

a Christian
perspective on
how to best
do what's best

Getting Things Done for the Glory of God

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Disclaimer

- ❑ I'm still learning; I don't have everything perfectly organized and executed all the time, but...
- ❑ God has blessed me with wise teaching in this area that has been transformative in recent years, so...
- ❑ I have a natural desire to pass along the best of what I've learned.
- ❑ I hope this is blessing to you as well.

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 I'd like to share 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

Outline

- Top Down Approach from Life Goals down to Inbox Processing and Next Action Items
 - Psalm 90:12 - Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- Allen's 6-Level Model for Reviewing Your Work
 - 50,000+ feet: Life
 - 40,000 feet: 3-5 year vision
 - 30,000 feet: 1-2 year goals
 - 20,000 feet: Areas of responsibility
 - 10,000 feet: Current projects
 - Runway: Current actions

Motivation: Soli Deo Gloria

- ❑ Without a God-centric focus, our plans are a “meaningless chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1)
- ❑ It’s possible to run a treadmill in life with great drive, great outward productivity, and great futility.
 - Proverbs 19:1 - Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.
- ❑ Bach penned “Soli Deo Gloria” (Glory to God alone) on his works. We too should be motivated to have our lives glorify God.
 - Matthew 5:16 - In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Love the Lord with All You Are

- ❑ You have unique talents, unique skills, and a unique calling.
- ❑ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
 - “Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master’s happiness!”
 - It makes no sense that our imperfect lives would *merit* the favor of a perfect God, but our desire to bring God *happiness* with our lives is a grateful *response* to His gracious embrace.
- ❑ Lyrics to Petra’s Godpleaser

Life Mission and Multi-year Vision

- ❑ 50,000 feet – Life
 - This is your mission statement, where you sum up all that is most important to your life.
 - My life mission: Love God; love others. (Matt. 22:36-40)
- ❑ 40,000 feet – 3-5 year vision
 - This is your personal vision for why you are doing what you are doing in these years.
 - College students: Why are you in college? What is God calling you to beyond? Who is He calling you to become?
 - My current life vision:
 - Love my wife and family.
 - Raise, teach, and mentor loving, playful, problem-solvers.
 - Advance AI game and puzzle play, design, and education.

1-2 Year Vision

- 30,000 feet – 1-2 year vision
 - In 1-2 years from now, when you look back, what do you hope to see?
 - Who do you hope to become?
 - What do you hope to accomplish?
 - College students:
 - Which courses do you plan to take and why?
 - Which summer experiences should you pursue that are most in line with your 3-5 year vision?
 - In which ways is God calling you to grow, and what are the practical disciplines and accountability tools to walk in obedience to that call?

Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities

- 20,000 feet – areas of responsibility
 - Think of everyone in your life.
 - Characterize the relationships you have (or should have) with each and what role you are called to (e.g. son/daughter, student, friend, mentor, etc.).
 - Do not forget your Foremost Defining Relationship!
 - What are your responsibilities in these relationship roles? (e.g. prayer, call and encourage family members, responsibly complete assignments, be a servant leader in your Christian fellowship, etc.)

Projects

- 10,000 feet – projects
 - What are the practical “project” headings that categorize your responsibilities?
 - (e.g. courses, Church participation, fellowship service, clubs, or non-traditional project categories such as “family”, “friends”, “long-distance friends”)
 - Personal note: While it may seem somehow cold or clinical to treat people I love with the same status as “projects”, it is precisely that I do not wish the myriad work projects to crowd them out as unimportant by omission. This is the essence of intentional relationship.
 - We categorize so that we can review and note if any area of activity (i.e. “project”) is being neglected or overemphasized.

