**'How to be productive at work by improving work habits- systematically ’**

# This article discusses tips on how to be more productive at work.

# Being proactive is a desirable trait.

* Being proactive means anticipating what might happen, planning ahead, preparing in advance and acting ahead instead of simply reacting to circumstances.
* Being proactive builds your personal brand and reputation at work.

***Being proactive*** *means thinking ahead, planning ahead and acting ahead.*

***Whereas taking initiative*** *means going the extra mile or going above and beyond your normal responsibilities to make things happen.*

**A proactive employee thinks ahead, acts ahead and gets ahead.**

* **Responding to emails promptly**

# When you receive an email

1. When you receive an email you can quickly decide if the email is just for your attention and no action is needed, or if it is for your attention and action is needed either immediately or later.
2. If it is something you can quickly answer, provide your response straightaway.
3. If it’s something you will work on or research on before answering later then **send a brief email confirming you will send feedback by a certain time or date**.
4. **Acknowledging receipt** enables the recipient to know that you received their email and when they can expect feedback.
5. **Do not ignore replying**. If you happen to forget an email, apologize and reply as soon as you can.
6. Always **include a clear email subject** and begin by thanking the sender for reaching out.
7. **For external emails** make it a practice when replying to include your email signature with your name, title, company and contact details.
8. **Also respond to everything** that has been asked on the email rather than answering just a few parts.
9. **At all times verify if you have included an attachment.** Go an extra step and open up the attachment to double check it is the right one.
10. **Additionally, take a moment to double check whose email address is on the ‘reply to’ line**. Sometimes the autocomplete can populate the wrong email address.
11. **Block specific times during the day for**[**when you respond to emails**](https://www.thriveyard.com/32-simple-ways-to-manage-email-effectively/)**.**
12. **Routinely check your spam or junk folder** to verify that legitimate emails did not end up there.
13. **Also use great judgement before selecting the “reply all” button.**
14. **It is a good idea to know your company’s policy for response time for emails.** Strive for relevant and brief responses to emails and proofread your emails.
15. **At a minimum respond to emails within one day, for urgent emails respond sooner.**

* **Having a to-do list**

# Get into the habit of writing a to-do list for the things you want to focus on each day. This is an efficient system of planning your workday.

**A to-do list gives you a big picture overview of what you are supposed to be working on.**

**It helps to keep you on track and reduces the risk of forgetting to do something that you were supposed to work on.**

1. **The ideal time to**[**write a to-do list**](https://www.thriveyard.com/39-ways-to-increase-your-productivity-at-work/)is at the end of a workday when you review what you have done versus what you had planned to do.
2. **Also assess additional new tasks that that have been added.** Then develop a draft to-do list for the following day.
3. **You will leave work knowing what your priorities are for the next day** and when you arrive in the morning you simply review your tasks and begin working.
4. **The best part of having a to-do list is checking off an item** after you have completed it.

* **Prioritizing tasks**

# Prioritizing begins by writing a list of all the tasks which you need to do then ranking them according to importance.

1. **Mark items as urgent vs. non urgent** and work immediately on the most pressing items first.
2. **Estimate how much time it would take to complete tasks** to have an idea of how your day would look like and stay focused as you complete the tasks at hand.
3. **Give yourself a cushion to cope** with unexpected situations, surprises and last minute requests.
4. **Communicate**[**key priorities with your boss or team**](https://www.thriveyard.com/30-ways-to-improve-your-relationship-with-your-boss/)so that they know when to support you or steer clear to give you room to work.
5. **Use deadlines to plan and manage priorities.**
6. **Break down big projects** into small tasks and assign mini deadlines for each task.

* **Managing your calendar**

# How do you keep your calendar under control?

# Utilize your calendar as a deliberate scheduling tool.

1. It is a good idea to have all your meetings and appointments in onecalendar and **look at it every day.**
2. **If you have the luxury, you can start off by booking work blocks** when you intend to fully focus on projects.
3. **Schedule times during the day for when you will look at emails** and provide feedback be it simple responses or in depth answers.
4. **Book recurring meetings and leave open slots** on your calendar where others can book meetings with you.

