

Managing your time at work



Clocking In to Clocking Out
Improving workplace basic education

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Vocabulary

Comfort zone

Consumables

Contractions

Curriculum vitae

Deadline

Distracted

Efficient

Food pyramid

Frequency (radio)

Goals

Long-term goals

Short-term goals

Important jobs

Log

Mindmap

Peak time

Pie chart

Plan

Prioritise

Productivity

Routine

Schedule

**Standard operating procedures
(SOPs)**

Target

Timeline

Underestimate

Urgent jobs

Verb

Work-life balance

What is time management?

Time can't be saved, paused, controlled or replaced. Therefore it's up to you to manage your time. When you use good time management techniques, you're really just managing yourself better.

Preparation is the key

Taking the time to think about what you need to do is a simple, but effective, way of managing your time. Even before you set foot in work you can prepare yourself for the day ahead. Some things can be prepared the night before like:

Work clothes	Are your work clothes clean? Can you find them easily?
Equipment	Do you have all the equipment and tools you need? Is everything in good working order?
Food	Do you need to bring your lunch with you?

Getting to work on time

If you're starting a new job or moving to a different site, it's a good idea to find out what the quickest way to your job is.

- Look at a map, check the distance from your house and estimate how long the journey will take.
- Test out the journey beforehand.

If you're travelling at **peak time**, you may need to give yourself more time. Peak time means you're travelling during the most popular times of the day, which are typically 7.30am-9.00am and 4.30pm-6.00pm.

Getting off to a good start

Research tells us that having a good breakfast can get our minds and bodies ready for the day ahead. Perhaps it's worth getting up a little earlier and starting your day off with a healthy breakfast. Remember to set your alarm clock.

Try it out

Answer these questions.

Write your answers in your notebook.

1. Name three things you can do the night before to prepare for work.
2. What are the busiest times of day for traffic?
3. What is the benefit of a healthy breakfast?
4. What is your idea of a healthy breakfast?

Words

Make a sentence using each word. Use a dictionary to help you.

saved

.....

replaced

.....

Words

Words ending with **ed**

Example: I worked fast to **save** time. Time can't be **saved**.

Change each verb so that it fits in the gap. Be careful with the spelling.

	It can't be ...		It can't be ...
replace	clean
manage	test
prepare	check
estimate	start

Extension activities

Talk about



Before you go to bed do you prepare for the next day? How? Do you feel rushed in the mornings? What can you do to change this? Can you remember a time at work when, instead of pausing to think, you rushed into a job and it didn't go very well?

Writing



In your notebook write down how people lose time at work. Then suggest ways in which this could be avoided. Here is an example.

People lose time looking for things.

*Spend a few seconds
putting things away when
you finish with them.*

Computer skills



You can use the AA Roadwatch website to find out about traffic reports and to plan your journeys. Go to www.AAroadwatch.ie and click Route Planner for directions around the country and across Europe.

Design



Design a poster that shows all the tools, equipment or things that you need for your typical day at work. Leave the poster where you can see it in the morning. Use it as a checklist before you leave home.

At home



You can hear morning traffic reports on national and local radio. What is the **frequency** of your local radio station? Mark or store this frequency and the frequency of a national station on your radio so that you can check the traffic report before you leave for work.

Plan your meals for a week. The plan should include a good breakfast and a healthy lunch every day. Look up the **food pyramid** on the Internet and use it to help you plan. Then write out a shopping list of all the items you need to buy for the meals.

How do you work?

Do any of these statements describe you at work?

- I'm always doing things at the last minute.
- I always seem to have unfinished work piling up.
- I'm easily **distracted** and find it difficult to focus on the task at hand.
- I don't know where to begin. I'll start after lunch.
- I work longer than everyone else, but don't seem to achieve any more than they do.
- At the end of the day, I wonder where my day has gone and what I've achieved, if anything.



Don't worry. We all feel like this from time to time. But if you always feel like this, it can have a negative effect on your work. You could start thinking negatively about your job. Or you could spend time on a number of different tasks and not finish any of them. This can reduce your **productivity**, which is the overall amount of work that you get done. And this can be stressful.

How to work efficiently

You need to think about how you work and about what you can do to be more **efficient** with your time. When you're efficient, you:

- know what tasks you have to do;
- give tasks just the right amount of time; and
- start and finish a task without distractions and without delays.

