



Tips for Managing your Attention Handout

For [additional resources](#) go to this tool's landing page

Purpose

This handout is a compilation of strategies that can be used to help you focus your attention. Withing this handout you will find the following:

- [Tips for Setting Boundaries and Effectively Using Time](#)
- [Tips for Unplugging from Routine](#)
- [Tips for Managing Email](#)
- [Tips for Managing the Phone](#)
- [Tips for Managing Mobile Devices](#)
- [Tips for Handling Social Media](#)



Tips for Setting Boundaries and Effectively Using Time

Often, to be most effective, efficient, and creative in our work, we need to focus our full attention on a particular task. If your job duties requires this, you should carve out time and space that is free from other distractions including the needs and priorities of colleagues, both peers and subordinates. The following are a few tips for setting boundaries to create time and space for yourself to focus on what matters most:

- Make it known when you need to focus with no distractions:
 - Block out time on your public calendar (“unavailable”)
 - Use a “do not disturb” sign on your office door or cubicle
 - Announce it at a staff meeting in advance
- If a colleague “drops-in” on you, greet them politely, as you do not want to discourage “face-to-face” interactions or “open door” policies; however, be clear:
 - You need to focus on something else in the moment
 - Offer to schedule another time to talk about their concern
- Find an alternate space that is away from your normal workstation, such as:
 - Unused meeting, conference, or breakout room
 - Work from home
 - Library
 - Cafeteria or offsite coffee shop

Whatever space you use should be conducive to how you work. Some people like absolute silence, while others thrive in a busy space full of white noise. Working from home has its own set of opportunities and challenges for getting things done. Be thoughtful with whatever you chose.

Time is a finite resource that we will never get back. Be strategic and intentional with your calendar. Do not overbook yourself. Make sure every space on your calendar is being used intentionally to most effectively support your goals. This includes how you spend your lunchtime, scheduled breaks, and rare free moments. Some questions to consider:

- Will I perform better if take a lunch break to refuel and rest my mind or should I squeeze in another conference call?
- Should I chat with colleagues in the break room or should I go outside for a walk?
- Do I need to attend this meeting or can I delegate to an emerging leader on my team or within my organization?
- In the long run, will my organization be better if I attend one more event or should I find time to coach a colleague or mentor a subordinate?



Tips for Unplugging from Your Daily Routine

As part of your daily time management routine:

- Touch paper or email only once. Reading and answering email can consume your whole day if you let it. Instead, set a limit of one hour a day for this task and stick to it. The easiest way to do this is to assign a solid block of time to this task rather than answering email on demand.
- Set aside uninterrupted planning time
- Get organized: Are you wasting a lot of time looking for things? Put everything on your calendar, sort everything on your desk, and organize the file management system on your computer so you can easily find what you're looking for
- Prioritize tasks: You should start each day with a session prioritizing the tasks for that day and. If you have 20 tasks on a given day, use the Time Management Matrix to help you decide what you truly need to accomplish?
- Don't procrastinate: A wise person does at once, what a fool does last. Both do the same thing; only at different times.
- Use a "gatekeeper"
- Batch activities to maximize time spent
- Do those things only YOU can do; delegate or outsource the rest. Delegation is one of the hardest things to do, but there's no need for you to be a one-person show, you need to let other people carry some of the load. Delegation shares the tasks you'd be better off leaving to someone else, so you can make the most of the time that you have.



Tips for Managing Email

Email has become one of the, if not the, most dominant forms of professional communication. Huge gains in productivity were realized from the 1980s to 2000s, but its over-use, and misuse has contributed to the rise of the 24/7 work culture as well as changing social norms in the workplace. Email is important but use it wisely:

- Set reasonable expectations for response times. By instantly responding to emails, we set high expectations across the organization.
- Before responding ask, *“Can it wait?”*
- Remember, email is not the same as Instant Messenger or a chat room.
- To set clear expectations for responses, try using a courtesy auto-responder with the following message, *“I will be checking my inbox at 9:00 AM, 11:45 AM, and 3:30 PM today, please call if urgent!”*
- Turn-off alerts and/or shutdown the email application when focusing on a particular task
- Be mindful of other people’s time and attention; do not add individuals to the CC: or BCC: lines if they do not have a pressing “need to know”
- If possible, keep work email off of personal devices (and vice versa)

The same principles apply to internal chat/messenger services such as Slack or GroupMe. These services are often marketed as “productivity” and “collaboration” platforms but often create distractions and add to “busyness.” If your time and attention is not needed for a specific conversation, log out and focus on what’s in front of you.



