

Hack Your Productivity

This handout highlights principles from biology and brain science to help you determine when, why, and how to **create proactive productivity habits**.

Why When Matters

By understanding your own [chronobiology](#), you can better understand the right times of day to plan different activities. In his book [When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing](#), author Daniel Pink outlines key elements of the brain and body's response system. By exploring the hidden patterns of your day, you can better tailor your time into an ideal schedule on how – and when – you work, play, and live.

The order in which you experience productivity stages depends on your chronotype, or your personal pattern of circadian rhythms. Your natural preferences indicate if you're a "lark" (morning person), an "owl" (evening person), or a "third bird" (somewhere in the middle). As Pink outlines, those who are morning orientated (about 80% of people) go through three stages in a single day:

- **Peak:** our mood rises in the morning
- **Trough:** our mood declines in the early to mid-afternoon
- **Recovery:** our mood boosts back up in the early evening

For those who are more evening oriented may experience their day in the reverse set of stages. See more details in this [article](#) with Pink. In general, you hit your most productive peak three hours after waking and your least productive peak seven hours after waking. This [visual](#) outlines the timing more and this is a [PDF](#) of Pink's When Daily Planner.

As you put your productivity in to practice, use the timing of your day to help drive new habits. Habit stacking is adding small, specific steps to your day that are timed with your regular habits (e.g., drinking a glass of water after brushing your teeth in the morning). Adding an intentional habit to an established habit helps your mind associate the new task with part of your accepted routine. One example is using the breaks between meetings in your trough to do yoga stretches or burpees – the physical activity will boost your brain *and* your energy.

Go Slow to Go Fast

One common misperception is that we humans are good at multitasking. The reality is that, in doing so, we're asking our brains to switch between multiple efforts without completing much of anything in a sequential order. In the book [Brain Rules](#), John Medina addresses the myth of multitasking, which is really called task switching. When it comes to productivity, the focus is on the brain's ability to pay attention and complete tasks versus the physical ability to be able to do different things simultaneously (like walk and talk).

When you are starting a new task that requires concentration, you are using the [prefrontal cortex](#) of your brain, often called the Executive Function. As you take different steps in your task, the brain shifts along with you – all taking fractions of sections. This process is called "rule activation." However, when a distraction comes in, your brain needs to process the details of it. If it is a welcome distraction, the brain now responds from its [amygdala](#), where it processes emotional responses. The repetitive switching affects our performance. [Studies show](#) that a person who is interrupted takes 50 percent longer to accomplish a task. Not only that, he or she makes up to 50 percent more errors.

Decision science relates to the process of your brain making rapid decisions throughout the day. When we try to force our brain to multitask, it gets fatigued from the task switching and decision making. One way to minimize your task switching is to [configure your phone](#) to be less distracting.