Summary of GTD

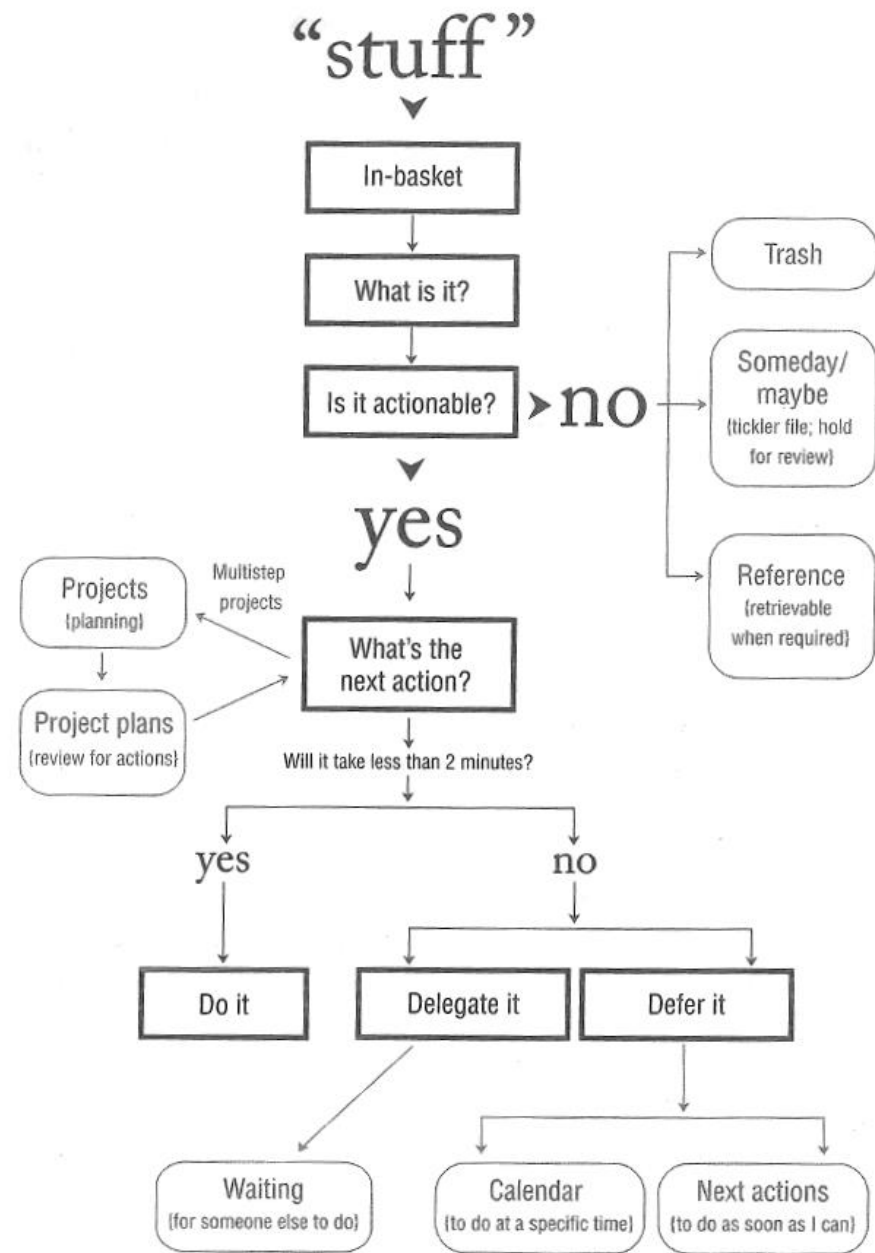
- ❑ Define your Inboxes
- ❑ Process your Inboxes daily
- ❑ Review your system and plans weekly

Your Inboxes

- ❑ List all places where you expect to get “stuff”.
- ❑ Find 2 days (e.g. a weekend) to
 - throw *all* of your stuff in these inboxes, and
 - process them. (“process”≠“do”)
- ❑ Build a *habit of capturing* tasks into your system.
 - If it’s in your system, it doesn’t have to be in your head. This is called “distributed cognition”.
- ❑ Example:
 - When starting, I aggressively went through every stack of material on my desks at home and work. I walked about my home and office, observing tasks that needed attention, voice-dictating email reminders and to-do items, and sending such “stuff” to my email inbox. I wrote lists and placed them into physical inboxes. For days, I built a habit of sending “stuff” to one of several “inboxes”.
 - Instead of maintaining a high cognitive load, I shunted stuff to places where I could consider them with greater care and circumspection.

