Pomodoro® Technique

WHAT IS THE POMODORO® TECHNIQUE?

The Pomodoro® Technique is a time management method developed by **Francesco Cirillo** in the late 1980s. It is a structured method made up of processes, tools, principles and values to learn how to deal with time and turn it from a vicious predator to an ally to boost productivity. It is based on a series of principles built on self-observation and awareness. Developing these skills makes it possible to change the relationship with time and reach our goals with less effort and anxiety.

For many of us time is an enemy. The anxiety triggered by deadlines leads to ineffective work and procrastination. The Pomodoro® Technique transforms time into a valuable ally. **Thanks to this technique we can use time to be more productive**.

IS THIS TECHNIQUE FOR YOU?

Has anything like this ever happened to you?

> - You are working on a task and you suddenly need to do other things - updating your Facebook status, working on a task of a different project, loading the dishwasher - instead of focusing on your current goal.
> - You are working on a task and you hear a voice in your head: "Are you sure this is the right thing to do now? Are you sure you are not forgetting something urgent to do? Are you sure there isn't a better way to do that?
> - Your deadline is approaching and completing your task on time seems impossible: the more time you work on it and the more complex it seems.
> - You're constantly interrupted by other members of the team: your attention span gets smaller and smaller and you make more mistakes.
> - You need to reach multiple goals by the end of the week and you don't know what the best task to start with is.

You are not alone! We all face the same problem. We know we should focus on the task in hand, but it feels impossible with so many distractions and demands on our time.

These kinds of occurrences are common when it comes to reaching goals under the pressure of time. The Pomodoro® Technique is a training programme to learn how to deal with these occurrences in a productive way in order to reach our own objectives.

We all need The Pomodoro® Technique. This deceptively simple tool transforms both work and home life and make us far more productive.

HOW DOES THE TECHNIQUE WORK?

Time is limited. We can't have as much as we want, neither stop it nor slow it down. When our mind realizes that it cannot control time, we get scared and time appears to us as a vicious predator.

The answers our frightened mind finds are dysfunctional: "run faster", "work harder", "find a shortcut" "do something else". None of these options are effective. And, as you may have experienced, these answers generate more frustration, weariness and a sense of guilt. Procrastination and low productivity are the effect of the anxiety we feel when we don't know how to deal with the fact that we can't control time.

The Pomodoro® Technique helps our brain recognise and observe those tricky moments and learn how to deal with them efficiently, which is so crucial in order to find functional answers and in the end to reach our goals.

WHY POMODORO®?

Francesco Cirillo, the creator of the Pomodoro® Technique tells the "Pomodoro Story."

"I was a student at the university in 1987 and I had to take the sociology exam in September. I couldn't keep my mind focused on my book. I was constantly getting distracted. I made a humble bet with myself: **'Can you stay focused for two minutes without distraction?'** I went to the kitchen, grabbed a timer and came back to my table. The timer was red and shaped like a Pomodoro (tomato in English). I wound it up to two minutes and started reading my book. When the timer rang I had won my bet against Time. Surprised, I began to ask myself why it had worked? I gradually increased the amount of time when I set the timer. I got to one hour, but that was too much. I didn't take too long to realize that, for a number of factors, **the ideal unit of work was 25 minutes followed by a 2-5 minute break**.

There, on that table in September 1987, I hadn't noticed yet but for the first time I had managed to turn time into an ally. Exactly at the moment when Time appeared to be such a vicious predator to me I managed to stop in front of it, and still and afraid ask this simple question: **"How can you, Time, be useful to me now?**

For the first time I used time instead of running away from Time. I decided to use Time, spend it to take a break, favour my mental processes, allow my mind to organize the information it had acquired in the working time and put me in the best situation to start my next Pomodoro."

The Method

Is the Pomodoro® Technique just the timer?

No. The Pomodoro® Technique is not just the timer! The Pomodoro® timer is for sure the most iconic element of the technique. But there is more to it.

THE PROBLEM

When dealing with Time, there are several situations in which it can appear as a vicious predator.

While you're working on a task, Time can show up in your mind in the shape of thoughts like:
- "I think it's time to update our Facebook account."
- "Pizza! Pizza! Pizza!"
- "Why don't you start working on that other project"
- "You should have started before..."
- "Do you want to take a break... now? With all the things you have to do?"

