday	12 Tuesday	13 Wednesday	14 Thursday	15 Friday
		Wellbeing Wednesday		
scacyllm	OpenAI API Plan	Social Plan (inc. 5 Steps NS)	ITI-162549: IT Service	Email admin
	Django		Virtual Town Hall (for staff and https://sbsox.zoom.us/j/	Timeblock / To do
		Cisco Python	TDM tasks	
TDM Studio			Cisco Python	Python/Django
Cisco Python	No Seminar room available Python{4}Lib https://			
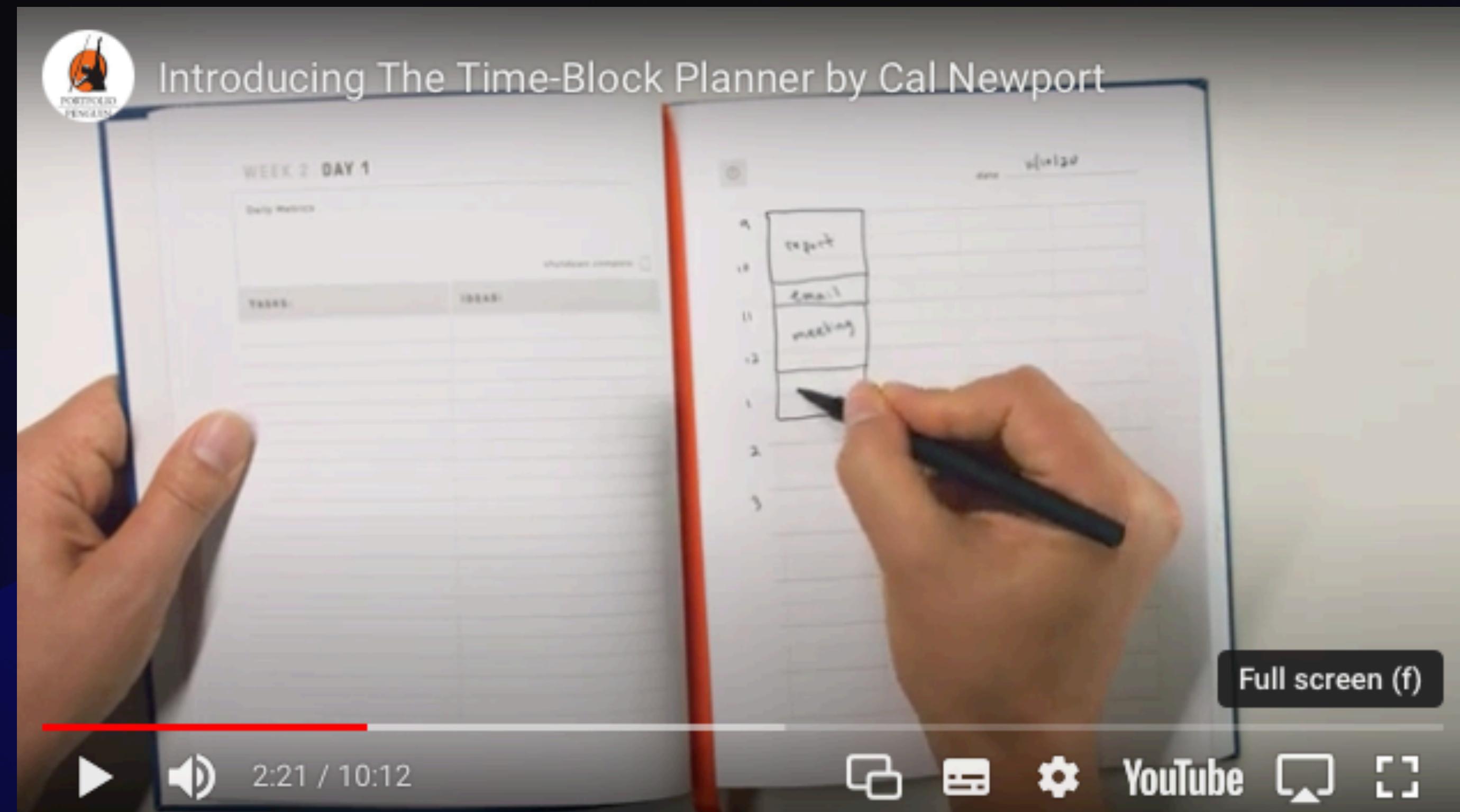
3: Time Blocking
Implementing

- Apps:

  - Outlook (or other calander app)

- Analogue:

  - Timeblock Planner

  - Regular notepad/diary

- Resources:

  - Time-Block Planner
   (www.timeblockplanner.com/)

4

Pomodoro Technique

4: Pomodoro Technique
Overview

- Time management method.

