

## Word Play for Productivity

Set a timer for five minutes and write down any words or phrases that come to your mind regarding your productivity *today*. Do not edit this list—just write as you feel the thoughts bubble up.

[illegible]

## **But, Why?**

Now set a timer for fifteen minutes and free write about why you feel this way.

Be very specific here.

What is working or not working when it comes to your productivity and stress levels?

Write it out here. If you would prefer to type, go for it but then do a bit of an arts and crafts project and print out your thoughts and paste them to this page.

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## Look, Listen, and Learn

Knowing the environment that will optimize your productivity and make you feel less stressed will help you cross tasks from your to-do list with ease.

I've spent my career working in busy and loud newsrooms with lots of people talking and scurrying around me. I got used to tuning everyone out to get my work done. So, when I started writing my first book, *Listful Thinking*, I struggled. I was writing alone at home, and it was too quiet.

I realized that to get any work done I had to turn the television on as background noise. And sometimes I need to get out of my house and go to a loud coffee shop to get started on a project. But once I realized that about myself, I became much more productive when I allowed myself to work the way that was most efficient for me.

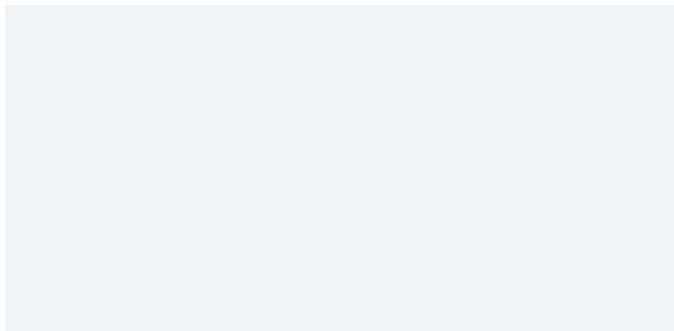
Let's use your senses to determine the optimal environment for you.

Really try to put yourself into each of these situations, and be honest about how they make you feel. There's no right or wrong answer.

## See

Do you find yourself getting distracted when you're in an open space with lots of people working around you? (Ex. coffee shop or office with an open floor plan)

What kind of lighting do you need when you're working on something important?



What do you like to look at when you're working?  
(circle all that apply)

City

Waterfall

Skyline

Trees

Beach

Television

Artwork

Snow falling

Rank these spots (and any you fill in on your own) in the order you'd like to spend the day working there.

Circle one that is the "best spot ever!"

Beach

Café/Restaurant

Quiet Office

Outdoors/Park

Home Office

Library

Bustling Office

Hotel

What colors are prominent in your work space?

Do you have a lot of artwork around you?

Are there plants in your work environment?

What kind of objects are on your desk?

## Hear

How do you feel when you're working in a quiet place?

How much work are you able to do in a busy or loud environment?

Can you do work with the television on?

# Smell

Do you use essential oils?

Which ones? How does it make you feel?

Do you drink coffee or tea when you're working?

How does that help you focus?

Do you have flowers in your work space?

Do you light candles when you work?

If yes, what scents do you like best?



If you're doing work in the evening, how do you feel? Circle all that apply:

Productive Happy Resentful

Sluggish Angry Grateful

Fired up Stressed Motivated

Looking back at your answers—what is your most productive time of day?

AM  
PM

# Best Day Ever!

Studies have shown that Tuesdays are actually the most productive day of the week. But of course that's not true for everyone. We'll get to the bottom of your ideal workday. Weekends count too.

**Task#1:** List out the types of tasks you do in a given week.

Take this week for example—write out everything you did, including write articles, talk to clients on the phone, write emails, care for an elderly parent, care for a child, make dinner, go to yoga, meditate, etc.

