



Resources

Personal Productivity Quiz

Take this quick quiz, originally developed by the team at the blog “I Done This” and adapted with permission for use here.

Read the questions and circle the answer you feel sounds most like you. Be honest now, no cheating!

- 1. What’s the first thing you do when you get to work in the morning?**
 - A Drink coffee. I can’t do or think about anything until I have had my coffee.
 - B Check my emails and start replying to them all before realising I was meant to be in a meeting 5 minutes ago and am already feeling stressed.
 - C Check my emails, answer most of them immediately, then make a comprehensive to-do list.
 - D Check my emails, answer a couple, and start on the day’s most pressing tasks.
 - E Scan my email, schedule and tasks for anything urgent. Schedule time to respond to those that need a comprehensive answer. Check my schedule. Plan my day around what I want to achieve by the end.

- 2. When you get an unexpected project with a tight deadline, how do you feel?**
 - A Totally flustered! It’s not my fault that others can’t get their act together.
 - B Okay. If my boss says it has to get done, I’ll do it.
 - C Pumped! I love working fast against a deadline.
 - D Surprised but I’m ready for it. I like doing what needs to get done.
 - E Ready. I have a few things I need to shift around, but because I am generally on top of things, I can accommodate last minute requests.

- 3. Your boss walks over to your desk on Monday with a big list of tasks due at the end of the week. What are you thinking?**
 - A Seriously?! This is why I can never get on top of my own work.
 - B I’ll drop everything and start on them right away.
 - C I’ll add them to my already packed to-do list.
 - D Sure. I’ll check out what needs to be done and work around that and/or do them later.
 - E Alright. I already have time for my most important things blocked out. I’ll double check with the boss on the timing and see if there is anything more pressing than others and work them around what is already in the schedule.



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- 4. What's your favorite part of the workday?**
- A When I get to go home and eat dinner.
 - B Don't really have one, any time I get a break I suppose.
 - C Late afternoon. I feel the pressure of home time looming and that's when I get most of my work done.
 - D Right after lunch. I feel so refreshed!
 - E The morning, when I'm getting organised for the day.
- 5. Oh no! It's Wednesday, and you've just woken up with a stomach virus. Other than physically ill, how do you feel?**
- A Justified. This is what happens when you are overworked.
 - B I'm sick. I should stay home. Plus, the day off from work is nice.
 - C Nervous and frustrated! It's going to be impossible to finish my to-do list.
 - D A little worried—I put off a lot to the end of the week—but I'll be able to get it done Thursday and Friday.
 - E Sick days are unfortunate but necessary. I'll be a little behind, but it's okay—that's why I stay on top of things
- 6. On Monday, you have a day-long retreat from work. Instead of doing your job, you're going to be doing "team-building activities" with your co-workers. How do you feel?**
- A Ugh! This will interfere with my "real" work.
 - B Secretly excited. I get really invested in games.
 - C Nervous. It sounds like a good idea, but can I afford to lose a whole day?
 - D A little iffy on games, but if it will help the team...
 - E Looking forward to it. It's important to take time out from time to time to work on our relationships and the "how" of our work.
- 7. How do you behave in company meetings?**
- A Zone out. Most of our meetings are a waste of time.
 - B Try and stay focused whilst checking my email.
 - C Act as the meeting's scribe. After the meeting, you send out a comprehensive email, so everyone knows what they're responsible for.
 - D Take relevant notes and participate where necessary.
 - E Stay present. If it was important enough for me to accept and attend, I need to see how I can give and get value.



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8. When do you drink caffeine?

- A All day
- B Whenever I really need that extra boost to get on my game.
- C Usually twice per day, at regularly scheduled times. Once in the morning and once in the afternoon.
- D In the morning. Occasionally a cup in the afternoon if it's a busy day.
- E When I feel like a treat and only as coffee. It's the thing I used to incentivise myself when I need a little more motivation.

9. You and your co-worker decide you need to set up a meeting with a client. What do you do?

- A Let your co-worker set up the meeting and accept it irrespective of what other meetings you have on. You can decide on the day the most important meeting to attend.
- B Let your co-worker set up the meeting, and then find a way to work around it if it conflicts with something else.
- C Let your co-worker set up a calendar invite. Then, the day of the meeting, prepare extensively.
- D Agree who will send the calendar invite. Then, prepare for the meeting and meet with your co-worker briefly to ensure you're on the same page.
- E Send the calendar invite to set up the meeting, along with an email detailing the meeting agenda. Then, schedule time to prepare for the meeting itself.

10. In high school, what kind of student were you?

- A Did what was required but found homework demands unreasonable.
- B Always did well, but had a lot of late nights.
- C Did all the right stuff to get into university, but had a hard time caring about the material at school.
- D Pretty on top of things. High school was easy—university was when things became more difficult and I had to be more planful.
- E Immensely organised. Color-coded binders by subject. Always kept (and used) the diary they gave out at the beginning of every year.