Try it out

Answer these questions.

Write your answers in your notebook.

1. Look at the statements at the top of the information sheet. Do they show good time management or poor time management?
2. Which of the statements are good if you want to be productive and efficient at work. Why?
 - a. I have half of yesterday's work to catch up on when I go in.
 - b. I'm starving, but I'll stay and get this order done.
 - c. I need to organise a plumber for the house. I'll try and do it at lunchtime.
 - d. The supervisor isn't in today. Great, I can do my own thing.
 - e. I'm working off site today. I always enjoy that.
 - f. I'm not sure how to use this computer. Everyone seems really busy. I'll have a go and see what happens.

Words

I'm is a **contraction**.

A contraction is a word made up of two smaller words. An apostrophe ' replaces the letters that are left out.

Write the words out in full. For example: I'm **I am**

I've don't

Write these words as contractions. The first one is done for you.

could not **couldn't** did not

she has he is

is not what is

they are are not

it is you are

Extension activities



At home

Do you think you are an organised person? Do you try to do three or four things at the same time? What happens when you do this? What things, at home and at work, do you do at the last minute?



Role play

Do you get distracted from what you're doing at work? How? Does it bother you? Think about how you would approach a colleague who was distracting and delaying you. What could you say? Role play the situation.



Talk about

Think of the different ways you can waste time. For example, you might get distracted, be interrupted, dawdle, be unsure about what to do or put things off. What advice could you give someone who finds they waste time in these ways?

How have work practices changed over the years? Are you more constrained or less constrained by the clock now?



Find out

We are a nation of talkers and mobile phones are now very popular. Do a survey of phone use among your colleagues. How much time do we spend each workday on the phone? Discuss how much of this time is work related and how much is general chatting. Write up your findings.



Writing

Write a story about an occasion when you were pressed for time. What were you trying to do? What was holding you back? How did you deal with it? What happened in the end?

It's urgent!

Not everything is urgent. You need to be clear on the difference between what is urgent and what is important.

- **Important jobs** are necessary to achieve your **goals**.
- **Urgent jobs** are those that need to be done as quickly as possible.

A goal is a target that you have agreed with your supervisor to work towards. If everybody meets their particular goals, then it's more likely that the company will achieve its goals and be successful.

When you plan your day, you need to **prioritise**. Prioritising means that you spend a little time deciding what are the most important jobs to do. The priority is always the one that is the most important. You do this first, then you go to the second most important job. Leave the least important until last.

Making choices about our work

Even though people have very different jobs, we generally make the same choices about how we do our work. Generally speaking we:

- start a task we like before one we don't like;
- do a quick task before one that takes more time;
- do a familiar task before one that is new;
- do an easy task before one that is difficult;
- do what we're told to do before what we have chosen to do; and
- do what is urgent before what is important.

If you want to achieve your goals, you need to understand how you work. To do this you need to examine and think about how you work. Be honest but don't be too hard on yourself. You'll find that most people do the same as you.

Try it out

Answer these questions.

Write your answers in your notebook.

1. In your own words, what is the difference between important tasks and urgent tasks?
2. In your own words, what does prioritising mean?

True or false?

Read the sentence and tick True or False.

Check with the information sheet if you need to.

	True	False
1. People usually do quick jobs before doing longer ones.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Usually people do the difficult jobs first.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. We keep the urgent jobs till last.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Most people prefer to start with tasks they like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. People generally do a familiar task first, then do a new one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. If we're told to do something, we'll make that a priority.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Generally people take the same approach to all tasks even though the tasks are different.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Extension activities



At home

Away from work, what are your **short-term** and **long-term** goals? They may be about learning or about your home.



At work

Each morning, write a list of your jobs for the day. Then prioritise the list by marking those jobs that are urgent. Tick the tasks as you complete them. Seeing a list of completed tasks can be very satisfying.



Talk about

When you arrive at work (or when you face a day of work at home), do you do the familiar, easy or quick tasks before you do the more difficult ones? Do you think this helps you be more efficient and more productive? Why is this?



Writing

Write an article for a newsletter on how a hectic social and home life can impact on your working day.



