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10 Timeless Productivity Hacks

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In our modern world, everyone is looking to do things faster, better, smarter, so it's no wonder that productivity hacks are incredibly popular.

But the truth is that there's nothing new under the sun; despite whatever the newest book, product, or guru wants to sell you, you can learn to become more productive with work habits people have used for many years. Apply even a few of these and you will increase your productivity, guaranteed:

1. **Define your MITs.** MIT stands for most important task, and just by taking a few moments to identify 3–5 things you must accomplish each day, you will improve your overall productivity—because you can't focus on your important work if you don't know what's important.
2. **Don't multi-task.** We live in a multi-tab, multiple device kind of world, but scientists tell us that none of us is truly a good multi-tasker. Working on one thing at a time will make you faster and less apt to make mistakes.
3. **Create a morning routine** (and an afternoon routine and an evening routine). For many people, defining and sticking to a morning routine can help ensure a smooth start to the day. If you know you operate at your best when you have exercised and had a good breakfast, making those things a priority will positively affect the rest of your day. Likewise, routines for other times of the day can streamline daily tasks.
4. **Edit your input streams and simplify.** Most people I know wouldn't want to give up their newsletters, social media, or blog reading, but there are ways to make your media consumption more productive. First, ruthlessly edit your media streams to the most valuable and important ones; then, find ways to streamline your consumption with RSS feeds, apps like Hootsuite, and offline readers.



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5. **Be succinct.** When writing emails, get to the point quickly. A good rule of thumb is to limit your email to five sentences or less.
6. **Do important work.** In the classic "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," Steven Covey presents a matrix that divides our activities into four categories: urgent and important, not urgent but important, urgent and unimportant, and not urgent not important. The key is to spend most of our time in quadrant two, doing the important work that isn't driven by crisis.
7. **Batch similar tasks.** The simplest example of this is choosing to process emails only once or twice a day rather than jumping like one of Pavlov's dogs every time the computer dings. Identify tasks that are interrupting your flow (email, phone calls, meetings, etc.) and schedule a time to do them all at once.
8. **Eliminate, automate, delegate.** Doing your best work often requires eliminating or minimizing tasks that you don't need to do. First, eliminate anything you can from your to do list; determine if any tasks can be automated with technology or templates; and finally, delegate any tasks that don't need your personal attention to a coworker or assistant.
9. **Work offline.** The Internet is a fantastic, but tempting place. If you have difficulty avoiding its distractions, work offline or take your work somewhere without an Internet connection to force some focus. I get so much work done on long plane journeys and I sometimes go to a local Coffee shop for some uninterrupted work.
10. **Do the thing you want to do the least, first.** Prioritize those items you are most likely to procrastinate—your day will go much more smoothly when the phone call you're dreading or the report you don't want to write are finished and no longer weighing on your mind.

Remember, you don't need a fancy system for productivity, just a few good, timeless habits.