

Thirty Ways to Save Thirty Minutes a Day

By: [Marc and Angel Hack Life](#) ([View Profile](#))

We're all way too busy. We live and work in an age with infinite online and offline demands for our time and attention. And the end result is that we're left with [little free time](#) to just breathe and be.

If you're anything like me, you wish there were few more minutes in every day. Well, the good news is that there are always minutes to be saved and various ways to save them. Save enough of them every day, and you'll have a few extra hours at the end of the week. In this article I discuss thirty of my favorite ways to save thirty minutes a day.

Sometimes our days are so crammed with things to do that an extra thirty minutes at the end of the day represents the difference between sanity and insanity. I use each of the tips below to save time and remain sane on a daily basis.

1. Group similar tasks back to back. Switching gears between different types of tasks can be tough. It takes most people several minutes to get into a productive mental groove geared toward a specific type of task. Therefore, it makes sense to group similar tasks in an effort to minimize the number of rough patches, and thus wasted time, between task orders.

2. Use productive shortcuts. People who claim that there are no productive shortcuts in life have been brainwashed. There are productive shortcuts for almost everything you do. Finding and using them can save you a few minutes here and there on a daily basis. If you use a computer, learn the keyboard shortcuts for the programs you use most often. If you can permanently delegate one of your regular tasks to someone else, do it. Is there a route to work with less traffic? How can you hit two birds with one stone?

3. Eliminate all distractions for a set time. Distractions are everywhere. They arrive via email, cell phone, coworker inquiry, etc. I've found that cutting out all distractions for a set time is one of the most effective ways to get things done in less time. You can't remain in hiding forever, but you can be nearly four times as productive while you are.

4. Narrow the number of ventures you're involved in. Productivity is not usually my challenge; narrowing the number of ventures that I can productively be involved in is. Even when you have the knowledge and ability to access super-productive states, you get to a point where being simultaneously super-productive on too many fronts at once causes all activities to slow down, stand still, and sometimes even slide backwards.

5. Plan ahead and start early. Ten minutes of dedicated planning each evening will save you from thirty minutes of ad hoc preparation each morning. Likewise, purposely starting your morning thirty minutes early will likely inject at least sixty additional productive minutes into your day. Think about it.

6. Organize your space. How much time do you think the average person wastefully spends searching for items they've misplaced? Keeping both your living and working spaces organized will undoubtedly save you thirty minutes daily.

7. Productively use waiting time. Waiting time does not have to be wasted time. When you are waiting at the doctor's office, the post office, or on hold for the next available representative, what simple tasks could you complete while you wait? How about sorting through your snail

mail, writing those thank-you notes you've been putting off, reading the book you keep meaning to read, reviewing and editing your to-do lists, etc.?

8. Handle two-minute tasks immediately. “The Two-Minute Rule” is the single greatest tip I picked up from David Allen’s book *Getting Things Done*. If you roughly estimate that a task is going to take you less than two minutes to accomplish, do it right now. It’s a waste of time and energy to keep small tasks like this on your to-do list or in the back of your mind.

9. Ask more questions. The trial and error process can be a huge waste of time. Often people view asking questions and relying on others as a weakness, but they are sadly mistaken. Asking questions will bring you closer to the people around you and likely save you a huge chunk of time—win-win.

10. Buy in bulk and cook in bulk. Buying stuff and cooking food are two of the most common unplanned consumptions of time. Most people buy replacements in small amounts only when they need them and think about food only when they’re hungry. The problem is these issues will often arise at inopportune times. The most efficient way I’ve found to counteract this is by doing bulk loads of both. I know I’ll always need gas in my vehicle. So instead of putting in \$25 here and \$25 there, I top off my tank every time I’m at the station regardless of the sticker shock. Likewise, I know I’m going to be hungry at lunchtime every day this week. So on Sundays I’ll grill up five extra chicken breasts and make a chicken wrap or sandwich for every day of the week.

11. Pick-up the phone. We’ve become so accustomed to communicating digitally, sending emails, IMs, and texts that we sometimes forget that we can get the same tasks accomplished in a fraction of the time with one or two quick phone calls.

12. Don’t mindlessly browse online ad infinitum. Web browsing is one of the immense black holes in terms of wasting time. Before you realize it, you may have spent hours browsing while generating very little value.