- Developed in 1987 by Francesco Cirillo.

- Named after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer he used.

- Breaks work into:

  - Focused intervals (usually 25 mins - "Pomodoros").

  - Short breaks (usually 5 mins).
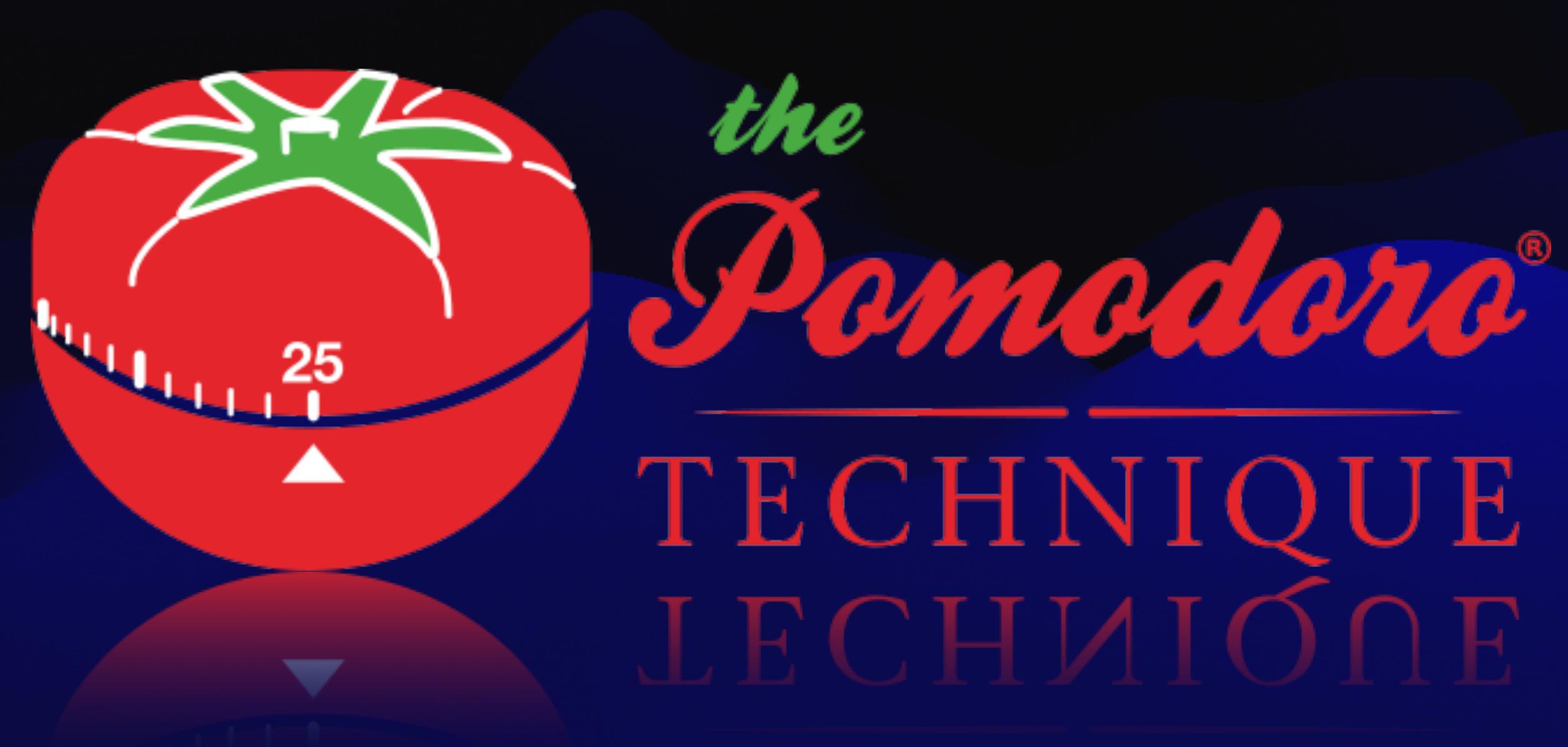
4: Pomodoro Technique

