

Make the Most of Your Workday

Boost Productivity with Time Blocking



At Exos, we believe that Work + Rest = Success, meaning that while work is important, we also need appropriate time to recover to be successful. So, how do you make sure you and your team are getting your jobs done while still prioritizing recovery? Easy. You've got to be better with your time. And to do that, a little bit of planning goes a long way. But first, there is some context you need.

Better Focus, Better Time Management

We've been conditioned for years to see multi-tasking as a good thing, but it just isn't. The idea of **task-switching**, or the process of switching focus and attention from one task to another, slows down your productivity and increases the risk of errors. Ever respond to emails during a meeting only for someone to call your name with a question? Your brain will have to switch from the email conversation back to the meeting, and likely you won't have the best answer. Now it's important to note there is voluntary and involuntary task-switching. Voluntary is how you set up your calendar — what you commit yourself to knowingly. Involuntary is the result of distractions — the sudden ping you get while you are in a meeting.

We can't always avoid task-switching, but we can limit it and mitigate its effects. A key way to do this is with **time blocking**. It goes by many names, time blocking, calendar chunking, or clustering, but the idea is the same: divide your calendar into larger blocks of time dedicated to specific types of tasks or activities. The idea is to create a schedule that allows for better focus and productivity while helping to prioritize your time, establish a routine, and reduce the mental stress of constant task-switching.

The Problem with Task-Switching

40%

Reduction in productivity caused by task-switching.

50%

Increase in errors due to task-switching.

23 min

And 15 seconds — the average time it takes to return to a task after it has been interrupted.



So, what's the TLDR?

Task-switching causes you to work harder to get less done. With the right skills, you and your team can work more efficiently so you can have the time you need for recovery.

How Can You Actually Boost Productivity?

The goal here is to minimize task-switching where possible and mitigate the impact when it can't be avoided. Now, this will take a bit of work up-front, but the time you save will make that an easy cost. You're not going to get this 100% every week — and that is ok! Remember that any progress is better than none. We suggest sharing these tips with your team to help everyone get on the same page.



Each Week:

Set aside time at the beginning of the week to make a plan. The amount of time will vary from person to person, and you'll probably get quicker the more you practice. For a first pass, block your calendar for 30 to 60 minutes at the beginning of your week. We recommend checking your email and calendar first, as both can impact your task list for the week.

- 01 Make a List of Tasks** — take a look at what needs to be done that week. Include your meetings, due dates, and the specific action items needed to complete each overarching task. For instance, instead of just “lead Thursday team meeting,” make a note that you need to create an agenda, complete and/or send pre-work, create a deck, etc. Also, don't forget to include recurring tasks like checking email or making phone calls.
- 02 Make Note of Priorities** — is something due this week? Mark as a priority and the due date. Is someone else waiting on you to move a project forward? Mark as a priority. If you reach the end of your week and only certain items can be completed, make sure those tasks are noted as priorities.
- 03 Start Time Blocking** — Is there a pattern emerging on your to-do list? Look for similarities and group those tasks together. Now look at your calendar:
 - a. Make note of your existing meetings** so you can ensure you are prepared for each, and knowing when they are scheduled will help you plan how to block the surrounding time.
 - b. Schedule time for recurring, daily tasks** (like checking email) — and be realistic, not optimistic, about how much time you need!
 - c. Look at your calendar** and block off time for your priority projects and recurring tasks. For example, you might schedule a block of time for focused work, a block of time for meetings, and a block of time for email. Depending on your job, you may want those “focused work” blocks to be vague or specific. If you know a task is going to create a dedicated amount of time during your week, go ahead and block that in. Or you can reevaluate each morning and schedule your priority tasks then.



Each Day:

- **Set Intentions** — At the beginning of each day (or at the end of the day, plan for the next), set intentions for your blocks of time. Did you accomplish what needed to be done the day before? Is there anything due? How can you best use your time today?
- **Reduce Distractions** — Distractions cause involuntary task-switching. If you need to be heads-down on a project, when realistic, use “do not disturb” on your phone, slack, email, etc. Remember, you set aside time for your recurring tasks, and you can respond to your emails during the blocked time for email.
- **Take Breaks** — Taking regular breaks throughout the day can help you stay focused and minimize the potential mental stress of task-switching. Try to take short breaks (five to ten minutes) every hour or so to recharge and refocus your attention.



Are you ready for a winning workforce?

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