Tips for Using and Managing the Phone

In today's hyper-busy and connected world, using the telephone or other voice communications can seem outdated and "inconvenient" ("just text me"); however, calling someone directly can be the most effective by allowing for:

- Faster, clearer answers to urgent matters
- Avoiding misinterpretation of tone, context, and intentions
- Helping to build team cohesion
- More opportunities for "chance" conversations ("oh by the way... did you know ... ?") and the exchange of ideas

If you do decide to "pickup" and use the phone:

- Do not rush through the conversation
- It might help to jot down the things you want to cover on a piece of paper so you can come back and check during the call to see if you are not forgetting something important
- Be prepared for small talk
- Give the other person the opportunity to speak and address concerns of theirs
- Do not assume it is a good time for the other person to speak. Offer them the opportunity to call you back or schedule time to speak
- Try to only give your work number to professional contacts (vice versa with personal number).
- Always ask first:
 - Does this person have a need to reach me during the workday?
 - Do I want them to call me on the weekend?

Keep your contacts organized and up-to-date.

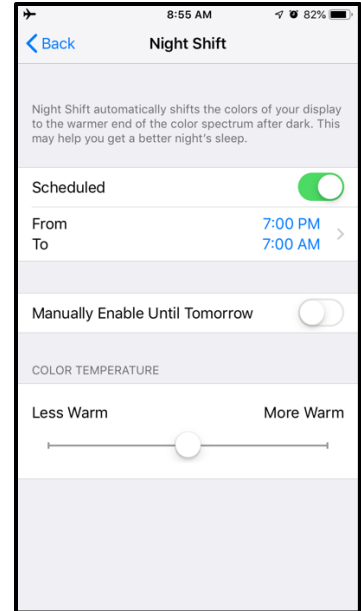
If you need to focus your attention, utilize the "Do Not Disturb" button and voicemail on your phone

- Screen calls
- Ask others to "hold my calls" then, determine which are highest priority to return

Tips for Managing Mobile Devices

Do not sleep with your cell phone in the bedroom. You don't need to read work emails as the last thing before you go to bed and the first thing you wake up to. Buy a standalone alarm clock.

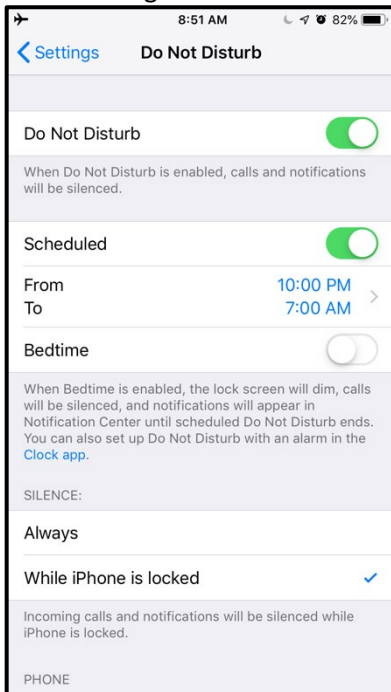
Utilize "bedtime" and "night shift" features on smartphones. The normal bright blue lighting on your screen can trick your brain into believing it is still daytime and interfere with your sleep schedule. Night Shift mode uses warmer colors on your screen during evening and night hours.