How It Works

1. Choose a Task: Decide what you want to work on.

2. Set a Timer: Usually for 25 minutes.

3. Work: Focus on your task without interruptions until the timer rings.

4. Take a Short Break: Rest for 5 minutes to recharge.

5. Repeat: After 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break (15–30 minutes).
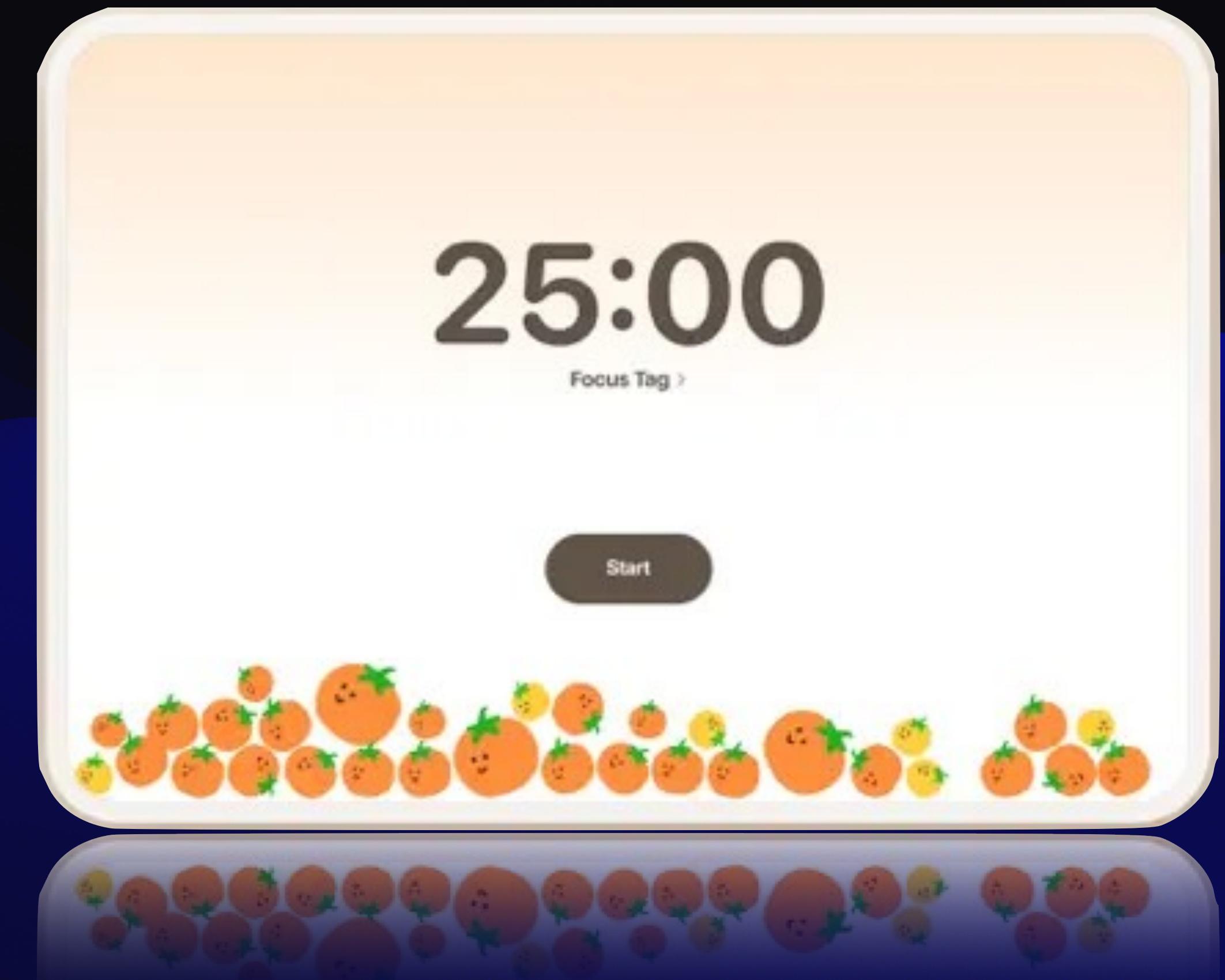
Image: FocusPomo Pomodoro Timer. FocusPomo Apps.

4: Pomodoro Technique

Benefits

- Encourages focus and reduces distractions.

- Prevents burnout with regular breaks.

- Helps track time spent on tasks for better planning.

Image: FocusPomo Pomodoro Timer. FocusPomo Apps.

