

The Time of Day Has a Significant Effect on Your Productivity

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More hours does not guarantee peak performance.

“All times of day are not created equal,” says Daniel Pink, author of [When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing](#).

“Our performance varies considerably over the course of the day, and what task to do at a certain time really depends on the nature of the task. If we look at the evidence, we can be doing the right work, at the right time,” he [said](#) in an interview.

You can pack more into each day if you did everything at the optimal time.

Everyone aims to do better at work every day but peak performance is a question of time. For personal efficiency, the question is *when*.

The human body operates in cycles, and they can be influenced by daylight, darkness, food, noise, and silence.

Your brain, body and hormone respond to stimuli and the body clock differently.

A growing body of [research on ultradian rhythms](#) suggests that our day is driven by cycles that affect how alert and productive we are.

The results of this research clearly show that the human body goes through cycles of between 90 and 120 minutes.

Through each of these cycles we are taken from an unproductive trough to a productive peak, and then back again.

This pattern was first noticed by sleep researcher Nathaniel Kleitman, which caused a mountain of research to be conducted in this area.

Another study [published in Thinking & Reasoning](#) found out that we tend to think more creativity when we're tired.

A study by Mareike Wieth and Rose Zacks suggested that innovation and creativity are often the greatest in moments of fatigue, based on our circadian rhythms.

Fatigue and tiredness have been shown to free up thinking along non-linear paths, leading us to find new solutions to existing problems. So your body's internal body clock is the best clue to how productive you can be.

Peak periods of physical and mental energy differ from person to person.

Everyone has different energy levels based on external and internal factors. The knowledge of your peak times can help you plan your day better.

Brian Tracy calls this your [prime time](#). “Your internal prime time is the time of day, according to your body clock, when you are the most alert and productive.”

The single most important productivity advice you need to follow is this: Match your highest priority work to your most productive hours.

The peak time for everything

Our body clock is a small group of cells made up of unique ‘body clock’ genes.

These cells turn on and off and tell other parts of the body what time it is and what to do.

Paying attention to the body clock, and its effects on energy and alertness can help pinpoint the different times of day when most of us perform our best at specific tasks.

At the beginning of the cycle, we experience heightened energy and focus, and at the end, we may feel scatterbrained and fatigued.

For many people working in the AM feels effortless, but PM’s are always a struggle.

If you take note of how your body reacts to work at any time of day, you will be able to figure out when you should focus on getting stuff done, when to brainstorm, and most importantly when you should avoid meetings.

When the body’s master clock can synchronize functioning of all its metabolic, cardiovascular and behavioural rhythms in response to light and other natural stimuli, it “gives us an edge in daily life,” says Steve Kay, a professor of molecular and computational biology at the University of Southern California.

But, what is the best day for you (or your team) to be productive?

Peak productivity, it seems, happens at the same time during your workday, no matter where you are in the world.

A two-year global [study](#) conducted by project management software company Redbooth found that productivity among office workers worldwide is at its highest point at 11 a.m., and plummets completely after 4 p.m.

John Trougakos, an associate professor of organizational behaviour at the University of Toronto in Canada, says about 75% of people tend to be the most mentally alert between 9 a.m and 11 a.m.

And a survey that looked into the habits of 2,000 UK workers seems to agree with Trougakos’ research, showing Tuesday morning as the most productive time for Brits.

The findings “are consistent with the considerable research on the ebbs and flows of mental acuity,” says Don Drummond, economist and adjunct professor at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario.

Perhaps it's no surprise that we get the least amount of work done on a Friday, with Redbooth's survey showing a 20% drop in productivity across the globe.

Sleepiness also tends to peak around 2 p.m., making that a good time for a nap, says Martin Moore-Ede, chairman and chief executive of Circadian, a Stoneham, Mass., training and consulting firm.

To get a little more precise and make sure you're really matching your best work to your peak times, try experimenting.

Tackle complex projects early in the day, make time for brainstorming, meetings and collaboration in the afternoon.

Most people are more easily distracted from noon to 4 p.m., according to recent research led by Robert Matchock, an associate professor of psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

But guess, what surprisingly, fatigue boost creative powers.

Problems that require open-ended thinking are often best tackled in the evening when you are tired, according to a study in the journal *Thinking & Reasoning*.

People who work with instead of against their ultradian rhythm perform better. It's critical that you acknowledge your body's natural rhythms and align your periods of work and relaxation with them to work in a sustainable productive way.

It requires a lot of research on yourself and a big time commitment up front, but the personal productivity insights you'll get out of it can pay off in the long-run.

This simple method can help you organize your days around your energy, not your time.

The experiment for better cycle insights

1. Pick a day and start tracking how you spend it.
2. Eliminate any factors that could mess with your energy—changes in caffeine intake is a big one, staying up late is another.
3. Start recording what you're accomplishing once an hour. Rate your energy level, motivation, focus on the process of work, every day.
4. Chris Bailey, author of "[*The Productivity Project: Accomplishing More by Managing Your Time, Attention, and Energy*](#)", took a year off to experiment with productivity.

He suggests recording scores for focus, energy, and motivation for three weeks, at the same time each day, to find your sweet spot. The longer you track your productivity, the more reliable your insights will be.

You will see trends even after one week of tracking, but the more data you gather, the more reliable your trends will be.

5. Take a few minutes each day to reflect on your previous day/week. Do you notice any patterns? When are you most focused? When do you notice a surge or dip in energy?

What times do you reach for coffee in the day? These patterns can reveal when you're at your best and when you should take a break to refresh.

6. Write down how you spend your minutes and keep notes on how you felt. Be honest. Sometimes you can identify that you feel "on a roll," which is a good sign that you're figuring out something about your productivity.

7. The exact details that you record may vary, but to get the most accurate results you'll need to be as consistent as possible.

Patterns will show themselves if you start tracking it. Time and activity tracking software like Rescue Time and Toggl can be a big help here.

8. You're bound to discover some very interesting things about what drives your productivity. If you can diligently track all three weeks, can you do more at the right time.

9. Try a combination of things during this process, including waking up an hour earlier, meditating, exercise, and taking longer breaks to find out if they affect your peak times. Do more of what works. The variables you choose to alter are countless. Have fun with it!

10. Once you figure out your most productive time of day, rearrange your tasks and put your important, high-concentration tasks in periods where you're highly productive and place less important, low-concentration tasks in periods where you're not very productive.

I did this experiment for three months and discovered my energy and capacity for intense deep work diminish after 12 pm.

This has changed how I work and write.

Closing thoughts

A better understanding of the body's hidden pattern can allow you to do the right work at the right time.

Paying attention to your body clock, and its effects on energy and alertness can help pinpoint the different times of day when you can do your best work.

Your internal clocks deserve more respect.

Seize the day and do your best work every day.