

Reclaim Your Time:

20 Great Ways to Find More Free Time

“The really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure.” - Henry David Thoreau

Are there a hundred different things you wish you could do with your life someday — anything from exercising to meditation or yoga to writing that novel you always wished you could write to reading more to relaxing and watching the sunrise?

But perhaps you never have the time, like most people.

The truth is, we all have the same amount of time, and it's finite and in great demand. But some of us have made the time for doing the things we love doing, and others have allowed the constant demands and pressures and responsibilities of life to dictate their days.

It's time to move from the second group back into the first. Reclaim your time. Create the life you want and make the most of the free time you lay claim to.

It's not hard, though it does take a little bit of effort and diligence.

Reclaiming that free time

Take my life, for example: there was a time, not too long ago, when my day was packed from morning to night, when I had meetings and long to-do lists and worked long hours and the rest of my time was filled up with social engagements and meetings for civic responsibilities. I had little time for my family, which ate me up, and little time to do the things I've always wanted to do.

I've always wanted to write, but never had the time. I've always wanted to exercise, but was too busy. I always wanted to travel, but who

can get away? I've always wanted to spend time with my kids, but work comes first, right?

Wrong. I finally got smart and decided that my life is my own, to do with as I wished, and so I took a time out to decide what I really wanted my life to be like. Then I designed my life, and made a series of decisions and steps to get my life to what I wanted it to be.

Today, I wake early and exercise or spend some quiet time reading and writing. I've written a novel and a non-fiction book. I write this blog. I run and have finally run a marathon (two actually) and completed a triathlon. I spend afternoons and evenings and all weekends with my kids and wife.

My life is what I've always wanted it to be, because I designed it to be that way and worked to make that design come true. It can be that way for you, to the extent that you're willing to make changes. Even if you just want to free up a little time for a hobby or for doing something relaxing, you can do that.

20 Ways to Find More Free Time

Not all of these will be applicable to your life — choose the ones you can apply and give them a try:

1. You need to block off at least an hour. Several hours or half a day is better. A whole day would be awesome. A weekend would be even more ideal, though not necessary practical for many folks. With this block of time, take a look at your life with some perspective. Is it what you've always wanted? How would you get to where you've always wanted to be? What do you enjoy doing, but don't have enough time to do? What things actually fill up your day? Are there things you could drop or minimize to make more time? We'll look at some of these things in the following items, but it starts with taking a time out to think and plan.

2. **Find your essentials.** What is it that you love to do? Make a short list of 4–5 things. These are the things you want to make room for.
3. **Find your time-wasters.** What do you spend a lot of your time on that isn't on your essential list? Take a close look at these things and really think about whether they're necessary, or if there are ways to reduce, minimize or eliminate these things. Sometimes you do things because you assume they're necessary, but if you give it some thought you can find ways to drop them from your life. Figure out what you do simply to waste time — maybe surfing certain sites, watching TV, talking a lot at the water cooler, etc. You're going to want to minimize these time-wasters to make room for the more important stuff, the stuff that makes you happy and that you love to do.
4. **Schedule the time.** As you sit down and think about your life and what you want to do, versus what you actually do, you will be looking at ways to free up time. It's crucial that you take a blank weekly schedule (you can just write it out on a piece of paper, or use your calendar) and assign blocks for the things you love — the stuff on your essentials list. If you want to exercise, for example, when will you do it? Put the blocks of time on your schedule, and make these blocks the most important appointments of your week. Schedule the rest of your life around these blocks.
5. **Consolidate.** There are many things you do, scattered throughout your day or your week, that you might be able to consolidate in order to save time. A good example is errands — instead of running one or two a day, do them all in one day to save time and gas. Another example is email, or any kind of communication — batch process your email instead of checking and reading and

responding throughout the day. Same thing with meetings, paperwork, anything that you do regularly.