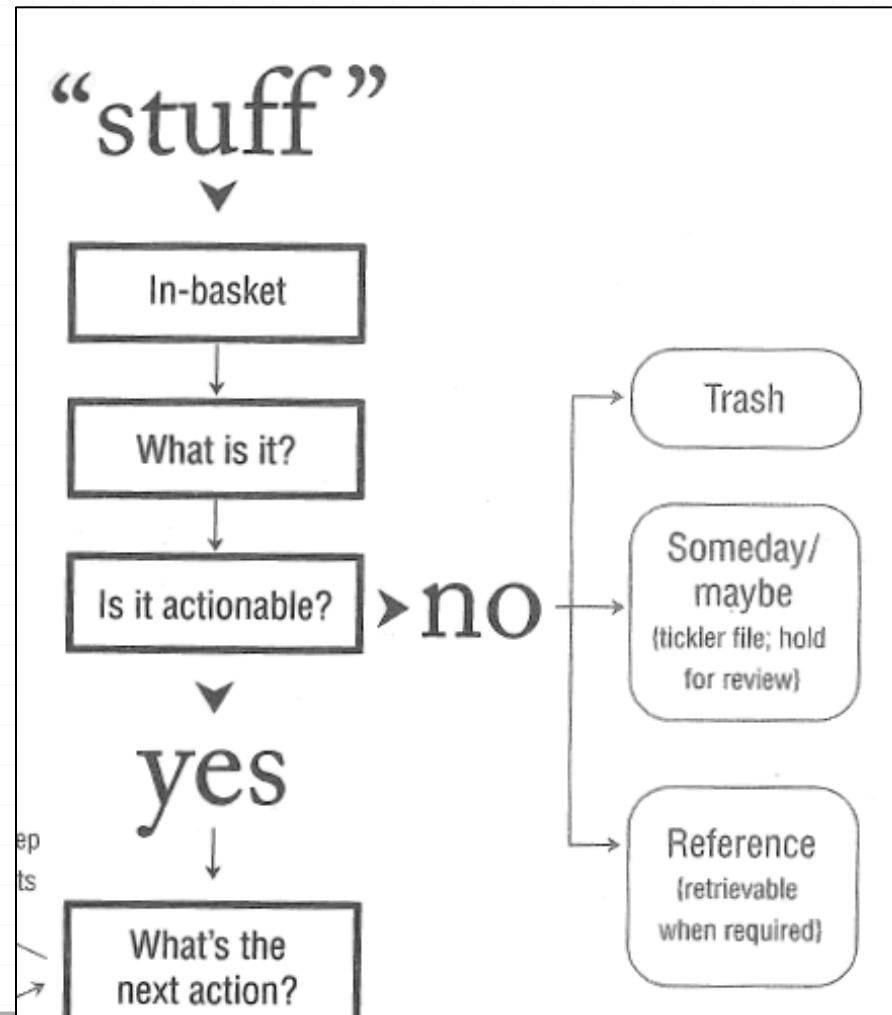
Process Your Inboxes

□ Flowchart from Getting Things Done by David Allen

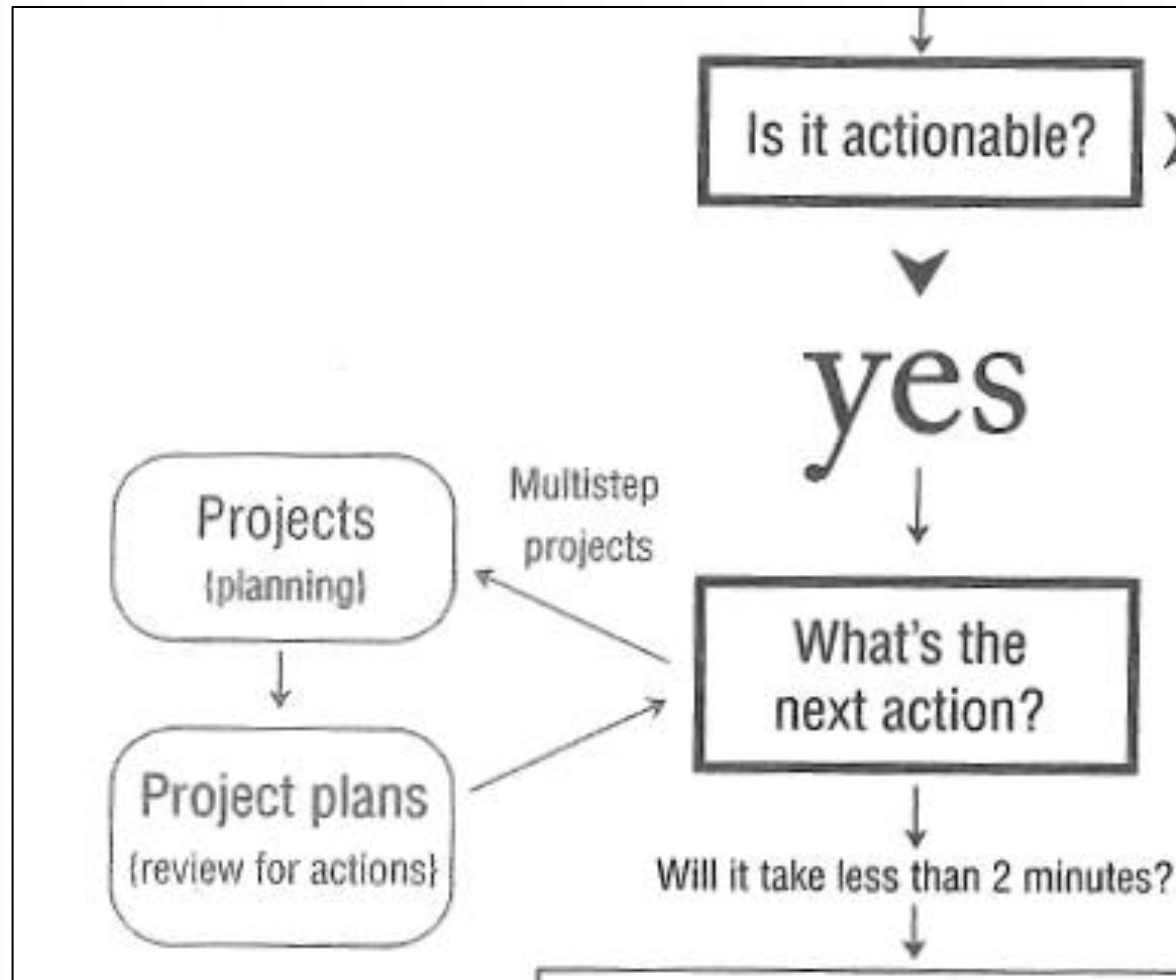