During the day, you need to complete several tasks and Time can show up in your mind in the shape of thoughts like:
- "Wouldn't it be better to work on another task?"
- "Sure you're not forgetting about the things you need to do?"
- "Sure there's no better way of doing this kind of things?"

During the week, you need to reach several different goals and Time can show up in your mind in the shape of thoughts like:
- "You're doing great on the book... don't stop now"
- "You're doing really terrible on the book... don't stop now"

While you're working in a team, and you have to reach your goals with other people, Time can show up in your mind in the shape of thoughts like:
- "You're too slow... You'll become a bottleneck for the rest of the team"
- "You should have left this task to Marc"

In each of these situations, Time appears as a vicious predator and you answers are dysfunctional.

THE SOLUTION

The well-known method to stay focused and mentally fresh:

1. Choose a task
2. Set a 25 minutes timer
3. Work on the task until the timer rings. Then mark off one pomodoro on your sheet of paper and record what you have completed.
4. Take a 5 minutes break
5. Every 4 Pomodoros, take a longer 15-30 mins break

The 25-minute work sprints are the core of the method, but a Pomodoro practice also includes three rules for getting the most out of each interval:

1. **Break down complex projects.** If a task requires more than four pomodoros, it needs to be divided into smaller, actionable steps. Sticking to this rule will help ensure you make clear progress on your projects.

2. **Small tasks go together.** Any tasks that will take less than one Pomodoro should be combined with other simple tasks. For example, "write rent check," "set vet appointment," and "read Pomodoro article" could go together in one session.

3. **Once a pomodoro is set, it must ring.** The pomodoro is an indivisible unit of time and can not be broken, especially not to check incoming emails, team chats, or text messages. Any ideas, tasks, or requests that come up should be taken note of to come back to later. A digital task manager like TODOIST is a great place for these, but pen and paper will do too.

In the event of an unavoidable disruption, take your five-minute break and start again. Cirillo recommends that you track interruptions (internal or external) as they occur and reflect on how to avoid them in your next session.
The rule applies even if you do finish your given task before the timer goes off. Use the rest of your time for overlearning, or improving skills or scope of knowledge. For example, you could spend the extra time reading up on professional journals or researching networking opportunities.

Tip: Keep an "Overlearning" list of tasks you can quickly choose from the next time you find yourself with pomodoro time to spare.

If the system seems simple, that's because it is. The Pomodoro technique is all about getting your mind in the zone to finish your tasks.

What makes Promodoro method effective?

1. Making it easy to just get started - Doing something small for a short period of time is a whole lot easier to face than trying to take on a big project all at once. That procrastination-busting strategy is exactly what the pomodoro technique asks you to do: break down your big tasks, projects, or goals into something you only have to do for the next 25 minutes. It keeps you hyper focused on the one next thing you need to do rather than get overwhelmed by the enormity of what you're taking on. Don't worry about the outcome — just take it one pomodoro at a time.
   For example, instead of sitting down to write novel, sit down to write for 5 minutes. Still too hard? Try just sitting down to edit a paragraph.

2. Combating distractions - If you've ever been interrupted when you were in a flow state, you know how difficult regaining focus can be. Yet, the constant stream of information pouring in via emails, team chats, and social media notifications demands more and more of our attention. In the moment, it can be easy to justify these internal pulls — "This email is too important to wait," or "It took less than a minute to check my Twitter; it isn't a real distraction." But those small interruptions add up! It isn't just the time you lose on distractions, it also takes time and energy to refocus your attention. After switching gears, our minds can linger over the previous task for upwards of 20 minutes until regaining full concentration. Indulging the impulse to check Facebook "just for a minute" can turn into 20 minutes of trying to get back on task. \
   The Pomodoro Technique helps you resist all of those self-interruptions and re-train your brains to focus. Each pomodoro is dedicated to one task and each break is a chance to reset and bring your attention back to what you should be working on.

3. Becoming more aware of where your time goes - When planning out our future projects, most of us fall victim to the planning fallacy — our tendency to vastly underestimate the time needed to complete future tasks, even when we know similar tasks have taken longer in the past.
   The Pomodoro technique can be a valuable weapon against the planning fallacy. When you start working in short, timed sessions, time is no longer an abstract concept but a concrete event. It becomes a pomodoro — a unit of both time and effort. Distinct from the idea of 25 minutes of general "work," the pomodoro is an event that measures focus on a single task (or several simple tasks).
   The concept of time changes from a negative — something that has been lost — to a positive representation of events accomplished. Cirillo calls this "inverting time" because it changes the perception of time passing from an abstract source of anxiety to an exact measure of productivity. This leads to much more realistic time estimates. So when you use the Pomodoro technique, you have a clear measurement of your finite time and your efforts, allowing you to reflect and plan your days more accurately and efficiently. With practice, you'll be able to accurately assess how many pomodoros a task will take and build more consistent work habits.

