

# Productivity, Part 1: Getting Things Done, Using E-Mail, Scanners, Reference Managers, Note-taking Applications, and Text Expanders

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In an era of declining reimbursements and tightening of the job market, today's radiologists are forced to "make do with less." With the rollout of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly called "Obamacare," radiologists will be expected not only to interpret studies but to also take on many additional roles, adding a new layer of complexity to already demanding daily duties. These changes make it more important than ever to develop a personal workflow management system incorporating some of the most potent productivity tools. In this article, the authors discuss current productivity techniques and related software with the most potential to help radiologists keep up with the ever increasing demands on their time at the work place and help us lead more balanced lives.

**Key Words:** Productivity, workflow, time management

*J Am Coll Radiol* 2014;11:481-489. © 2014 Published by Elsevier on behalf of American College of Radiology

This is an opportune time in radiology to focus on productivity skills. A study of the recent US recession of 2007 to 2009 found that overall productivity at the workplace increased, with each worker putting forth more effort and producing more output than in normal times, an effect deemed "making do with less" [1]. With the rollout of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly called "Obamacare," it is predicted that radiologists will have to do more than just read a large number of studies to succeed [2]. Although the specific details of "postreform" radiology may remain somewhat murky, it is clear that radiologists are expected to use informatics to deliver timely, content-rich reports; develop meaningful relationships with hospitals,

referring physicians, and patients; manage the utilization of imaging; and participate in the medical, social, and political structures of hospitals [3]. With increasing performance expectations and complexity, it is more important now than ever to be productive [4]. The good news is that productivity is a skill like any other that can be learned and honed through constant practice [5]. In this article, we focus on personal productivity techniques a radiologist could use to keep up with these ever increasing demands. Part 2 focusses on other productivity techniques [6].

## GETTING THINGS DONE

The past two decades have seen an explosion of "time management" or "personal productivity enhancement" methods in an attempt to teach people efficient routines for dealing with information overload. However, they fail to address the central problem: we are constantly bombarded by new information, which typically requires reconsideration of priorities, objectives, and resources, commonly rendering detailed planning ineffective [7].

With Getting Things Done, or GTD for those in the know, David Allen has proposed a simple and flexible method intended to minimize stress and anxiety while maximizing productivity [8]. The basic principle of GTD hinges on moving tasks out of the mind by recording them externally, thereby freeing the mind, enabling it to concentrate on actually performing those

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tasks. It proposes a productivity framework (Fig. 1), which involves gathering all of the “incompletes,” including anything personal or professional that has some type of “to-do” attached to it, and sorting them into essentially 5 categories (5 D’s) [5]:

- Delete it: If you don’t need it, delete it!
- Do it: If it can be done quickly (<2 min), do it now.
- Delegate it: An often-ignored strategy!
- Deposit it: Create an easily accessible and organized archiving system.
- Defer it: Schedule and track the tasks that will take >2 min to complete, such as future projects, and time-bound “to-dos.”

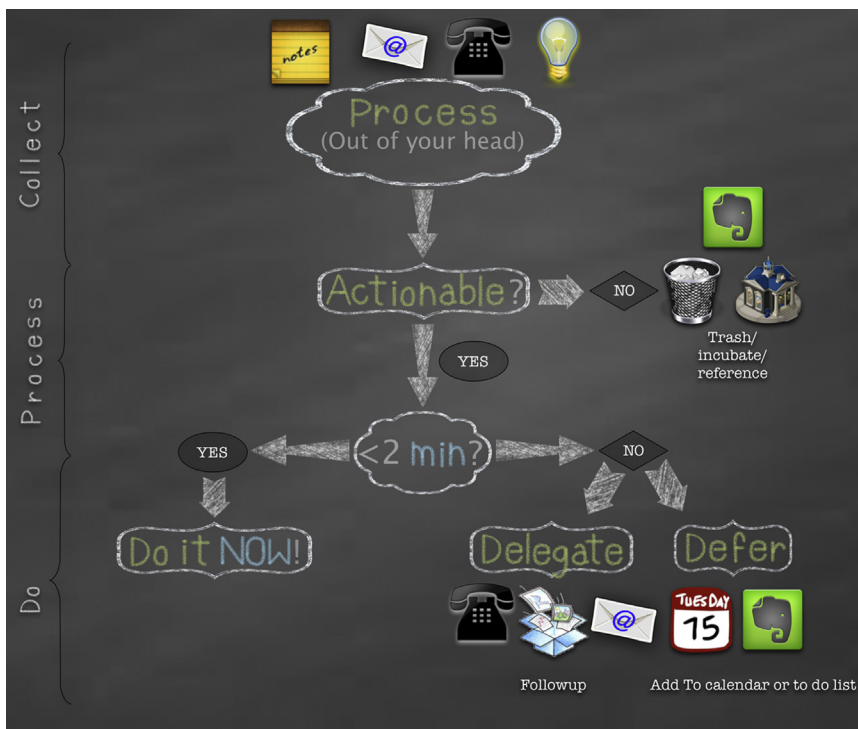
The “do” portion of the GTD model is the most difficult part of being productive. Staying motivated and healthy and achieving work-life balance is key to an effective productivity model [5]. Adopting a few healthy practices, such as daily exercise, goal setting, decluttering, taking regular breaks from work, and learning to prioritize, will lead to an almost effortless increase in energy and productivity [9]. These habits, along with limiting distractions, will thus allow more work to be done in a shorter amount of time. The Pomodoro Technique (named after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer) is a productivity method designed to enhance concentration by focusing on only one task at a time, resulting in reduction of the impact of internal and external distractions. With the aid of a simple timer, also available as simple applications on several smart phones, the user will spend short, 25-min bursts of focused energy on a task, followed by a 3-min to 5-min rest

interval. After 4 “Pomodori,” a longer break of 15 to 30 min is taken [10]. This method, one of the more popular time management techniques among productivity enthusiasts today, can thwart procrastination by streamlining concentration, thereby increasing output.

A both crucial and incredibly rewarding step in any workflow management system is the weekly review [5]. A small amount of time should be carved out weekly to get caught up (keep up with the paperless workflow, process inbox, capture notes), stay current (review actionable items, plan next actions), and be creative (brainstorm new ideas, set short-term and long-term goals, analyze the effectiveness of productivity practices) [11].

**DEALING WITH E-MAIL**

E-mail is notorious for being a huge source of distraction and wasted time, but it can also be used as a productivity tool. An e-mail inbox often represents unprocessed items that need some decision. An overflowing inbox compromises focus, decreases efficiency, silently drains energy, and distracts from the task at hand [5]. Achieving “inbox nirvana” [11] is possible, and learning the “process” of regularly prioritizing incoming information can dramatically improve productivity. In a way, e-mail is a microcosm of an individual’s overall productivity framework, and the 5 D’s of GTD can, and should, be applied. For example, if an e-mail response will take <2 min to complete, doing it immediately eliminates the need for further processing, which would likely take more time than just getting it done now and out of the way. Processing e-mail in this way also provides a motivating “caffeine-like hit” of accomplishment. For



**Fig 1.** Illustration of the Getting Things Done workflow. Elephant icon represents Evernote application. House icon represents Papers 2 application. Open box represents Dropbox application.

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