WORKFLOW DIAGRAM—PROCESSING

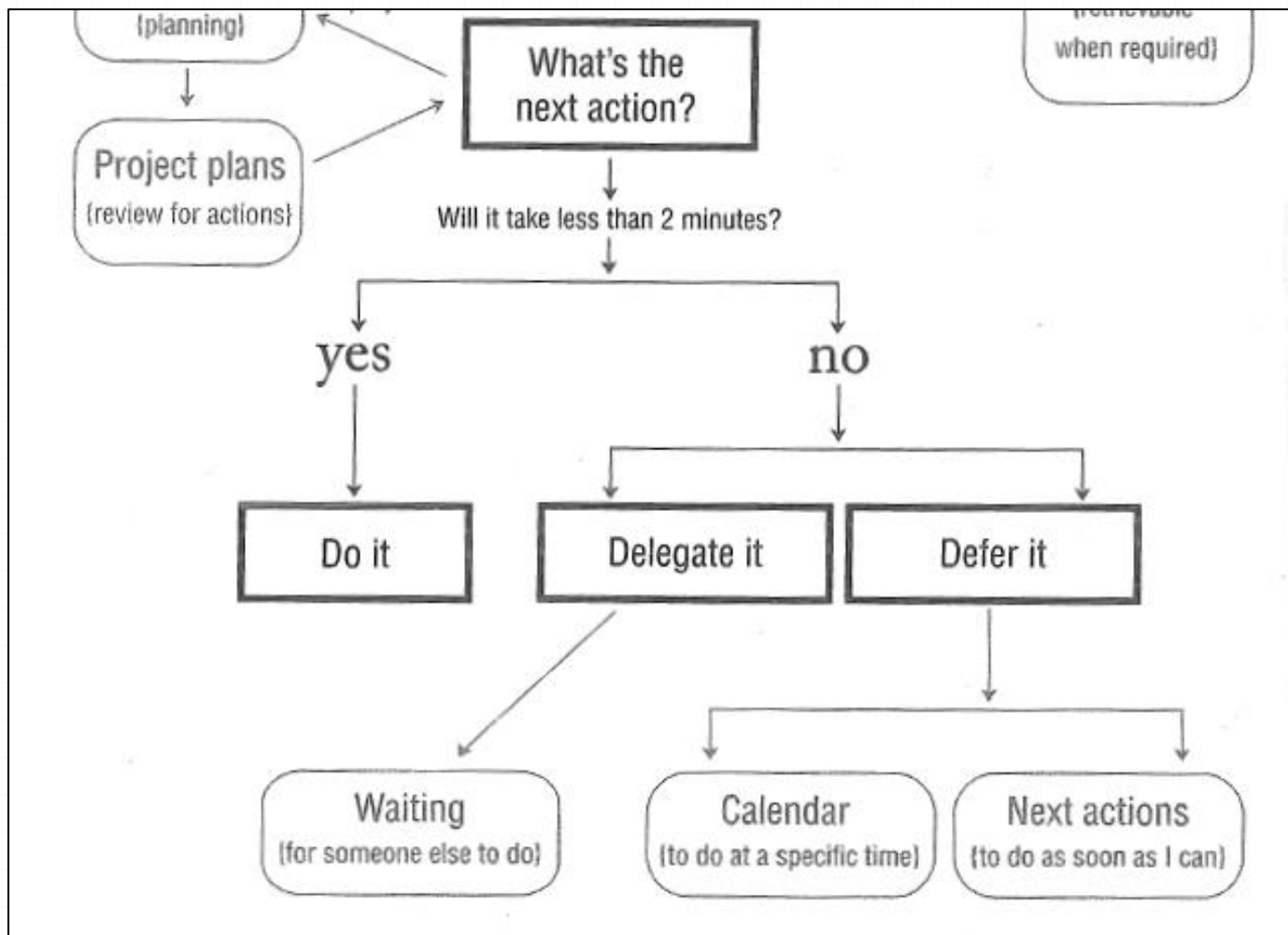
Sifting the Actionable from the File-able