* **Having a routine for how you work**

# Having a standardized routine for your workday is beneficial. It helps to boost your productivity.

Develop a routine for doing tasks and then keep improving your routine and performance.

***A sample routine for a work day could be as follows:***

* Tidy up your work area in the morning.
* Write your to-do list.
* Prioritize your tasks.
* Do hard tasks first then easy tasks.
* Or do easy tasks first to build momentum then do the hard tasks.
* Do one task steadily until you complete it.
* Check off items done.
* Respond to email requests, telephone calls, colleagues, meetings etc.
* Take short breaks.
* Have lunch.
* Review the work done at the end of the day.
* Add new tasks and draft a plan for the next day’s work.
* **Following up**

# Following up and being persistent are ingredients for success in one’s career.

1. It takes **will power** to constantly follow-up especially when you don’t receive any response.
2. Follow up is needed in instances such as scheduling meetings after meetings, and **generally when you have sent someone an important email and they have not responded.**
3. You can also follow-up when **sending reminders ahead of important deadlines, events or meetings.**
4. Additionally **when thanking your customers** and **also when sending reminders.**
5. When following up**, personalize your email and refer to any email or communication you had previously sent.**
6. **Following-up can be done through** different avenues such as email, telephone, text, snail mail, meetings or social media.
   1. *One way of going the extra mile is checking in on clients a few weeks or months after you have delivered a project just to see how things are going. It is granted to make the clients or customer pleasantly surprised.*

* **Not over committing yourself**

# Being over committed affects one’s ability to be proactive.

*It is necessary to have a good idea of what your current commitments are at all times to enable you assess whether you can take on additional work.*

1. **If you are unable to honour a commitment, it is best to say no** and offer a polite explanation that your plate is currently full.
2. **You can also have negotiation discussions to agree on** later deadlines, revised or reduced scope of work.

* **Providing timely updates**

When working on a project, update your boss, your team, client and other relevant stakeholders

1. **Update on the progress at regular intervals** and also once the activity is completed.
2. Complete the project on time.
3. If you are not able to provide updates as earlier envisioned, **let your boss know in advance.**
4. *In addition let your boss hear your mistakes or any potential holdups* ***from you first***

## **Acting on feedback**

# It is important to [receive feedback](https://www.thriveyard.com/31-tips-on-how-to-give-and-receive-feedback-at-work) because it measures how you are performing.

Feedback can come **from asking good questions.**

1. *The next step after receiving feedback is to reflect on it* ***and put it to use.***
2. What are you doing well? What should you continue doing? [What areas and skills should you improve on?](https://www.thriveyard.com/23-tips-on-how-to-delegate-work-effectively) What behaviours or actions should you stop doing? What new things should you start doing?
3. **Just as it is important to receive feedback, it is equally important to give others feedback.**

## **Managing time and meeting deadlines**

# [Time management](https://www.thriveyard.com/20-tips-on-how-to-prioritize-work-and-meet-deadlines) entails doing the most amount of productive and efficient work within the shortest time possible.

1. **The emphasis is on efficiency** and not jumping from task to task or never ending busyness.
2. **The foundation of time management** is in knowing what you want to do, why you should do it, planning how to do it and doing it in the best way possible.
3. **A broad formula for time management** is to map out the daily tasks to do, begin each day by doing the most important tasks, have a time-frame for how long to work on a task and review it after you have completed it.
4. **Deadlines are important too**.
5. **Stay on top of deadlines by writing down** the deadlines, breaking projects into small tasks, setting-up reminders, staying focused, eliminating distractions, monitoring progress and wherever possible completing tasks ahead of the deadline.