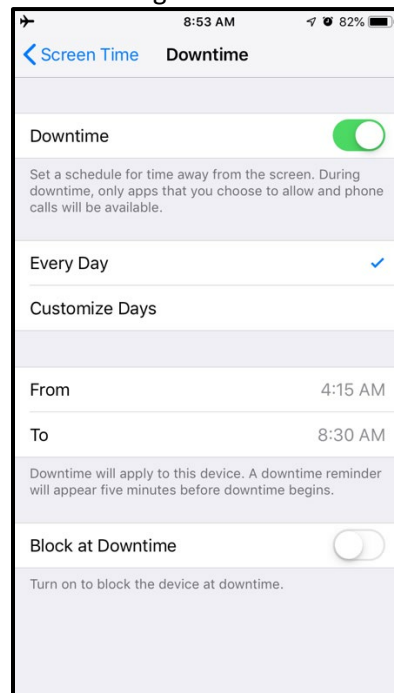
Below are a few features found on newer versions of the iPhone and iOS? Android; other smart phones and smart watches have similar features built-in as well.

Do Not Disturb Mode – Use this feature anytime you need to focus on a task or conversation.

Find it under "Settings" on the iPhone.

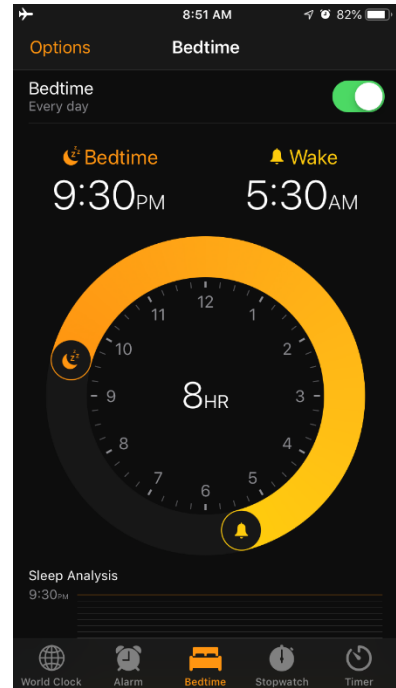


"Downtime" and "Quiet Hours" can be scheduled in advance and at regular intervals.

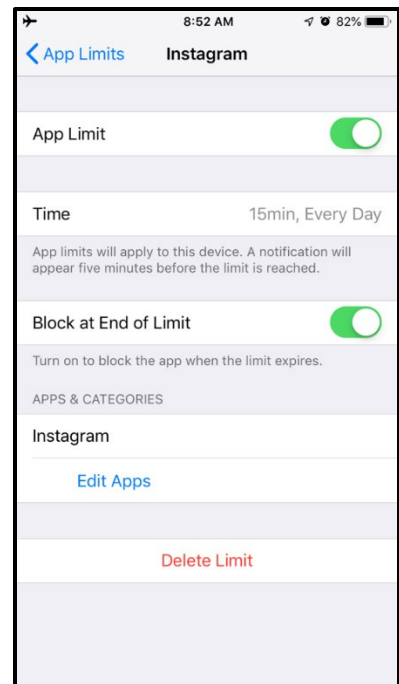




Bedtime Mode – Set this feature in advance when you want phone notifications to shut down for the evening and automatically turn back on in the morning in conjunction with your alarm.



App Limits – Sets limits for allowable time on any particular app such as social media platforms or news outlets.





Screen Time Reports – Provides data on how much time you spend on your phone. The report provides a daily and weekly summary and tracks long term trends. This is a great tool to use when trying to limit how much time you spend on your phone.



Ask the following question: Are there other standalone devices I could use to avoid overreliance on my smart phone?

- Calculator
- Notepad
- Datebook/calendar
- Landline!?!?



Tips for Handling Social Media

Social media is everywhere across our society. While it has utility in both our personal and professional lives, social media apps (applications) are designed to keep us engaged with their platform, and can distract us from what needs to get done in the real world. The following are some tips for handling social media:

- Install only work-essential apps on professional devices
- Always turn-off notifications
- Do not login to accounts at your workstation
- Practice social media “minimalism”
 - Does this platform enhance or detract from my goals?
 - Try selecting only one to two platforms for professional (i.e., LinkedIn, Twitter, or a blog) and personal use (i.e., Facebook, Instagram)
- If you are responsible for your organization’s social media:
 - Schedule content in advance in order to minimize time on platforms
 - Try using social media manager platforms such as Hoot Suite
 - Be intentional with who you follow/engage with
 - Curate or turn off feed
 - Be cautious
 - Be mindful of content you post and how it represents the organization; what if this went viral? How would it be perceived by the public?