Now, tally up your results to see where you fit on the Deny to Design framework on the next page.



Resources

Mostly E's - DESIGN

"I choose what I do, when I do it and how I do it. I'm still responsive to the needs of others and I am able to manage my workload effectively."

You are the master of your domain! You use your calendar as a work resource and you allocate time accordingly. You choose what you do and when, and feel under control. You truly have life by design. You are clear on your priorities and you are able to make sound choices about what meetings you accept, what activities you undertake and with whom you spend your time. You likely feel calm, centred and in control most of the time.

Mostly D's - DISCERN

"Do I really have to be there or do that?"

You are getting there. You will be accepting meeting requests from others but you are beginning to ask the question "Do I really need to be there?" "Is this work I really should be doing?" You are also starting to implement and see results from thinking and working more systemically. For example, you are using your email, calendar and tasks in a more integrated way, and starting to feel the benefits of that. We are starting to feel hopeful.

Mostly C's - DECIDE

"There has to be a better way. Perhaps I need to do a time management course!"

You realise that there is a different and better way of doing the world but have not yet figured it out. You try all sorts of time management or productivity courses, but never seem to quite get there as old habits are hard to break and new habits are hard to form. Often at this level we feel resentment.

Mostly B's - DEFAULT

"My work is controlled by others and I am at the mercy of my calendar and my workload. Shifting deadlines and demands of others determine my priorities."

You are operating without any thought or direction. You are at the mercy of other people and their most important things. You don't think of your calendar as a resource, but as simply a way to keep track of all the appointments you have. It's likely that you are responding to things in a very reactive and unconsidered way. You experience feelings of overwhelm. You get to the end of a day or week and feel like you have been busy, but not productive.

Mostly A's - DENY

"It's nothing to do with my productivity. It's the amount of work I have, or my boss, or my colleagues. There just isn't enough time in the day to get everything done."

The funny thing about time is that everyone has the same amount, and yet some people seem to do so much better with what they have. In many respects it's like money. There are some people that earn relatively low salaries, and still manage to build wealth and property portfolios. Then there are others who earn relatively HUGE salaries, and don't have much to show for it. The feeling here is one of helplessness or hopelessness.



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Experiment 1 – Your Chronotype

In his book *When*, Daniel Pink suggests that the simplest way to identify your natural work inclination, or chronotype, is to answer three simple questions:

1. What time do you generally go to bed at night?
2. What time do you generally wake up in the mornings?
3. What is the midpoint between those two times?

For example, if you normally go to bed at 10 pm and wake up at 6 am, your midpoint is 2 am. Use figure 1.2 below to identify your chronotype.

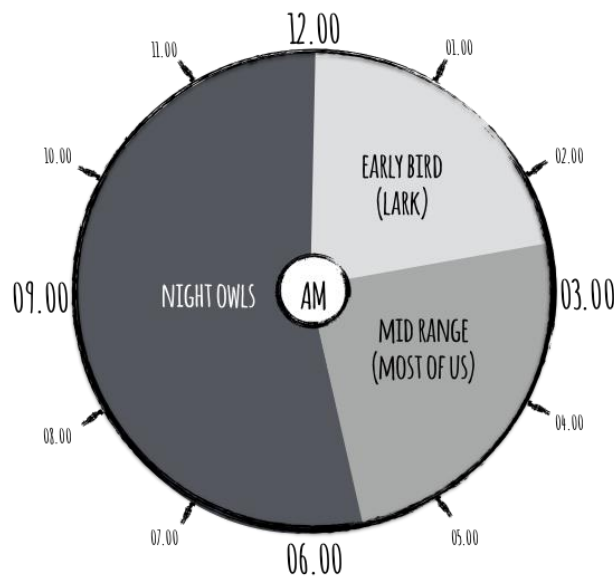


Figure 1.2: your chronotype

This is of course according to the rule of 'all things being equal'. If you are a shift worker, or if you have recently returned from an overseas trip and your body clock is a bit out of whack, then the results may not be accurate for you. Instead, you could try the free and anonymous online Circadian Rhythm Type Test (AutoMEQ).



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Experiment 2 – Sleep Habits

Are you a good sleeper?

There are a number of apps that can track how well you're going. These are available for just about all smart phones, smart watches or fitness devices. (Yes, I know, it might seem counterintuitive to turning your tech off at night, but they usually work okay with flight mode on so you won't be disturbed by other notifications.)

Do a bit of research to find the right one for you, your lifestyle and your device.

The best ones are those that allow you to enter a few conditions for the day:

- whether you have exercised
- what your stress levels are
- what you have eaten
- how much water you have drank
- how much alcohol you have consumed.