## **Planning ahead**

# Plan what you want to accomplish then take action.

[Planning ahead](https://www.thriveyard.com/35-ways-to-improve-your-leadership-skills-at-work/) entails knowing what you want to achieve and then structuring your activities in a systematic or sequential way around the time available.

1. **At the end of the activity, examine** what you did against your initial objectives.
2. **Get into a good rhythm at the beginning of the day.**
3. **Part of planning involves knowing your most productive periods** during the day.
4. **Periods when you are really energetic, focused** and your engines are revving and do your most creative and productive work around those times.

* . **Improving work processes**

# On a regular basis iterate, improve, refine, reduce, modify, redesign and recalibrate your work processes.

1. **Some easy steps of improving work processe**s include, using checklists, developing standard operating procedures and designing forms and templates for everyday use.
2. **Others include preparing** manuals, templates, responses to frequently asked questions, setting up reminders, avoiding scheduling back to back meetings and scheduling short meetings.
3. **Preparing agendas for meetings and following the agenda**, checking emails at specific periods during the day rather than continuously working on email all day long and crafting standard email responses for questions you respond to over and over again.

## **Learning from mistakes**

# Even with our best intentions to work as best as we can and be highly proactive, inevitably mistakes do happen.

What should you do during these instances?

1. **Options for when you fall behind in your work**: working remotely, working earlier, staying late, asking for help, renegotiating deadlines, putting up a do not disturb sign, seeking cooperation of colleagues, working weekends, temporarily saying no to new tasks and compressing time by forcing yourself to work faster.
2. ***Also become better at estimating the time needed to complete tasks.***

## **Building-up your skills**

# What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you excel in doing? Which tasks do you enjoy doing the most? Which ones do you least enjoy?

**Be on the lookout for potential slip ups in tasks that you don’t enjoy but still have to do. Focus more energy and be vigilant on these areas.**

* **Communicating well**

# Taking time to listen attentively and taking good notes helps in how you respond to others.

**Ask good questions** to gain deeper understanding or to clarify instructions and assumptions.

1. **Choose the correct medium** to communicate depending on the situation.
2. When involved in a critical telephone call**, it is a good practice to write a summary of the phone call and share it with the parties involved as reference notes for what was discussed.**
3. **Similarly during meetings it is helpful to take down the key points** and circulate your meeting notes with the participants to ensure that you are all on the same page.
4. *A challenging scenario that arises from time to time is the ability to know when to switch from endless back and forth emails to*[*resolving an issue*](https://www.thriveyard.com/15-tips-on-how-to-manage-conflict-at-work/)*via a phone call or face to face meeting.*
5. *It pays off to know at what point you need to simply pick up the phone and discuss further.*

## **Handling interruptions at work**

# Interruptions are unavoidable parts of the work processes.

# Think through a typical week, what kind of interruptions do you get at work?

**If the issue arising is a sudden deadline** that needs your attention or assistance, your swift response is paramount.

1. **If a colleague needs your input** you can let them know you are pressed for time but can spare a few minutes to listen to and address their issue. **If they need a more comprehensive response** you could request them to either send you an email or you can have a meeting later on.
2. **If it is colleagues passing by your desk just to chit chat** then this can eat up your time and cause you to fall back on your work schedule.
3. **At the same time it is important to nurture work relationships** with colleagues and not brush them off when they want to talk to you.
4. **Work place friendships are important** in boosting job satisfaction, morale and productivity.
5. **You could try one of two approaches**, firstly let your colleague know that you can’t chat now because you are working on a project but you will pass by their desk later or secondly you can later on mutually plan a group lunch together at convenient times just to catch up.

## **Conclusion**

# What is the next step after being proactive? Taking initiative is the next logical step after being proactive.

**Being proactive means** thinking ahead, planning ahead and acting ahead.

**Whereas taking initiative means** going the extra mile or going above and beyond your normal responsibilities to make things happen.