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Grad School Coaching

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Time Focus Resources

Overview:

One of the most well known time-focus techniques is called the Pomodoro Technique

- 1. Choose a task to be accomplished**
- 2. Set the Pomodoro (timer) to 25 minutes**
- 3. Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings, then put a check on a sheet of paper or the app will keep track in a table per month of how many Pomodoros you accomplish**
- 4. Take a short break (5 minutes is OK)**
- 5. Every 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break**

Time focus using the Pomodoro Technique can be modified to meet your individual needs (i.e. 45 minute time focus blocks instead of 25 minute). Once you find what is best for you, stay with that format, do not continually deviate.

Useful Apps & Chrome Extensions

- **Be Focused – Focus Timer** – Sits in Menu Bar on laptop/desktop (free or paid version)
- **Pomo Timer: Ultimate Productivity Booster** – Sits in Menu Bar on laptop/desktop (free or paid version)
- **FocusMe:** A Pomodoro Timer - Chrome extension that also includes a built-in website blocker
- **Marina: Pomodoro® Assistant** - Chrome extension

Article = Productivity 101: An Introduction to The Pomodoro Technique

Modified from source: <https://lifehacker.com/productivity-101-a-primer-to-the-pomodoro-technique-1598992730>

Completely a long list of tasks is difficult, especially if you are a graduate student with unstructured time, self-employed or need to do things for yourself that you usually put off, like paying bills. There always seems to be something else to do: a drawer that could be organized, a phone call to your sister or checking flight prices on a trip you have no intention of taking.

Enter: the Pomodoro Technique. This popular time-management method can help you power through distractions, hyper-focus and get things done in short bursts, while taking frequent breaks to come up for air and relax. Best of all, it's easy. If you have a busy job where you're expected to produce, it's a great way to get through your tasks. Let's break it down and see how you can apply it to your work.

We've definitely discussed the Pomodoro Technique before. We gave a brief description of it a few years back, and highlighted its distraction-fighting, brain training benefits around the same time. You even voted it your favorite productivity method. However, we've never done a deep dive into how it works and how to get started with it. So, let's do that now.

What is the Pomodoro Technique?

The Pomodoro Technique was invented in the early 1990s by developer, entrepreneur, and author Francesco Cirillo. Cirillo named the system "Pomodoro" after the tomato-shaped timer he used to track his work as a university student. The methodology is simple: When faced with any large task or series of tasks, break the work down into short, timed intervals (called "Pomodoros") that are spaced out by short breaks. This trains your brain to focus for short periods and helps you stay on top of deadlines or constantly refilling inboxes. With time it can even help improve your attention span and concentration.

Pomodoro is a cyclical system. Working in short sprints makes sure you're consistently productive. You also get to take regular breaks that bolster your motivation and keep you creative.

How the Pomodoro Technique works

The Pomodoro Technique is probably one of the simplest productivity methods to implement. All you'll need is a timer. Beyond that, there are no special apps, books, or tools required (though plenty of them out there if you'd like to go that route—more on that later). Cirillo's book, The Pomodoro Technique, is a helpful read, but Cirillo himself doesn't hide the core of the method behind a purchase. Here's how to get started with Pomodoro, in five steps:

1. Choose a task to be accomplished.
2. Set the Pomodoro to 25 minutes (the Pomodoro is the timer)
3. Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings, then put a check on your sheet of paper (some apps/Chrome extensions track this for you)

4. Take a short break (5 minutes is OK)
5. Every 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break

That “longer break” is usually on the order of 15-30 minutes, whatever it takes to make you feel recharged and ready to start another 25-minute work session. Repeat that process a few times over the course of a workday, and you actually get a lot accomplished—and take plenty of breaks to grab a cup of coffee or refill your water bottle in the process.

It’s important to note that a Pomodoro is an indivisible unit of work—that means if you’re distracted part-way by a coworker, meeting, or emergency, you either have to end the Pomodoro there (saving your work and starting a new one later), or you have to postpone the distraction until the Pomodoro is complete. If you can do the latter, Cirillo suggests the “Inform, Negotiate and Call back” strategy:

- Inform the other (distracting) party that you’re working on something right now
- Negotiate a time when you can get back to them about the distracting issue in a timely manner
- Call back the other party when your Pomodoro is complete and you’re ready to tackle their issue

Of course, not every distraction is that simple, and some things demand immediate attention—but not every distraction does. Sometimes it’s perfectly fine to tell your coworker “I’m in the middle of something right now, but can I get back to you in....ten minutes?” Doing so doesn’t just keep you in the groove, it also gives you control over your workday.