Identifying the Tangible Next Steps



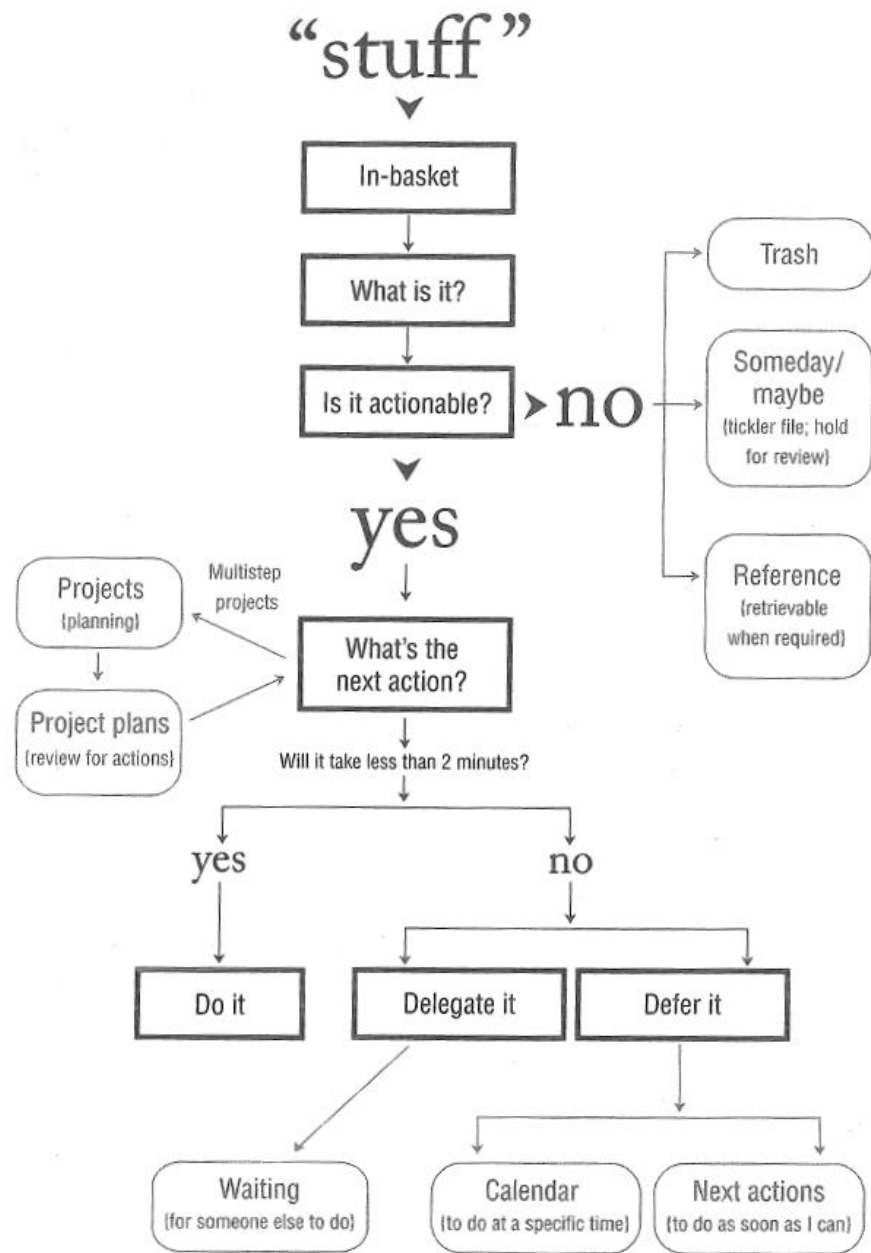
Delegating to Others, Calendar, and What's Best Next List