Start to track your patterns and determine the conditions under which you get the best night's sleep. For example, when I did my own analysis, I found that my best quality sleep was on a Monday night, when I had been for a 20-minute walk in the afternoon and consumed a small glass of red wine — yep, go figure!



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Experiment 3 – Valuing your time

What excuses are you making right now that prevent you from valuing your time?

Do you say things like:

- 'I have to do email first thing otherwise I don't feel under control.'
- 'I'm great at multitasking. I get more done when I do several things at once.'
- 'I pride myself on being available at all times for my team.'

Change now!

Don't think of this as a chore, but rather make it a bit of a game or challenge.

For example:

- 'How many days in a row I can avoid opening my email until 12?'
- 'How many tasks in a row can I do without multitasking?'
- 'How long can I go without being distracted?'
- 'What's my personal best (PB) for the number of unimportant emails I can file or delete in a 25-minute burst?'

Just try it and see.



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Experiment 4 – Take Back Control

Protect your time

Start blocking out the first two hours of your day from now on.

If you have to wait a few weeks until you can begin doing this, that's okay.

However, you could also try and move some of your meetings or other tasks to later in the day. Try and reschedule as much as you can to free up that time, and then protect your two most valuable hours.

Control your inbox

Start to practise how you control your inbox. Spend no more than five minutes on this in the morning and set a timer on your watch or smart phone to keep you honest.

1. Run down the inbox and identify the 10 per cent that require a considered response.
2. Determine if those responses are needed immediately or can be scheduled.
3. Schedule the responses accordingly (over the first 2 hours of the coming weekdays).
4. Leave the rest until later in the day.

Some additional tips:

- **Unsubscribe immediately from anything you can**, or most of the newsletters that come to that email address. Do it right now. If there are newsletters you like, then set up a rule or folder for them, or follow them on social media instead.
- **Stop sending emails**, so people don't always feel they have to return one to you! Use instant messaging services for quick communication and save email for things that require considered responses, an evidence trail or attachments.
- **Send better quality emails**. Put the action required in the subject line, for example 'Action required', 'FYI only', 'Please respond' or 'Decision required'. Also, put as much in the email as you can to help the other person respond. I once went back and forth for about eight messages just to set up a meeting. If I had done a better job in the first email, I would have only needed two!



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Experiment 5 – Is it really urgent?

Make sure you are reacting to the right things.

How often do we have the assumption of urgency? We use words like 'soon', 'quickly' or 'by Friday' without really understanding what that timing means. Even the phrase 'we have plenty of time' means different things to different people.

People set arbitrary deadlines like 'close of business' when it actually could be delivered at 10 am the next morning. 'Close of business' is a mental time stamp that lets people feel like the day is closed off and completed, like a full stop to the day.

Remember, if it's 3 pm and someone says, 'I need you to do this urgently', you may not be in the best frame of mind to get it finished. Making a start and reviewing it in the morning might be a more accurate and productive way of dealing with the work.

Over the next couple of weeks, test your 'urgency' assumptions by:

- asking people for a specific time they want something by. Don't accept 'ASAP', as that can be just as meaningless as 'soon'.
- asking people for context around what will happen with the work afterwards — for example, 'Who is waiting on this?', or 'How will what I'm doing affect the work of others, or the project overall?'
- responding, if they say 'I need it by close of business today', by asking 'What would happen if I wasn't able to meet that deadline?', or 'What would happen if I gave it to you by 10 am tomorrow?'



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Experiment 6 – Reduce your email by 20%

How much time could you save if you reduced your email by, say, 20 per cent?

In the example in table 6.1, which is based on the average amount of email my clients tell me they are sending and receiving per day, a 20 per cent reduction could recover 28 days of productive work time.

That’s a whole month! What would you do if you had an extra month of time in the year?

Table 6.1: calculate your savings

Actual email received	Example	You
Number of emails received per day	80	
Multiply by 240 workdays per year (adjust +/-)	240	
Annual email received	A 19,200	
Annual email sent		
Number of emails sent per day	60	
Multiply by 240 workdays per year (adjust +/-)	240	
Annual email sent	B 14,400	
Annual days spent processing email		
Add A + B	33,600	
× 2 minutes per email	67,200	
Convert to hours by dividing by 60 minutes	1,120	
Divide by 8 work hours per day	C 140	
Days saved by 20 per cent email reduction		
C × 20 per cent	28	

Play with the percentage. Start with 10 per cent or go as high as 50 per cent. Play with the math.

Experiment 7 – The First 2 Hours Framework

Think about all the things you need to do tomorrow, and in the coming week. Don’t forget to include meetings and preparation for those meetings.



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Put them into the template shown below according to the best time of day to be doing them.

Now go and block the time in your calendar accordingly.

