make better to-do lists

This is a **little better zine**.

It doesn't have the solutions to your big problems, but the skills inside can make coping a **little** easier when life is difficult.

Learn more at **littlebetterzine.com**

Using to-do lists effectively is important to me because:

▶ Why Use a To-Do List?

People who struggle with forgetfulness, inattention, and low motivation can benefit from using to-do lists. To-do lists help by moving information from your memory onto a piece of paper – this is called **externalizing information**. If you write tasks in a place where you will see them, then you don't need to worry about forgetting them.

▶ To-Do List Basics

You should use **no more than 2 to-do lists**:

- 1 list for school + work tasks
- 1 list for personal tasks

Or if you prefer, you can use one list for both work and personal tasks, but not more than two. Include **all** of your tasks on these two lists – no sticky notes. And write your to-do lists on a single piece of **paper** – no apps.

Keep all your tasks on **one page**, so you don't have to flip back and forth to see your entire list. When you run out of space on your paper to-do list, copy all the unfinished tasks to a new piece of paper. (Spiral-bound notepads are great for to-do lists)

Keep your to-do list in an easily visible place where you will see it throughout the day.

Visually mark the important tasks on your list – you can circle, underline, or star ★ the tasks which are most urgent.

If you want to save a record of your work, you can write the date you completed a task next to each item on your to-do list when you cross it off.

Record each day you used these tips for two weeks:

Week 1 ○○○○○○○

Week 2 ○○○○○○○

▶ Break Up Big Tasks Into Steps

Will any task on your to-do list take more than **30 minutes**? Are there tasks on your to-do list that you are avoiding, or tasks that have been on your to-do list for a while?

Break these tasks up into smaller steps and write **only the next step** on your to-do list.

For example: Instead of writing "laundry" you could write "gather dirty clothes in laundry basket."

After you complete one step of a larger task, you can write down the next step on your to-do list. But you should have only one step on the list at a time.

▶ Increase Your Motivation

Not making progress on your to-do list?

Make sure your to-do list is placed somewhere you will see it.

Schedule alarms or automatic reminders to remind you to look at your to-do list throughout the day.

When adding a difficult task to your to-do list, write why completing the task is important to you. For example: Instead of writing "fold laundry" you could write "fold laundry so my bedroom will be more tidy and restful."

Beware of perfectionism – striving to maintain a perfectly organized or aesthetically pleasing to-do list will discourage you from using it. Give yourself permission to keep a messy, imperfect to-do list.

▶ Practice Patience

Remember: It takes time to establish new habits. Changing old habits is hard at first, but will get easier over time. Commit to using these tips every day for at least two weeks before you decide they won't work for you.

▶ Make Your To-Do List SMART

The tasks on your to-do list should be

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Relevant
Time-Bound

Ask yourself the following questions to check if each task on your to-do list is SMART:

- **Specific** – Is the task a specific action?
- **Measurable** – Will I know when the task is complete?
- **Achievable** – Is the task realistic?
- **Relevant** – Why do I care about completing this task?
- **Time-bound** – Will the task take 30 minutes or less?

Consider sharing your to-do list with someone you trust and asking for their honest feedback. Do they think your tasks are SMART? Can they help you break big tasks into smaller ones? Can they help you brainstorm strategies for overcoming barriers to getting tasks done?

▶ Common Barriers

Here are some common barriers to getting tasks done:

- "It's hard for me to get started on a task."
- "I get distracted easily."
- "I feel overwhelmed."
- "I'm disorganized."
- "I'm forgetful."
- "I struggle to make a plan."
- "I struggle to follow a plan."
- "I get stuck on one task and can't switch to another task."

Which barriers do you struggle with the most?

How might you use your to-do list to overcome these barriers?