## WORK TASKS

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## HOME TASKS

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**Task #2:** Which days do you currently do each of the tasks above? Write next to each task the days you typically do it. If you do all tasks on all days, that's ok too. Note it above using these abbreviations:

Monday—M

Tuesday—Tu

Wednesday—W

Thursday—Th

Friday—F

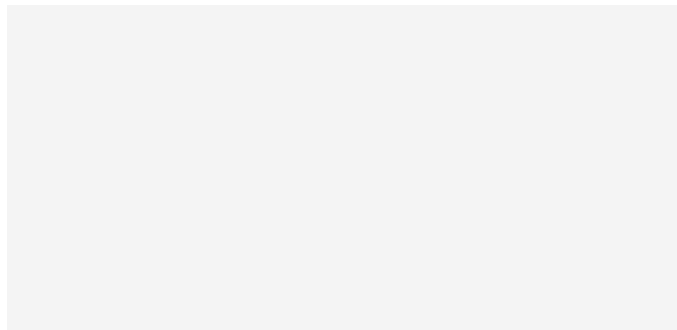
Saturday—Sa

Sunday—Su

All days—All

**Task #3:** Note which tasks are easy to do and which are more difficult by putting an E or a D next to each one.

**Task #4:** Looking back at last week, which was your most efficient day?



## Canceled Meetings?

What do you do when someone cancels an appointment with you? (Circle one or add to the list)

Start working on the next to-do list item

Call a friend/family member

## Get a massage

Take a nap

## Meditate

[illegible]

## What's Your Pomodoro?

The Pomodoro Technique was invented by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s. You set a timer, work for twenty-five minutes of focused time, and then take a break. It's called Pomodoro, which means "tomato" in Italian, because he used a little tomato timer when he was developing the method.

For me, I think twenty-five minutes is a bit too long at first. I can focus for about fifteen to twenty minutes at a time when I get into a groove. The trick is to try out a bunch of time intervals and see what works for you.

**Task #1:** Pick one task that you've been avoiding on your to-do list and write it here:

**Task # 2:** Set a timer for twenty-five minutes. If you get distracted, you must stop the clock. Try your hardest to focus on only that one task for the time allotted.

Take note of when your mind wanders and write it down here.

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**Task #3:** Use this space to record how you feel about this exercise.

Here are some questions to guide you: Did that time feel long, short, or just right? How much of the task did you actually get done? Did that surprise you? When did you get distracted? What would help you stay on track with that task?

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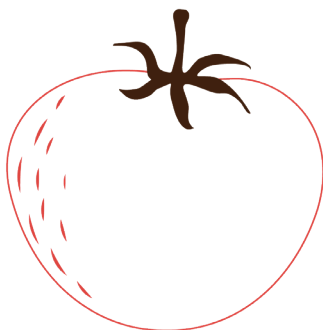
**Task #4:** Now pick another item on your to-do list and write it here:

**Task #6:** Now use this space to record how you felt this time. What was different?

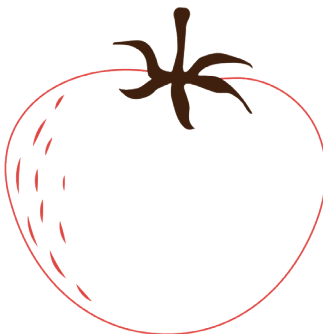
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**Task #7:** Continue to do this until you find a time frame that makes you feel like you are getting something done, but not rushing. You may find that there are different time frames for different tasks.

**Task # 8:** Record how often you got distracted here.



**Task # 9:** Record your ideal Pomodoro here.





Task #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated time:

Actual time:

Task #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated time:

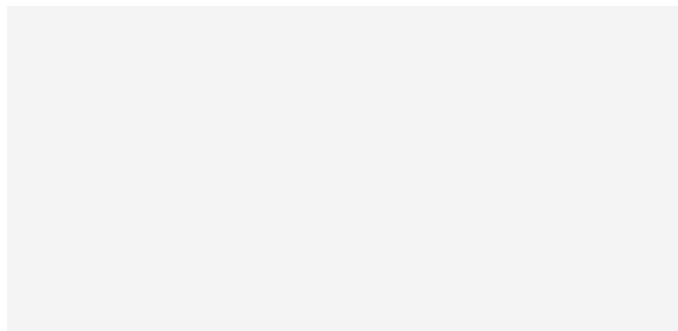
Actual time:

Task #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated time:

Actual time:

Now that you've done this challenge, what surprised you about it? Use this space to write your thoughts.