Find out

Talk to someone who is retired. How did they feel about leaving their job and having more time for leisure and home? What changes did they make to their lives?



Listening

Listening skills are very important in the workplace, especially when you are being told the schedule for the day or how to do a new task. What are good listening skills? Discuss this in your group and list the qualities you need to be a good listener. Do you think you are a good listener?

Time flies!

Many people will know the phrase 'time flies'. You know the feeling: you look at your watch thinking that it's early, but you're shocked to find out that it's actually much later. So, to get the best use out of your time, it's helpful if you limit the amount of time that just flies by. Be more efficient. Have a look at your day and **log** what you do with your time. Here's a time log that Ivan has created.

Creating a time log

Ivan works for CP Distribution. He felt under pressure at work, so he decided to look at how he spends his time by creating a time log.

<i>My time log for Monday</i>	
Time	Activity
7.30 – 8.30 am	Got up, had shower and ate breakfast.
8.30 – 9.00 am	Walked to work.
9.00 – 9.30 am	Sorted through orders.
9.30 – 11.15 am	Got ten deliveries ready. Only nine were passed by Quality Assurance (QA) as an item was missing from one delivery.
11.15 – 11.30 am	Took a short break.
11.30 – 12.45 pm	Looked for missing item from delivery. Told supervisor.
12.45 – 1.45 pm	Had lunch, posted letter and phoned Dennis.
1.45 – 3.00 pm	Checked stores again and found missing item.
3.00 – 3.15 pm	Took a short break.
3.15 – 5.00 pm	Got five deliveries ready for QA to check tomorrow.
5.00 – 5.30 pm	Walked home from work.
5.30 – 6.15 pm	Checked post, tidied house.
6.15 – 7.45 pm	Went to football.
7.45 – 8.30 pm	Cooked and then ate dinner.
8.30 – 10.30 pm	Watched TV.
10.30 – 10.45 pm	Washed up.
10.45 – 11.30 pm	Read my book.

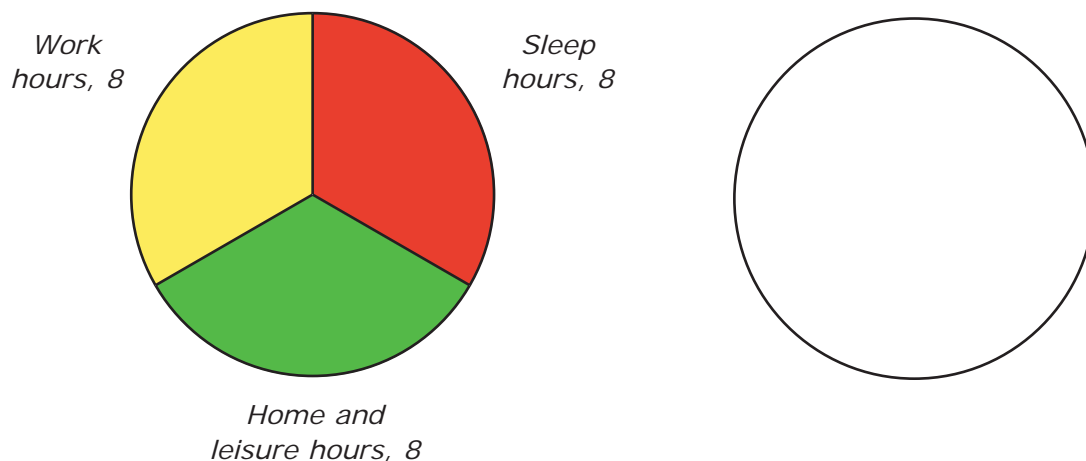
Try it out

Answer these questions about Ivan

1. How long is his working day?
.....
2. Take out all the break times. How many hours does he actually work?
.....
3. How long did he spend trying to find the missing item? Was this efficient?
.....
4. Where do you think Ivan could save some time during the day?
.....

Pie chart

Each day can be divided into three parts: sleep, work, and home and leisure. Here is a pie chart showing how the day can be divided.



1. Count how many hours Ivan spends asleep, at work and at home or leisure. Does the pie chart represent his day?
2. Count how many hours you spend asleep, at work and at home or leisure. Draw a pie chart showing your day.
3. Compare your pie chart with your colleagues' pie charts. Are you spending your time as well as you would like?