4. Gamifying your productivity - Every pomodoro provides an opportunity to improve upon the last. Cirillo argues that "concentration and consciousness lead to speed, one pomodoro at a time."
   The Pomodoro technique is approachable because it is more about consistency than perfection. Each session is a fresh start to reevaluate your goals, challenge yourself to focus, and limit distractions. You can make the system work for you.
   Motivate yourself to build on your success by setting a goal to add an extra pomodoro each day. Challenge yourself to finish a big task in a set number of pomodoros. Try setting a goal

number of pomodoros for each day without <u>breaking the chain</u>. Thinking in tomatoes rather than hours is just more fun.

Tips for using the Promodoro technique:

While the 25/5 minute work/break intervals are the heart of the Pomodoro Technique, there are a few things you can do to make your pomodoros more effective:

1. Plan out your pomodoros in advance

TASKS	NUMBER OF POMODOROS TO COMPLETE
Write article first draft	🍅🍅🍅🍅🍅
Check my email and messages	🍅
Plan article promotion	🍅🍅
Admin tasks	🍅
Check my email and messages	🍅
End-of-day review and prep for tomorrow	🍅

12 POMODOROS

Take 15 minutes at the beginning of your workday (or at the end if you're planning for the next day), to plan out your pomodoros. Take your to-do list for the day and note how many pomodoros each task will take. (Remember, tasks that will take more than 5 pomodoros should be broken down into smaller, more manageable tasks. Smaller tasks, like responding to emails, can be batched together in a single pomodoro.)
If you work an 8-hour workday, make sure your pomodoros for the day don't go over sixteen. If they do, postpone the least urgent/least important tasks for later in the week.

2. Build overflow pomodoros into your day
    While an 8-hour workday technically leaves room for sixteen pomodoros, it's best to build in a buffer of 2-4 "overflow" pomodoros, just in case. Use your overflow pomodoros for tasks that take longer than you planned or for unexpected tasks that come up during the day.
    If you don't end up needing them, use the extra pomodoros for   learning or lower priority tasks that always get pushed to the end of your to-do list. It's much less stressful to end the day with pomodoros to spare than to overschedule yourself and get behind.

3. Experiment with the length of your pomodoros
    For some types of work that require extended periods in a creative "flow" state — thinking coding, writing, composing, etc — 25 minutes may be too short. Try extended work sessions with longer breaks. A <u>DeskTime</u> study found that a 52-minute focus and 17-minute break is the perfect balance. Others prefer 90 full minutes with a 20-30-minute break, based on <u>Ultradian rhythms</u>.
    For tasks that you've been putting off for one reason or another, 25 minutes might be too long. If you're feeling a lot of mental resistance, or you just can't get yourself to stay focused for 25 minutes, try a 15-, 10-, or even 5-minute pomodoro.
    For most people most of the time, the sweet spot will be in the 25-50 minute range for peak concentration with a 5-15 minute break. Try mixing your intervals based on your available

energy, the type of work, and how much a task makes you want to bury your head in cute puppy videos on YouTube instead.

4. Get away from screens during breaks - Not all breaks are created equal. If your pomodoro work sessions happen on your computer, don't just switch over to Twitter or Instagram when the timer goes off. Give your eyes and brain a break from screens — that means your phone too! Stand up, move around, stretch, go outside, do a mini meditation, grab a snack, watch birds out the window. If you work from home, fold some clothes or clear off the kitchen table. Whatever you do, your break will be much more mentally refreshing if you get away from the glowing hypnosis of your computer or phone.

5. Use an app to enforce your pomodoros - Humans are fallible. No matter how motivated you are at the start of the day, it's really hard to actually stick to your pomodoros. Hold yourself accountable with a break reminder app or an alarm on your phone.
You can try apps such as Big Stretch for Windows and BreakTime for Mac.
You can create your promodoro plan on https://todoist.com/home

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