4: Pomodoro Technique

Implementing

- Apps:

  - Be Focused (Apple App Store)

  - FocusPomo (Apple App Store)

  - ReDD (redd-project.org/tools/)

- Analogue:

  - Any timer

- Resources:

  - The Pomodoro Technique
    (www.pomodorotechnique.com/)
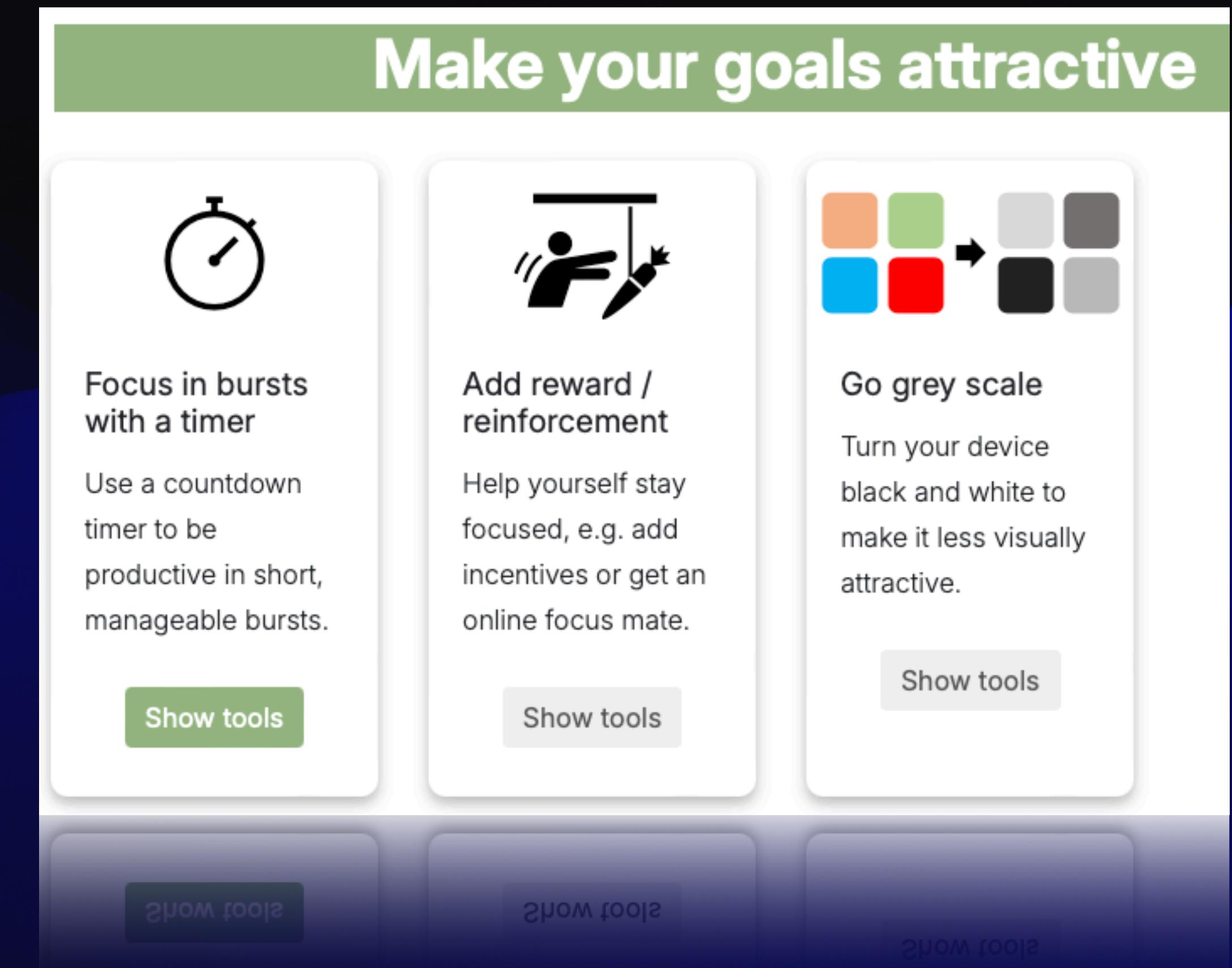
Image: © Ulrik Lyngs & Maureen Freed

4: Pomodoro Technique

Implementing

- Apps:

  - Be Focused (Apple App Store)

  - FocusPomo (Apple App Store)

  - ReDD (redd-project.org/tools/)

- Analogue:

  - Any timer + notepad

- Resources:

  - The Pomodoro Technique
    (www.pomodorotechnique.com/)
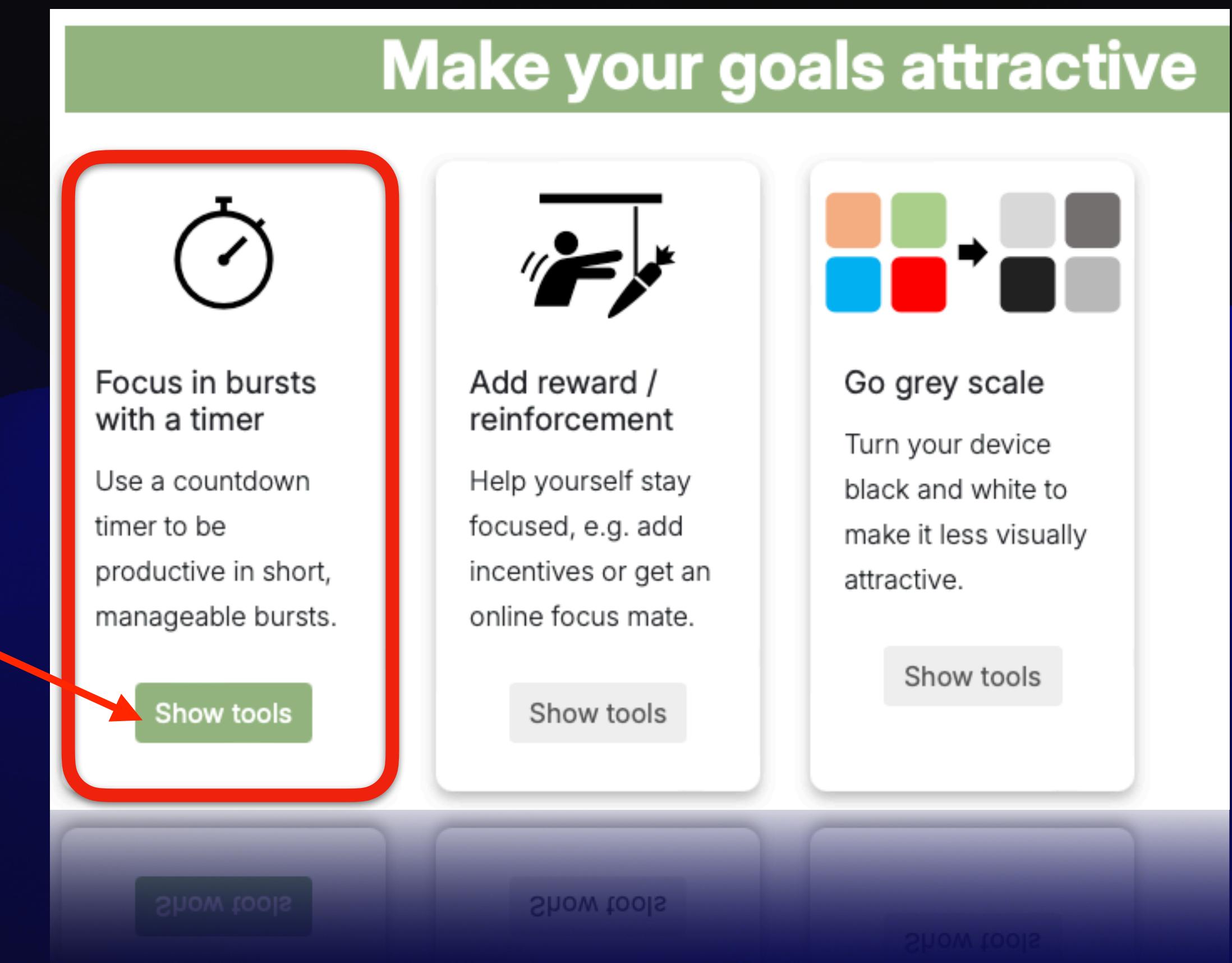
Image: © Ulrik Lyngs & Maureen Freed

Conclusions

- **Getting Things Done (GTD)**

  - Great for organising incoming tasks and ideas.

  - Requires consistent effort to maintain lists and conduct regular reviews.

Conclusions

- **Kanban Boards**

  - Excellent for visualising workflows and managing tasks collaboratively.

  - Proper maintenance to avoid becoming cluttered.

Conclusions

- Time Blocking

  - Ideal for structuring your day and focusing on priorities.

  - Demands discipline to stick to the schedule.