Extension activities



At work

Keep a log of all the time you spend doing different tasks. Do you spend all the time usefully? See if you can focus your attention better to make your working day less stressful.



At home

Write a log for your day. How do you spend your day? Can you see any areas where you could use your time better? Maybe there are things you could do faster or extra things you would like to do.



Computer skills

Use the spreadsheet programme on your computer to create a log of your day at home and at work. Use the programme to make a graph. This will show you what portion of your day was spent at each activity.



Design

A **timeline** is a type of chart that displays information over a period of time. It is very useful for displaying information about a work project that runs over a number of days or weeks. Make a timeline for a project at work (or at home, such as decorating or a wedding). Add information about what's happening in the project to help you see the tasks you need to do and if the project is running to schedule.



Reading

We usually find other people's lives interesting. Find a magazine article about a day in the life of someone famous or someone with an ordinary life. You can tell a lot about a life from a typical day. Would you swap anything about your life with the person you read about?



Writing

Write about a typical day in your life. Start with when you get up.

What's the point of planning?

There's a saying that tells us 'fail to plan and plan to fail'. Planning is an important part of any organisation. As an employee, you play your part in this.

A **plan** is a set of actions that you take to reach your targets. To make a plan, follow these steps.

1. Decide what you want to achieve. This is setting a **target**.
2. Know how much time you have or need to reach your target. This gives you your **deadline**.
3. Decide what steps to take to reach the target on time. This is your **schedule**.

If you spend half the day on one thing that you thought would take 15 minutes, you need to ask yourself two questions.

- Are you doing it correctly?
- Have you **underestimated** how much time you need?

It's very common to underestimate the amount of time you need to do a task. As a result, you may not meet the deadline and you can feel like you failed. This is not true. You just need to plan better. Good planning takes away a lot of stress.

Learning from your plan

You can learn a lot from your plan.

- What went well?
- What didn't go well?

It's important that you ask yourself why something didn't go to plan. If you can answer this question and change the way you work, you may save yourself a lot of time and stress the next time.

Also, if you can't meet your targets or deadlines, you need to be clear about why this has happened. Your supervisors may need to document this in their reports, so you should be able to explain why you haven't been able to keep to schedule.

Try it out

Irene works in housekeeping in a hotel. She starts work at 9.30am and loads up her cleaning cart for the day, which takes about 30 minutes. She needs to clean six rooms before her lunch break at 1pm. She has 30 minutes to clean each room. Here is the cleaning schedule for each room.

Mins	Task	Materials
3	Go into room with fresh linen and towels. Open curtains and window. Pick up all dishes and rubbish and put on cart.	Linen and towels
2	Spray cleaner on all bathroom surfaces.	Cleaning products
2	Strip bed and remove all linen from bedroom. Replace towels in bathroom.	
5	Make bed.	
5	Dust room and check all storage is empty. Vacuum room.	Cleaning cloths Vacuum cleaner
10	Clean all bathroom surfaces. Wash floor.	Cleaning cloths Mop
3	Replace used toiletries and consumables. Walk through room and check everything. Close window and fix curtains.	Toiletries and consumables

Answer these questions. Write your answers in your notebook.

1. What time does Irene start on the first room?
2. If it takes Irene 8 minutes to make the bed instead of 5, how much more time does she need to clean all 6 rooms?
3. Irene's supervisor talks to her about the extra time it takes. Irene says that she can't make the beds any more quickly. The supervisor looks at how Irene works and sees that Irene's rooms have king-size beds with extra pillows and bigger sheets, which take more time. They change the daily plan so Irene can get all her work completed.
If you were the supervisor, what changes would you suggest?
4. What could have happened if Irene and her supervisor hadn't talked about it?

Extension activities



Writing

When you plan, it is important to break your goal or target down into smaller steps. Write the steps you need to take to complete a task you do regularly, for example making tea and toast; checking the oil level in the car; taking a train journey; planting flower seeds.



Using numbers

Estimate the time you need for each step of a task. Try out the task and time yourself to see if you gave yourself enough time. Do you often underestimate or overestimate the amount of time you need for things? Are you being realistic?



Computer skills

On your computer, write up the task schedule from the 'Using numbers' exercise. Many computers now have special planning or journal programmes, or you can simply use a word processing programme.