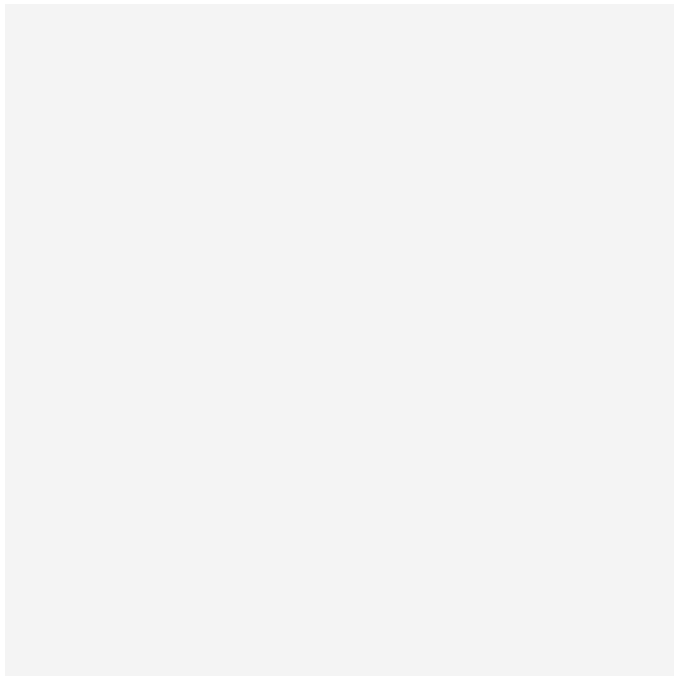


## Examine Your Stress Style

### Pick a Scene

Pick one scene from the last two months where you felt your stress levels were through the roof.

Be as descriptive as possible—use your five senses to return to that time here. Give yourself ten minutes to write freely:

A large, empty light gray rectangular box intended for the user to write their description of the stress scene.

## How Did It Feel?

List out how you felt specifically after that very stressful moment in your recent memory. Use single words or phrases to describe your feelings from the scene on the last page:

[illegible]

## What Made It So Stressful?

Knowing your personality and capacity to get things done—what made this situation especially stressful for you? Jot down a few words or phrases that come to mind first:

[illegible]

## Long-Term Effects

List out how this stressful situation affected your life at all these touch points in time.

How did it stick with you...

An hour later?

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A day later?

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A week later?

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A month later?

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## How Do You Manifest Stress?

After years as a health journalist, I've done dozens and dozens of stories about the effect stress has on the body, mind, and soul.

It's important to identify how stress shows itself in your life so you can become aware of what's happening. You identified one scene above, but now I want you to think of other times you've been stressed and use those collective times to do this exercise.

Circle which symptoms you experience when you're stressed out and fill in any others that come to mind:

### **Stress on the Body**

Headaches  
Muscle pain  
Back pain  
Chest pain  
Sleep problems  
Upset stomach  
Fatigue

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### **Stress on the Mind**

Anxiety  
Depression  
Sadness  
Lack of focus  
Lack of motivation  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Anger

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### STRESS ON YOUR HABITS

Overeating  
Undereating  
Biting nails  
Drug or alcohol use  
Skipping exercise

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### STRESS ON YOUR PERFORMANCE

Missing appointments  
Missing deadlines  
Becoming less dependable  
Feeling scattered  
Feeling frozen  
Procrastinating

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## Other Stressful Situations

List out briefly three other times you've felt very stressed over the past year.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



## Common Theme Search

Now that you've examined this stressful slice of your life, what can you glean from that information? What is a recurring theme, if any, in the stressful moments of your life?

Perhaps a particular situation sets you up for stress? Maybe it was lack of sleep, not enough resources, or no time to prepare, etc. Write out what commonalities you see in these situations.

**WHO**—Are there certain people who are present during your stress scenes?

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**WHAT**—What are you doing during these stress scenes?

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WHERE—What is your location?

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WHEN—Is there a time of day or year that these stress scenes pop up?

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WHY—What are the circumstances of these stress scenes?

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What are the common denominators in these stress scenes?  
(Pull this from the information you've discovered above)

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## **Pick a Zen Scene**

Think about a very peaceful time in your life in the past two months.

Pick just one scene from your life, and write about it here.

Use all five senses to be as descriptive as you can. Set a timer for ten minutes to write as much as you can.

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## How Did It Feel?

List out how you felt specifically after that very Zen moment in your recent memory. Use single words or phrases to describe your feelings from the scene above:

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## What Made It So Peaceful?

Knowing your personality and capacity to get things done, what made this situation especially peaceful for you? Jot down a few words or phrases that come to mind first:

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## Long-Term Zen Effects

List out how this Zen situation affected your life at all these touch points in time. How did it stick with you...

An hour later?

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A day later?

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A week later?

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A month later?

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