6. **Cut out meetings.** This isn't possible for everyone, but in my experience meetings take up a lot of time to get across a little information, or to make easy decisions that could be made via email or phone. As much as you can, minimize the number of meetings you hold and attend. In some cases this might mean talking to your boss and telling her that you have other priorities, and asking to be excused. In other cases this might mean asking the people holding the meeting if you can get the info in other ways. If so, you've saved yourself an hour or so per meeting (sometimes more).
7. **Declutter your schedule.** If you have a heavily packed schedule, full of meetings and errands and tasks and projects and appointments, you're going to want to weed it out so that it's not so jam-packed. Find the stuff that's not so essential and cancel them. Postpone other stuff. Leave big blank spaces in your schedule.
8. **Re-think your routine.** Often we get stuck in a routine that's anything but what we really want our days to be like. Is there a better way of doing things? You're the creator of your life — make a new routine that's more pleasant, more optimal, more filled with things you love.
9. **Cut back on email.** I mentioned email in an earlier point above, regarding consolidating, but it's such a major part of most people's lives that it deserves special attention. How often do you check email? How much time do you spend composing emails? If you spend a major part of your work day on email, as many people do (and as I once did), you can free up a lot of time by

reducing the time you spend in email. Now, this won't work for everyone, but it can work for many people: choose 2–3 key times during the day to process your inbox to empty, and keep your responses to 5 sentences. ([Read more.](#))

10. **Learn to say no.** If you say “yes” to every request, you will never have any free time. Get super protective about your time, and say “no” to everything but the essential requests. [Here's how.](#)
11. **Keep your list to 3.** When you make out your daily to-do list, just list the three Most Important Tasks you want to accomplish today. Don't make a laundry list of tasks, or you'll fill up all your free time. By keeping your task list small, but populated only by important tasks, you ensure that you are getting the important stuff done but not overloading yourself.
12. **Do your Biggest Rock first.** Of the three Most Important Tasks you choose for the day, pick the biggest one, or the one you're dreading most, and do that first. Otherwise you'll put that off as much as possible and fill your day with less important things. Don't allow yourself to check email until that [Big Rock](#) is taken care of. It starts your day with a sense of major accomplishment, and leaves you with a lot of free time the rest of the day, because the most important thing is already done.
13. **Delegate.** If you have subordinates or coworkers who can do a task or project, try to delegate it. Don't feel like you need to do everything yourself. If necessary, spend a little time training the person to whom you're delegating the task, but that little time spent training will pay off in a lot of time saved later. Delegating allows you to focus on the core tasks and projects you should be focusing on.

14. **Cut out distractions.** What is there around your workspace that distracts you from the task at hand? Sometimes it's visual clutter, or papers lying around that call for your attention and action, or email or IM notifiers on your computer that pop up at the wrong time, or the phone, or coworkers. See if you can eliminate as many of these as possible — the more you can focus, the more effective you'll be and the less time you'll waste. That equals time saved for the good stuff.
15. **Disconnect.** The biggest of distractions, for most people, is the Internet. My most productive times are when I'm disconnected from the grid. Now, I'm not saying you need to be disconnected all the time, but if you really want to be able to effectively complete tasks, disconnect your Internet so you can really focus. Set certain times of the day for connectivity, and only connect during those periods.
16. **Outsource.** If you can't delegate, see if you can outsource. With the Internet, we can connect with people from all over the world. I've outsourced many things, from small tasks to checking email to legal work to design and editing work and more. That allows me to focus on the things I'm best at, the things I love doing, and saves me a lot of time.
17. **Make use of your mornings.** I find that mornings are the absolute best times to schedule the things I really want to do. I run, read and write in the mornings — three of the four things on my Essentials List (spending time with family is the other thing on the list). Mornings are great because your day hasn't been filled with a bunch of unscheduled, demanding, last-minute tasks that will push back those Essentials. For example, if you schedule something for late afternoon, by the time late afternoon rolls around, you might have a dozen other things newly added to your

to-do list, and you'll put off that late-afternoon Essential. Instead, schedule it for the morning, and it'll rarely (if ever) get pushed back.

18. **The Golden Right-after-work Time.** Other than mornings, I find the time just after work to be an incredible time for doing Essential things. Exercise, for example, is great in the 5-o'clock hour, as is spending time with family, or doing anything else relaxing.
19. **Your evenings.** The time before you go to bed is also golden, as it exists every single day, and it's usually completely yours to schedule. What do you want to do with this time? Read? Spend time with your kids? Work on a hobby you're passionate about? Take advantage of this time.
20. **Lunch breaks.** If the three golden times mentioned above don't work for you, lunch breaks are another good opportunity to schedule things. Some people like to exercise, or to take quiet times, during their lunch breaks. Others use this time to work on an important personal goal or project.

"The real problem of leisure time is how to keep others from using yours." -

Arthur Lacey