Conclusions

- Pomodoro Technique

  - Helps maintain focus and prevent burnout.

  - Rigid time intervals may not suit tasks requiring deep concentration or environments with interruptions.

Conclusions

- Experiment with these 4 methods - and also from the list of 15.

- See what works for you and adapt them to your work style.

- All techniques created by people struggling with productivity or focus.
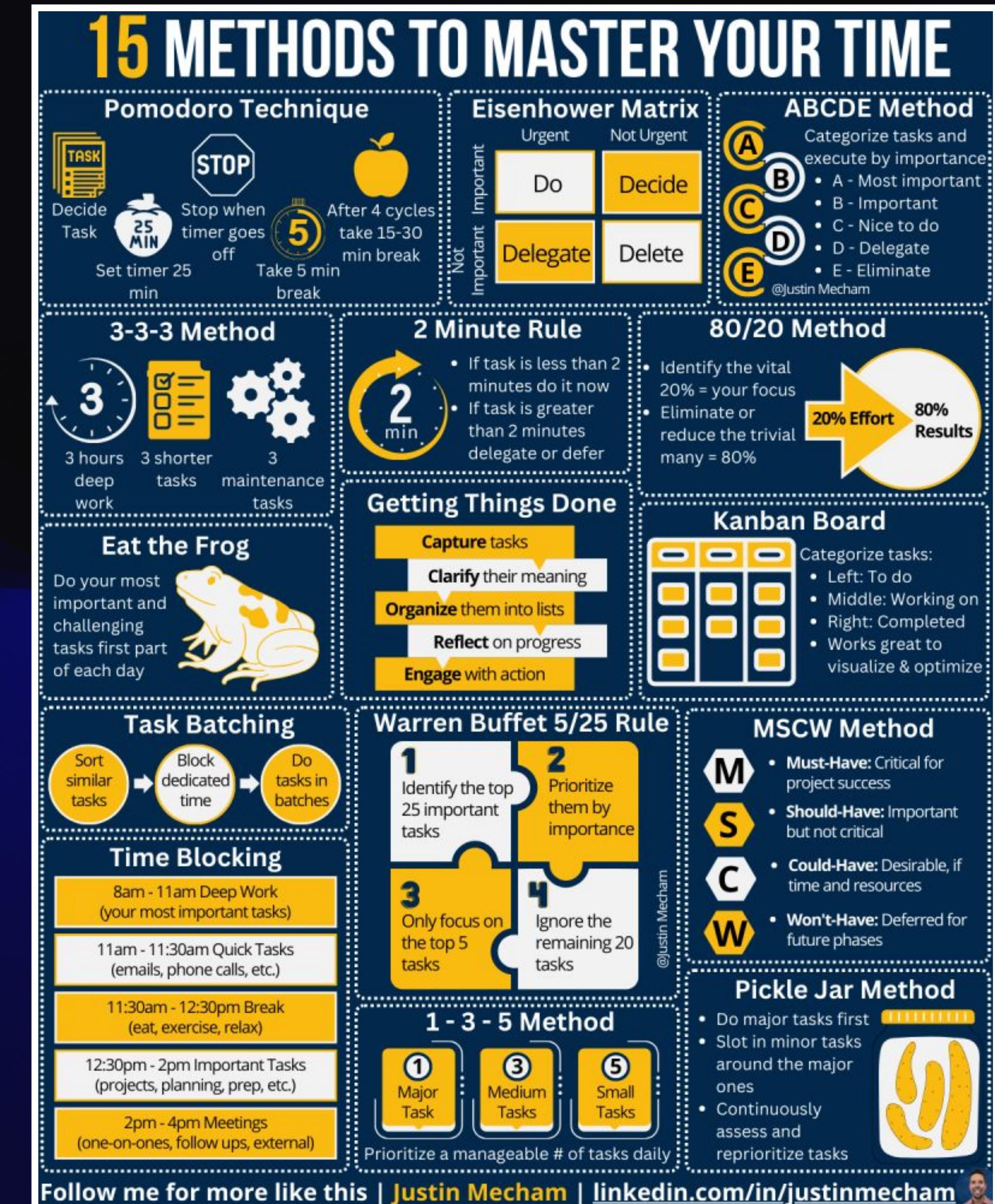
Image: Justin Mecham - https://www.linkedin.com/in/justinmecham/

Contact

John Pilbeam
Web Digital Officer, Sainsbury Library

john.pilbeam@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

https://johnpilbeam.com/