

8 Ways To Improve Your Focus At Work



[Kate Ashford](#), Contributor

I cover personal finance, work, and consumer trends. Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

Recently I started working on a project that required me to track my time. I didn't give it much thought until I started working, and that's when I discovered something—I have trouble staying on task. At least, I have trouble staying on *one* task.

Since I'm always working on multiple projects, there's always some small thing that could be done on each of them—sending out a query for a story, answering an email scheduling an interview, checking to see if a source has gotten back to me. I find it very hard to focus on one project for an extended period. I am a terrible single-tasker.

That's not so great, since research has shown that multitasking [isn't good for productivity](#). So, I turned to workplace experts with this question: What's the best way to really focus? Here's what I heard:

Work in chunks. One of the best ways to focus and boost productivity is to block your time into segments and take regular breaks. "Our brain focuses best in short spurts, so dedicating 25 minutes to one activity, taking a five-minute break, and then resuming that activity or switching to another activity for another 25 minutes will help," says Kelly Noel Rasmussen, a digital marketer in Madison, WI. This is also known as the Pomodoro Technique.

Use a time tracker. "Time tracker devices such as Toggl or DeskTime can help you become more aware of how much time you are spending on certain activities," Rasmussen says. "Over the long run, you may be able to see where you can trim or maximize your time."

Know when you work best. If you're a morning person, don't wait until the end of the day to tackle the thing that requires the most brain power. "It's often not a question of time, but rather mental bandwidth and depth of concentration," says Charlie Hugh-Jones, a life and business strategist and author of *Unlocking a More Productive You*. "Time of day is a crucial factor. Learn your rhythms and harness them for your most challenging work mentally."

Make a to-do list. That doesn't mean keeping a running list in your head, apparently. Write it down. "Without a to-do list, your brain is just working too hard and cycling all the important and not-so-important things, instead of letting you work on actual work," says Darla DeMorrow, a professional organizer with HeartWork Organizing.

Keep time-suck temptations at bay. You can't check Facebook if the site is blocked on your computer during work hours. "Many of my clients end up adding some sort of blocking app to their computer or phone," DeMorrow says. "Way too many people default to surfing or game playing online when they are overwhelmed. One of my clients just installed ColdTurkey this week."

Shut down alerts. "When you allow your work to be interrupted by the constant ding of text messages or new tweets or news flashes, you aren't actually focusing," says Deborah Searcy, Ph.D., an instructor in management programs at Florida Atlantic University. Put your phone on silent and stash it in a drawer for an hour, and silence your email notifications if you can. Shut down social media so you can't see how many new notifications you have.

Start with the hardest thing. "Proceed by completing the most difficult—or least anticipated—task first," says Jordan Slavik, an instructor at the University of Maryland. "If this task is not completed first, it will typically not get completed at all."

Stop reacting immediately. Dropping what you're doing every time an email arrives leads to a constant back-and-forth that results in a lot of wasted time. Improving productivity requires a change in mindset. "It requires a shift away from feeling a need to instantly please each person who emails, texts, calls or walks in on you and wants your attention immediately," says Christian Muntean, principal with Vantage Consulting. "It requires accepting that mono-tasking, by focusing on clear priorities, is a far more efficient way to accomplish a lot."