

How students
can better
track tasks
and manage
time

Getting Things Done as a Student

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Primary Sources

- Getting Things Done (GTD) by David Allen
 - My favorite nuts and bolts of how to capture and track tasks, how to organize and plan work life.
- What's Best Next by Matt Perman
 - A Christian perspective on GTD, First Things First, and other productivity literature
 - Much of what's at the heart of my motivation here, but lacking GTD's nuts and bolts
- First Things First by Steven Covey, A. R. Merrill, and R. R. Merrill
 - Prioritizing the Important in the face of the Urgent

GTD Summary

- Getting Things Done (GTD) model by David Allen:
 - Define and use your inboxes
 - Process your inboxes daily
 - Review your system and plans weekly

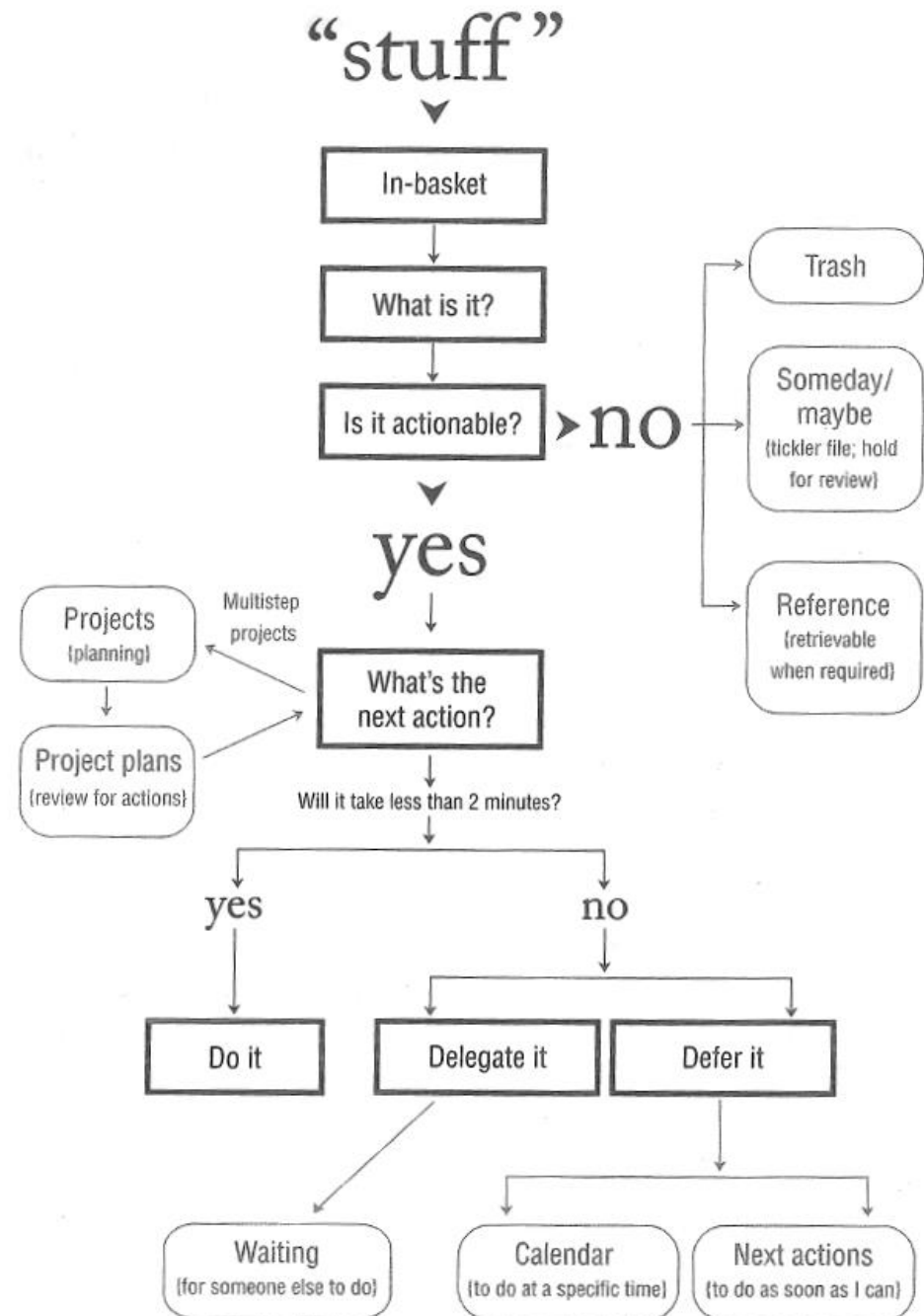
Define and Use Your Inboxes

- ❑ **First, list all places where you expect to get “stuff”.**
 - Examples: email inbox, mailbox, backpack, desk inbox
- ❑ Next, find a time soon to:
 - throw *all* of your task-related stuff into these inboxes
 - process them (Note: “process” doesn’t mean “do”)
- ❑ **Build a *habit of capturing* tasks into your system by putting task-related stuff into your inboxes.**
 - If it’s in your system, it doesn’t have to be in your head. This is an example of “distributed cognition”.
- ❑ **Activity: List *all* of your inboxes.**

Process Your Inboxes

- ❑ **Process your inboxes daily**, i.e. capture task next steps, due dates, etc. onto lists and calendars.
- ❑ For each inbox item:
 1. Decide whether or not to file it.
 2. If not, identify the next action.
 3. Process the next action.