At work

If you write down plans for particular work tasks, keep these plans in a folder. If you need to carry out a task again, then you will not need to draw up a new plan. Over time, update the plans with any changes you make to the way you carry out the tasks.



Find out

Irene's employers had written up **standard operating procedures** (SOPs) for cleaning the bedrooms. Find out if your employer has SOPs for particular tasks. They may be in an employee handbook.



Listening

Listen to a colleague describe the steps involved in a task. Can you repeat the steps back to them correctly? Make notes as your partner talks if you think this will help you.

It's okay to say no

It can be hard to say no to your supervisor. It can also be difficult to say no to your workmates when they're overstretched and ask you for help. But if you don't say no, you could be making trouble for yourself. It could mean that you take on too much and neglect your own work. If your work is not getting finished, you won't meet your targets. So sometimes you have to say no.

Dealing with pressure

Taking on too much work can put us under pressure. We may feel that everything in our day is urgent. It may mean that we:

- come into work early to try and get on top of everything, or
- stay late to try and finish jobs off.

If your working day is stressful, it may affect your home or social life. You may see less of your family, or you may be tired when you do see them. It's important to have a good **work-life balance**. Too much work upsets the balance and has a negative effect on your home life.



Talking about it

If you feel that you're taking on too much work, it might be a good time to talk to your supervisor. Sometimes you might agree to take on extra work for the short term, but long term it may put too much pressure on the rest of your work. If your supervisor isn't aware that you're under so much pressure, set up a meeting to discuss the situation.

Try it out

Words

Make sentences using these words. Write them in your notebook.

overstretched

under pressure

balance

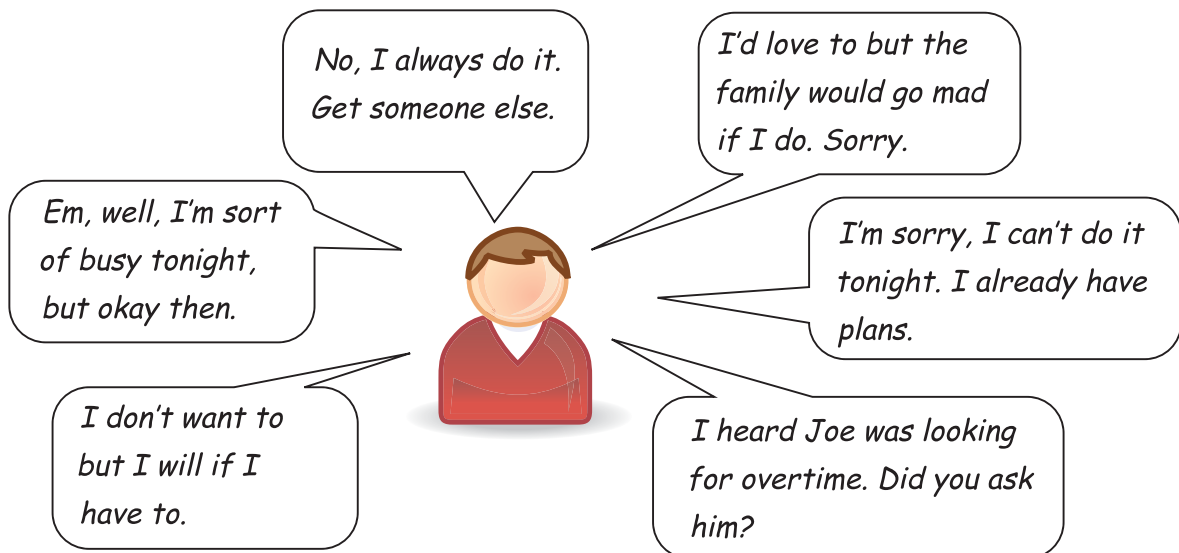
neglect

target

affect

Ways to say no

Frank has been asked to stay late at work, but he is expected home. What do you think is the best way for him to say no?



Yes and no

Copy the table into your notebook.

Write in ways of saying yes and no when you are asked to do extra work. Remember, say no to the extra work, not to the person. Then they won't take it personally.

Yes	No
Yeah, no problem.	I'm sorry, I can't.