How to get started with the Pomodoro Technique

Since a timer is the only essential Pomodoro tool, you can get started with any phone with a timer app, a countdown clock, or even a plain old egg timer. Cirillo himself prefers a manual timer, and says winding one up “confirms your determination to work.” Even so, we’ve highlighted a number of Pomodoro apps that offer more features than a simple timer offers. Here are a few to consider:

- **Marinara Timer (Web)** is a [webapp we’ve highlighted before](#) that you can keep open in a pinned tab. You can select your timer alerts so you know when to take a break, or reconfigure the work times and break times to suit you. It’s remarkably flexible, and you don’t have to install anything.
- **Tomighty (Win/Mac/Linux)** is a cross-platform [desktop Pomodoro timer](#) that you can fire and forget, following the traditional Pomodoro rules, or use to customize your own work and break periods.
- **Eggcellent (Formerly Pomodorable (OS X))** is a combination Pomodoro timer and to-do app. It offers [more visual cues when your tasks are complete](#) and what you have coming up next, and it integrates nicely with OS X’s Reminders app. Plus, you can estimate how many pomodoros you’ll need to complete a task, and then track your progress.
- **Focus Timer (iOS)** [used to be called PomodoroPro](#), and is a pretty feature-rich timer for iPhone and iPad. You can customize work and break durations, review your work history

to see how your focus is improving, easily see how much time is left in your work session, and the app even offers a star-based rating system to keep you motivated. You can even customize the sounds, and hear the clock ticking when you lock your phone so you stay on task.

These are just a few good tools to choose from. You can also use Google as a timer. Don't hesitate to experiment with others, but remember, the focus of the Pomodoro Technique is on the work, not the timer you use. If you would like an actual tomato timer like Cirillo uses, this one is available for \$7 at Amazon. Alternatively, you can buy a tomato timer and a copy of the book together from him directly. If you want Kindle or ePub versions of the book, grab them directly from Cirillo's store as well.

Who the Pomodoro Technique works best for

The Pomodoro Technique is often championed by developers, designers and other people who have to turn out regular packages of creative work. Essentially, people who have to actually produce something to be reviewed by others. That means everyone from authors writing their next book to software engineers working on the next big video game can all benefit from the timed work sessions and breaks that Pomodoro offers.

However, it's also useful for people who don't have such rigid goals or packages of work. Anyone else with an "inbox" or queue they have to work through can benefit as well. If you're a system's engineer with tickets to work, you can set a timer and start working through them until your timer goes off. Then it's time for a break, after which you come back and pick up where you left off or start a new batch of tickets. If you build things or work with your hands, the frequent breaks give you the opportunity to step back and review what you're doing, think about your next steps, and make sure you don't get exhausted. The system is remarkably adaptable to different kinds of work.

Finally, it's important to remember that Pomodoro is a productivity system—not a set of shackles. If you're making headway and the timer goes off, it's OK to pause the timer, finish what you're doing and then take a break. The goal is to help you get into the zone and focus—but it's also to remind you to come up for air. Regular breaks are important for your productivity. Also, keep in mind that Pomodoro is just one method, and it may or may not work for you. It's flexible, but don't try to shoehorn your work into it if it doesn't fit. Productivity isn't everything—it's a means to an end, and a way to spend less time on what you have to do so you can put time to the things you want to do. If this method helps, go for it. If not, don't force it.

Integrating Pomodoro with other productivity methods

Since the Pomodoro Technique focuses squarely on how you do your work and not on how you organize your work, it's just begging to be remixed with other methods and systems .

For example, if you're a fan of GTD (aka, Getting Things Done), you can easily use GTD to organize and prioritize—and then use Pomodoro to actually get your work done. It also works well with methods like Kaizen, which emphasizes continual improvement over time, or Scrum,

which demands flexibility in organization and priority, but still requires results. Many productivity systems focus on organization or specific tools. In those cases, the goal is to help you avoid forgetting things and prioritize your work. Pomodoro's focus is on making sure you make progress on your tasks, stay focused, and get things done without going insane. However, even though it plays well with others, resist the urge to over-hack your method and make it unnecessarily complicated. Pomodoro's utility is in its simplicity.

Finally, the Pomodoro method is highly personal. Since it only really impacts how you work, you don't need to get other people on-board with it before it's useful.

At this stage, you have the tools required to get up and running with the Pomodoro system if you want to give it a try. It's not difficult, and you may find that it helps you focus. There's more to the picture here, and Cirillo's book can offer more guidance and specific examples if you need them. Beyond that, here's a short list of additional resources worth reading:

- [The Pomodoro Technique Blog](#)
- [The Pomodoro Getting Started Guide](#)
- [The Pomodoro Technique Illustrated](#)
- [Our Pomodoro Tagpage](#)

To a certain point, you can only read so much about the Pomodoro Technique—you have to just try it out on your own and see if it works for you. With luck, it'll give you a way to be continuously productive while keeping you from burning out. Don't worry if you don't rack up five or 10 pomodoros in a day: Many people who love the method note you may only get one or two in before you're distracted by something unavoidable. The upshot however is that those one or two pomodoros may be more productive than anything else you do all day.