Process Your Inboxes



Flowchart from Getting Things Done by David Allen

1. Decide Whether or Not to File It

- For each inbox item: **“Is this actionable?”**
 - Actionable for a current priority?
 - **Yes.** → Step 2.
 - Reference item?
 - **Yes.** → File it.
 - Possible future task? Not a current priority?
 - **Yes.** → Add it to a “Someday/Maybe” list and file it.
 - Otherwise, recycle or trash it. (Circular file!)

2. Identify the Next Action

- **For this item, what is the next physical/visible step of progress?** Make it concrete. Examples:
 - ~~Climb the mountain.~~ Locate the trailhead.
 - ~~Get a summer internship.~~
 - Request an appointment with a Center for Career Development Career counselor.
 - ~~Write a paper on topic X.~~
 - Research information on X, write the thesis statement, outline paper, write first draft, ...
- For larger projects, take a few minutes to outline your plan, but **the next action should be concrete**, not abstract.

3. Process the Next Action

- ❑ If it would take less than 2 minutes to do, **do it now**.
- ❑ If not, should you be doing it? If not, **delegate it**.
- ❑ Otherwise, **defer it**.
 - If it's time-specific, **put it on your calendar**.
 - Examples: scheduled classes, project partner meetings, extracurricular events
 - If it's to do ASAP, **add it to your "Next Actions" list**.
 - Examples: assignments (include due dates!), project steps, promises to friends, summer internship search steps

Weekly Review

- **Make a regularly scheduled weekly time to *prayerfully* review your system.** Examples of things to review:
 - Consider the past week with respect to your roles, relationships, and responsibilities.
 - Are you getting all task-related items into your inboxes?
 - Are you processing your inboxes daily?
 - Review past and future calendar dates for new action items.
 - Review project/long-term task plans.
 - Review any lists you keep, e.g. “Next Actions”
“Someday/Maybe”
 - Allot time for important, non-urgent tasks in the coming week’s calendar.

The Clock and the Compass

- In Covey, Merrill, & Merrill's *First Things First*,
 - the *clock* symbolizes the life driven by urgency and disconnected from purpose and meaning, whereas
 - the *compass* symbolizes the life driven by "true north" principles and purpose.
- Activity can be (I)mportant and/or (U)rgent.
 - I notate Covey et al's "quadrants" as follows: Quadrant I (+I+U), II (+I-U), III (-I+U), IV (-I-U).
 - High performance organizations typically have a high proportion of II (+I-U, compass), whereas typical organizations have a high proportion of III (-I+U, clock).
- Quadrant II time doesn't take place by accident. We must apportion time to it.
 - A weekly schedule where you block out time for Quadrant II is helpful.
 - Many long-term growth goals fall into this category, as do career research, internship applications, relationship building, etc.
- **Question: What are examples of activities/tasks in your life that are important but not urgent (i.e. don't need to be done now/soon)?**

Productivity Through Self- and Other-Accountability

- Robert Boice study on scholarly writing productivity:
 - Control group:
 - Tended to write in binges before deadlines, no intervention
 - ~16.9 pages / year
 - Self-Accountable group:
 - Committed to **writing daily** for 15-60 minutes (30 min. avg.) and **keep a daily writing log**
 - ~63.7 pages / year (~3.8× control group)
 - Self- and Other-Accountable group:
 - Committed to **writing daily** for 15-60 minutes (30 min. avg.) and **keep a daily writing log**
 - Committed to **be accountable for progress to someone else weekly**
 - ~157.3 pages / year (~9.3× control group, ~2.5 × self-accountable group)

Review

- ❑ Define your Inboxes and habitually direct incoming “stuff” to them.
- ❑ Process your Inboxes daily.
- ❑ Review your system weekly and plan next week. Block out and defend this time (and other Quadrant II time) on a weekly schedule.
- ❑ **Activity: List your next concrete steps for enacting change in your work routine. Examples:**
 - Buy whatever materials you may need to support your workflow.
 - Create a weekly schedule.
 - Set up documents for listing Next Actions, Someday/Maybe lists.
 - Put all of your “stuff” into Inboxes, and process it into your calendar/lists.

Additional Student Resources

- ❑ My sample Google docs:
<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BxH0cjR9jiCDQThBV1JzSVM1Mzg&usp=sharing>
- ❑ Cal Newport:
 - Getting Things Done for College Students: The Full System (<http://calnewport.com/blog/2007/07/20/getting-things-done-for-college-students-the-full-system/>)
 - Getting Things Done for College Students...Made Easy (<http://calnewport.com/blog/2008/10/06/monday-master-class-getting-things-done-for-college-studentsmade-easy/>)
- ❑ LifeHacker's Chris Lesinski: Getting Thing Done Explained for Students (<http://lifehacker.com/5334886/getting-things-done-explained-for-students>)