Process Your Inboxes

□ Summary:

- If it isn't actionable, trash/recycle it, or file it.
- Otherwise, determine the next tangible step forward.
- Do it if < 2 minutes.
- Delegate and track if appropriate.
- Otherwise, defer it to calendar or ASAP list.



WORKFLOW DIAGRAM—PROCESSING

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.
 - Many spiritual disciplines fall into this category, as does career research, internship applications, relationship building, etc.
 - A weekly schedule where you block out time for Quadrant II is helpful.

The Weekly Review

- ❑ Gather all loose paper, etc. into Inbox for processing.
- ❑ Process your notes.
- ❑ Review past calendar dates for capture of action items, reference information, etc.
- ❑ Review future calendar dates to capture actions in preparation for upcoming events.
- ❑ Empty your head, taking notes on other items you may want to capture.
- ❑ Review “Projects” (and Larger Outcomes) lists.
- ❑ Review “Next Actions” List.
- ❑ Review “Waiting For” List.
- ❑ Review any relevant checklists.
- ❑ Review Someday/Maybe lists.
- ❑ Review “Pending” and Support Files.
- ❑ Be Creative and Courageous.

How I Do It

- ❑ Allen does a good job of describing a structure but leaving the implementation details to the user.
 - For example, some love Evernote; some work with pencil and paper; I use simple Google docs, file folders, my computer directory structure, etc.
- ❑ My Inboxes:
 - Anywhere: Email inboxes, Facebook messages, Voicemail, backpack (esp. folder)
 - At home: desk Inbox
 - At work: desk Inbox, mailbox, meeting portfolio

How I Do It (cont.)

- Three main Google Docs (accessible anywhere with internet)
 - GTD Google spreadsheet – ASAP (“What’s best next”)
 - Important columns: next action item, where (work/home)
 - Less important: priority, project, due, tickle, notes
 - Sort by: where, priority
 - GTD List Google doc – All supporting lists
 - GTD notes (inboxes, daily/weekly review process)
 - Misc. lists: loaned items, CV update items
 - Tickler list
 - Someday/Maybe list (research, teaching, home projects, entertainment)
 - Work Log Google doc – planning and tracking activity
 - Weekly plan items for Quadrants I-III
 - Daily abbreviated notes on main tasks and approx. times

Accountability and Productivity

- Robert Boice's study of academic research writing:
 - Control Group 1: wrote with no change in habits, typically in bursts
 - Average: 17 pages
 - Group 2: wrote daily (e.g. 15-30 min.) and kept a daily record (self-accountability)
 - Average: 64 pages (~4 times control group)
 - Group 3: wrote daily, kept a daily record, and held themselves accountable to someone weekly (self-accountability + other-accountability)
 - Average: 157 pages (~9 times control group)
 - Sources:
 - [Publish and Flourish: Become a prolific Scholar](#) (Tom. Prof. Blog Post)
 - Robert Boice, [Advice to New Faculty Members](#) (2000)

Review

- ❑ Prayerfully consider:
 - Your life mission, 3-5 year vision, and 1-2 year vision.
 - All of the precious people God has placed in your life, your relationship to them, and the roles in their lives God has called you to.
 - A helpful categorization of all of your “projects”.
- ❑ 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.

Conclusion of the Matter

- Key Scriptures:
 - Psalm 90:12 - Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
 - Ecclesiastes 9:10 - Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.
 - Ecclesiastes 12:13 - Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:31 - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
 - Colossians 3:17 - And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
 - Colossians 3:23-24 - Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
 - Matthew 5:16 - In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- Throughout our short lives, may we work with all of our might to love and serve God and men to the glory of God alone. Amen.

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>)