Extension activities



At work

Be aware of the time it takes you to do each separate task. Write it down. If you are asked to take on extra work, you will then be able to see if you have time for it. By keeping an accurate account of your time, you can show your supervisor when you need extra help.



Writing

If you need to make a decision about something and are unsure what to do, draw up two lists, one for and one against. Seeing the reasons for and against written down helps you decide what to do, especially if one side of the list is much longer than the other.



Talk about

Generally speaking, we are a very polite nation and don't like to say no directly. Discuss the strategies we use to avoid doing something without saying no.



At home

Watch politicians being interviewed on television. Notice the different strategies they use to avoid saying no even when they are asked a yes-no question.



Design

Use a camera to take photos of different facial expressions, or collect pictures from magazines and newspapers. Make a collage. Try to identify what the people are saying from their expressions. How do we use body language to communicate that we don't want to do something?



Role play

Practise ways of saying no that are assertive yet polite. What words or phrases can you use, and what ones should you avoid?

Managing information

To achieve your goals you have to stay focused. Yet there can be many distractions in your day. For example, just as you're getting stuck into a job, you receive an email asking you to do something else. How do you manage all this information?

The two-minute rule

When you get a new request for work, pause for two minutes and think about the best solution for the job. Sometimes we jump straight in and may not think of the best way to deal with it. Ask yourself these questions.

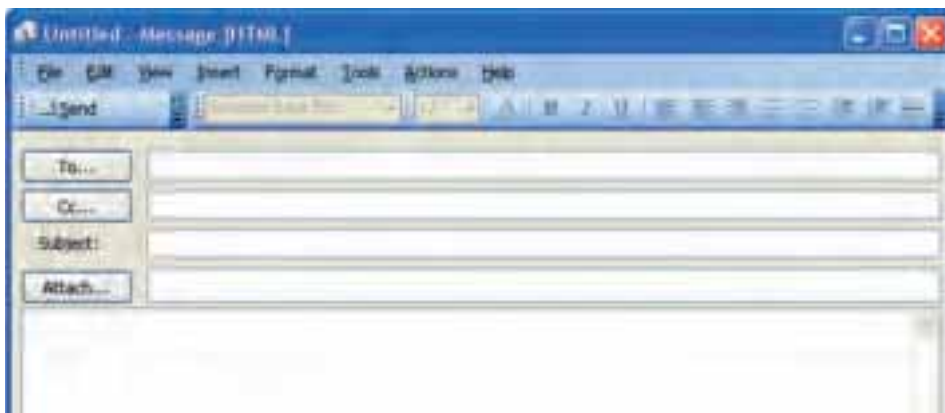
- Have I done this job or a similar job before?
- Does this job fit in with any of my other jobs?
- When is the best time for me to do this job?

By taking two minutes for a decision, you can save time in the long run.

Managing emails

One way to manage the amount of information is to limit the number of times you check your email. For example, you could check it three times a day, in the morning, at midday and in the afternoon. If someone wants you urgently, they will most likely contact you directly by phone. Otherwise, people may not mind waiting an hour or so for your response. If you check your email at agreed times, you can focus entirely on your daily tasks. Every workplace is different, so you might need to check this with your supervisor before you do it.

Using email




When you send an email, you should always say what the email is about in the subject field. The person receiving the message can read this and decide how important the message is.

Try it out

Subject

Look at these message subjects. Which messages should you read straight away and which ones can you leave for later?

1. Subject: Change in schedule for today.
2. Subject: Fwd: A joke for Friday.
3. Subject:  Monthly time sheets by next Monday.
4. Subject: Bring milk home with you.
5. Subject: From Cristina.
6. Subject: **!** Important, please read before lunchtime.

Are you unsure of what some of the messages are about? How could the message subject explain the message more clearly?

! means that the message is important.

Fwd: means the message has been forwarded from someone else.



means that the message includes an attached file.

Spelling

Find the 10 spelling mistakes in the text and rewrite it correctly.

One way to manag the amount of inforation is to limit the number of times you check your email. For exampel, you could check it tree times a day, in the mornning, at midday and in the afternoon. If someone wants you urgently, they will most likly contract you directly by phone. Otherwise, people may not minde waiting an hour or so for your response. If you cheeck your email at agreed times, you can focus entirely on your daily tasks. Every workplace is diferent, so you might need to check this with your supervisor before you do it.