13. Standardize common tasks. If you find yourself performing the same set of tasks on a regular basis, then it makes sense to establish an efficient, standardized way of accomplishing them. Are certain tasks easier to perform in the morning? Are there additional resources that can be utilized only at a certain time? It’s up to you to find an efficient pattern, standardize it, and follow it.

14. Make better usage of commute times. Listen to audiobooks, make calls, or do some proactive time planning. I use Evernote on my iPhone and capture tons of ideas and thoughts when I’m commuting and traveling on business.

15. Write things down. Nobody’s memory is perfect. If you don’t take notes and set up to-do lists for yourself, you will end up wasting minutes of time trying to remember things that would have taken you seconds to write down.

16. Consolidate all daily errands into one trip. Consolidate all of your errands into one trip instead of driving back and forth several times from home to the store to home to the bank to home, etc.

17. Stop overanalyzing things. There comes a time when you have to stop evaluating something and just bite the bullet and do it. Contemplating taking action isn’t taking action. It gets nothing accomplished.

18. Exercise daily. I know it sounds counterintuitive. You have to spend time to exercise. But research has shown that exercise boosts cognitive function, creativity, problem solving, and productivity. In fact, a NASA study showed that employees who exercised daily worked at 100 percent efficiency after seven hours, while those who didn't saw a 50 percent drop, meaning it took them twice as long to accomplish the same thing.

19. Use a timer. I use a timer to limit the amount of time I spend on daily tasks such as email, retuning calls, cranking through my to-do lists, etc. This keeps me from getting overly distracted from the truly important tasks I must accomplish during the day.

20. Do what you don't want to do first. If you do the tough tasks first when your mind is fresh, you'll get them done quicker and be onto the next thing in no time.

21. Harness the power of teamwork. I heard a story once about some horses that were in a competition to see which could pull the most weight. One horse pulled three thousand pounds, and another one pulled four thousand pounds. Someone suggested the horses team together to see how much they could pull. Most guesses were in the seven-thousand-pound to ten-thousand-pound range, but when those two horses worked together, they pulled an amazing twenty thousand pounds. That's the power of teamwork. Good teamwork can get a large project completed in an amazingly short amount of time.

22. Just say NO! While saying yes can take us down some wonderful roads, there's also a ton of value in saying no. We're only given a certain amount of hours in our lives; do you really want to give yours away so easily? If you don't have time to commit to a new project, complete a favor, or serve on another committee, it's a good idea to just say no.

23. Focus your attention on one thing at a time. Cutting out multitasking (or "multi-slacking," as I call it) leaves you to focus more intently on one task and finish it to completion, rather than having many tasks started and nothing finished.

24. Pare down your email inbox. As a first step, cancel any email newsletter subscriptions that you do not read anymore. If you subscribe to more than one newsletter in a certain category (e.g., tech newsletters), choose the one that delivers the most value to you on a daily basis and get rid of the rest. The email inbox should only be for priority communication; otherwise, it just wastes your time.

25. Use time multipliers. Effective delegation of lower priority tasks is a time multiplier. Eliminating time-wasting activities is a time multiplier. Screening phone calls can be a time multiplier. By practicing creative procrastination on anything that doesn't propel you toward your goals, you can multiply the amount of time you have to achieve those goals.

26. Relocate closer to your place of employment. In every major city in the world there are people traveling over an hour to reach their work destination from home. This is a huge chunk of time that could be used far more productively.

27. Turn off the TV. 'Nuff said.

28. Use technology to automate tasks. From creating email filters to automatically backing-up your hard drive to automatic bill paying. The more you can automate, the more time you'll save.

29. Keep it simple. Keep your to-do lists and planning simple, and don't waste time playing with new tools. There's always going to be shiny programs that promise to make your day faster and more efficient. Stick with one, and learn to rely on it.

30. Spend minutes now to save hours later. During happy hour last Friday, I spent some time listening to one of my colleagues confess her utter distaste for the Windows 7 Start menu. "The system is organized all wrong. The programs I need are buried and the ones I never use are right at my fingertips. I waste so much time digging through menus," she said. "But you can easily rearrange that," I replied. She looked down with a despondent expression on her face. "I know," she said. "Someone else told me that too, but I haven't taken the time to figure it out." Bottom line: sometimes you have to spend a few minutes now to save hours of grief in the future.

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