## Lesson 7 Worksheet: Productivity for Creative People

This worksheet will help you optimize your workflow for maximum creativity and minimum stress and drudgery.

The worksheet refers to my free e-book *Time Management for Creative People*, which you can download from this page: <http://www.wishfulthinking.co.uk/2007/12/03/time-management-for-creative-people-free-e-book/>

**1. Routines, Systems, Spontaneity**   
  
Which of the following is the weakest link in your working day?

* **Routines** – Organising your day around your daily rhythms of arousal and rest, so that you spend your peak performance time on challenging creative work.
* **Systems** – Using robust productivity systems to captue and process all of your commitments.
* **Spontaneity** – Leaving the door open for insight and inspiration to strike, and being willing to follow your flights of fancy wherever they take you.

What difference would it make to you if you improved this area of your work? Use the relevant parts of the next three questions to fine-tune your workflow.

**2. Routines**

(i) What time of day do you find it easiest to produce your best work?

* Mornings
* Afternoons
* Evenings
* Middle of the night

If you don’t know the answer, observe your working patterns over the next few days. Notice when you are most energized and alert, vs tired and sluggish.

(ii) From now on, do everything you can to keep your ‘peak productivity time’ clear for focused work:

* Put it in the diary
* If you have a choice, arrange meetings around your peak time
* Don’t answer e-mail or do routine tasks during peak time

This is easier if you work alone than in a shared office. But do whatever you can to influence your schedule. If you’re in an office with frequent demands on your time, it may help to talk to your boss, and **explain how you will be more productive and deliver better work** if you can have some flexibility in arranging your schedule.

(iii) The following resources will help you develop a more creative working routine:

* *Time Management for Creative People* chapters 2 & 3
* The Key to Creating Remarkable Things <http://the99percent.com/tips/6658/the-key-to-creating-remarkable-things>

**3. Systems**

(i) Capture your commitments

If you have captured **all** of your important commitments in a place where you can review them easily, it’s much easier to concentrate on whatever you’re doing in the moment, safe in the knowledge that you haven’t forgotten anything.

In his book *Getting Things Done* David Allen recommends using a limited number of ‘buckets’ to capture your commitments. The fewer buckets you have, the easier it is to review and process your tasks.

Here are my ‘buckets’ – once a task is recorded in one of these places, I know I won’t forget it. (I may not have time to do it all, but that’s an issue of priorities, not remembering!)

* Google calendar
* A to-do list notepad on my desk
* A spreadsheet of all my current projects
* My answerphones – mobile and landline
* My e-mail inbox
* The Notepad app on my iPhone

For more on buckets, see chapter 6 of *Time Management for Creative People*.

(ii) Process your commitments

At the start of the day, go through your buckets and make a list of the things you are going to do today. Make it short enough to be realistic (I do mine on a post-it note) and do your best to clear it every day.

When new commitments come in – put them on *tomorrow’s* to-do list, unless they are insanely urgent. Otherwise today’s to-do list will keep growing instead of shrinking.

At least once a week, go through your buckets and make sure you’re not behind on anything important.

For more on processing tasks – including e-mail – see chapters 4 and 5 of *Time Management for Creative People*.

(iii) Answer e-mail at set times

It will take you far less time to reply to 20 e-mails if you sit down and crank through them all at once, instead of interrupting other tasks and replying to each e-mail as it comes in.

Allocate one or two times of the day to answering e-mail – and aim to clear your inbox each time if possible.

Make exceptions for **seriously important AND urgent e-mails**. E.g. your boss or a client needing something on a deadline. Answer these when they come in – but make them the exception to the rule.

For more on processing e-mail, see chapter 5 of *Time Management for Creative People*.

(iv) Batch similar tasks

As with e-mail, if you do your filing all at once, it takes less time. Same with your errands to town. Same with phone calls. Same with invoicing. And so on.

Whenever possible, set aside time to batch process similar tasks. (Make sure it’s not your peak productivity time!) This will make you more efficient so you’ll spend less time on mundane work.

(v) Backlogs

If you have an overflowing inbox or a backlog of work in another format, I recommend Mark Forster’s advice (from *Do It Tomorrow*):

1. Isolate the backlog so it can’t get any bigger (e.g. move the e-mail into a dedicated ‘backlog’ folder)
2. Process the rest of your work as normal (e.g. deal with the latest incoming e-mail, so you don’t fall further behind)
3. Dedicate time to eliminating the backlog (e.g. devote an hour a day or even a whole day to processing the e-mail backlog)

(vi) Build in accountability

If you’re not 100% confident of finishing what you start, make a public commitment – it can be a powerful motivation. E.g. the marathon runner who gets her friends to sponsor her beforehand. See how I used this in How I kept My New Year’s Resolution: <http://www.wishfulthinking.co.uk/2009/05/15/new-years-resolution/> **4. Spontaneity**

Paradoxically, the better organized you are, the easier it is to be spontaneous and follow your instincts, without neglecting important responsibilities. Here are some suggestions for retaining the element of surprise and discovery in your working life.

(i) Take regular time off

Coffee-breaks, lunchtimes, evenings, weekends, holidays – make sure to make time for these if you want to be really creative and productive.

Hard work is good, but beyond a certain point it becomes counterproductive. Burn the candle at both ends for too long and you risk burning yourself – and your talent – out.

(ii) Capture ideas

We all know that inspiration strikes at the most unexpected times, so make sure you’ve got a handy way of catching those ideas that fall out of the blue: a notepad, a voice recorder, a camera – or a phone that acts as all three.

[www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com) offers a way of capturing and integrating information from all kinds of sources – paper, digital files, photographs, web pages etc.

(iii) Meet new people

There are few things as stimulating as meeting new people who share your passion for creativity but with different backgrounds and experience. More on creative networking later in the course…

(iii) Skive off

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy (or Jill a dull girl). Some days you just don’t feel like working – and why should you? Cut yourself some slack, go for a walk and see where it takes you. If you find some great inspiration along the way, that’s a bonus – but at the very least you’ll feel relaxed and refreshed when you start work again tomorrow…