Extension activities

At work



What are the different ways you receive or record information at work? Some have two purposes. For example, an email is a way of receiving information, but if you save it on your computer, it is also a way of recording information. Look at each way and decide which works best for you. Encourage your colleagues and customers to communicate information to you in this way.

Find out



The two-minute rule is very useful for giving you time to think and plan. However, if the job has a number of possible solutions, you might like to brainstorm your ideas or use a **mindmap**. What do your colleagues know about these two tools for planning?



Computer skills

Set up an email contact list in your email programme. Create different lists that relate to different parts of your job or your home life. This makes it easier to send one email to many people.



At home

Discuss different systems for organising information at home. Unless you have a system, it's difficult to keep track of all your bills and appointments.

Using numbers



A calendar or diary is a very useful way of managing appointments and dates. For example, if you work shifts, you can easily keep track of your work hours by writing them into a diary. You can write in your days off and your holidays. Then you can arrange appointments knowing they won't clash with anything else. Get a diary or calendar and write up your time commitments.



Writing

We can write dates in different formats. Are you confident you can write dates when filling in a form or writing a letter? Try it out.

How can I make changes?

If you want to use your time better, there are three important steps.

1. Examine how you spend your time.
2. Set new goals and plan how to reach them.
3. Put the plans into action – make changes.

The last step is probably the hardest because it means changing your **routine**.

Breaking the routine

Everyone has a routine. A routine gives you a structure for using your time and dividing the day into different parts. As a result, you feel comfortable in your routine. You might hear yourself saying: “That’s the way I always do this job” or “Time for my morning coffee”. It’s easy to do what you’ve always done and what you feel safe with. This is your **comfort zone**. However, it may well be better to do that job a different way. Or it may be better to keep going until you finish the job and go for a coffee another time. Breaking the routine may seem hard but it is a good way to get more from your time.

Being active about change

Some people would prefer not to change. It would make life much easier. However, you need to learn to change because the world is constantly changing. With modern technology most work practices have changed. If you think about it for a moment, there have probably been changes in your job and you have changed with them. As difficult as it is, you can decide to change. Only now you are not reacting to changes around you; you are creating change and actively taking control of your day. It’s a big step but you can do it.

Working with change

It’s a good idea to introduce changes gradually. Trying to change your routine in one day could leave you feeling confused. It’s also likely that you won’t get as much done as you hoped. But stick with your plans. It’s normal to experience difficulties during a period of change. Change takes time and effort.

Try it out

Answer these questions.

Work with a partner and write your ideas in your notebook.

1. If you want to use your time better, what three things do you need to do?
2. Why do people find change difficult?
3. Explain in your own words the meaning of comfort zone.
4. What advice does the information sheet give about introducing changes?

Spelling

Complete the words below by adding one of the letter blends.

The words are from the information sheet.

pr

gr

pr

cr

tr

1. Introduce the changesadually.
2. Don'ty to change your routine in one day.
3. It's difficult toeate change.
4. Some people wouldefer not to change.
5. With modern technology most workactices change.

Now complete these words.

pr

dr

br

fr

1. I don'tive so I take the bus to work.
2. Myother works for the council.
3. I take my lunch out of theidge before I go to work.
4. The companyovides a cleaning service.

Extension activities

Talk about

Describe your daily routine. Do you have a routine when you arrive at work, or a routine when you arrive home after work? Are these routines helpful?



How do you feel about change? Are you a person who reacts to change, or do you make change happen? Think of a major change that has happened in the last two years, either at home or at work. How easy (or difficult) was it to make the change? How do you feel about it now?

At work

Discuss three changes that have happened in your workplace and how they have changed the way you work. Have the changes been positive or negative? Can you suggest some changes for the company you work for?



Writing

Prepare a **curriculum vitae** with all your qualifications and work experience on it. Save it on your computer and update it regularly when you gain new qualifications or experience. You never know when you might want to apply for a promotion.



Computer skills

Use the Internet to research the company you work for. When was it formed? Has it always been in the same industry? How has it changed?



At home

Do you have a routine in your social life? Are you happy with it, or is there something else you would like to do? If so, do you need to discuss these changes with the people who live with you?



Notes

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