

## 10 lessons from Benjamin Franklin's daily schedule that will double your productivity

[Mayo Oshin](#)

May 30, 2019



Benjamin Franklin is best remembered as one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, but he achieved much more in his lifetime.

During Franklin's 84 years alive, he invented the lightning rod, made significant discoveries in physics and population studies, wrote best-selling books, composed music and played the violin, harp and guitar at a high level, founded many civic organizations, including the University of Pennsylvania in [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#), and much more.

How did Franklin achieve so much more than his contemporaries, given he had the same 24 hours each day to get things done?

The answer to this question lies in Franklin's daily schedule.

Here's how it works, including 10 lessons that will double your productivity this week, no matter if you're a [network engineer](#), [sales manager](#), or [construction project manager](#).

### Create a list of values to live by

Before putting pen to paper on his daily schedule, Franklin created a list of virtues to live by.

He referred to these as his 13 virtues: a list of values designed to help guide his daily schedule.

Here's the list of Benjamin Franklin's 13 virtues:

- 1. Temperance:** Eat not to dullness and drink not to elevation.
- 2. Silence:** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling conversation.
- 3. Order:** Let all your things have their places. Let each part of your business have its time.
- 4. Resolution:** Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.
- 5. Frugality:** Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself: i.e. Waste nothing.
- 6. Industry:** Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions.
- 7. Sincerity:** Use no hurtful deceit. Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
- 8. Justice:** Wrong none, by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
- 9. Moderation:** Avoid extremes. Forebear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
- 10. Cleanliness:** Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation.
- 11. Chastity:** Rarely use venery but for health or offspring; Never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
- 12. Tranquility:** Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
- 13. Humility:** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Franklin arranged each virtue in order of importance, and instead of tackling all of them at once, he planned to: "fix it on one of them at a time; and, when I should be master of that, then to proceed to another, and so on, till I should have gone thro' the thirteen."

Each day, Franklin would track his progress on one virtue, in a little book—which had a page allotted for each of the virtues—and in the evenings, he would put a mark next the virtue if he committed a fault.

At the end of each week, Franklin would review the number of faults committed against the virtue, and would only move onto building the habit of the next virtue, if no faults were committed.

By creating a list of values to live by, Franklin laid a solid foundation to build a daily schedule that aligns with them, and directs his time and energy in the right direction.

### Benjamin Franklin's daily schedule

*"You may delay, but time will not."*  
— Benjamin Franklin

In [Benjamin Franklin's autobiography \(audiobook\)](#), he breaks down his simple daily schedule for peak productivity:

The morning question, What good shall I do this day?	5	Rise, wash, and address <i>Powerful Goodness</i> ; contrive day's business and take the resolution of the day; prosecute the present study; and breakfast.
	6	
	7	
	8	
	9	
	10	Work.
	11	
	12	Read or overlook my accounts, and dine.
	1	
	2	Work.
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	Put things in their places, supper, music, or diversion, or conversation; examination of the day.
	8	
	9	
Evening question, What good have I done today?	10	Sleep.
	11	
	12	
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	

From Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*

Here are the 10 most important productivity lessons from Franklin's daily schedule:

#### 1. Keep it simple

The first thing to note about Franklin's daily schedule is its simplicity.

There are only six time blocks scheduled for each day, and one of these blocks includes sleep—an obvious necessity.

There's no overwhelming to-do list of things to get done. It's simple, ruthlessly focused on the essential, and highly effective.

It's easy to underestimate the [power of simplicity](#), even though it's the hidden driving force behind peak productivity.

#### 2. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day

One of Franklin's most popular mantras was "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise," and according to this schedule, he definitely lived up to it.

Each day, Franklin woke up early at 5 am and went to bed early at 10 pm, for a total of 7 hours of sleep each night.

It's important to note however, that what matters most isn't the time you go to bed or wake up, it's the consistency of your sleep schedule.

By going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, you'll [train your brain to fall asleep faster](#) and improve the quality of your sleep.

#### 3. Spend quiet time alone

Shortly after waking up, Franklin would take a shower and then "address *Powerfull Goodness*." In other words, he'd spend some time in prayer or meditation.

This daily [habit of solitude](#) gave Franklin the much needed clarity and focus to plan the day, and follow through on his plans.

#### 4. Set your intention and plan for the day

Each morning, before going to work, Franklin would set his intention for the day with an important question: What good shall I do this day?

Then he'd pick a virtue to focus on, and begin to "contrive day's business, and take the resolution of the day" i.e. to plan his day.

Setting an intention and creating a plan of action each morning, ensures that you stay focused on your most important task and avoid getting easily distracted by the minutia, and other people during the day. If your intention is to [eat clean](#) that day, stay focused on that goal.

### **5. Dedicate time to learning**

You don't have to work in [education](#) to be a life-long learner. In Franklin's daily schedule, he sets aside some time to "prosecute the present study," which means he'd spend time on an independent personal project separate from work.

Most likely, this would've been time spent reading either books or papers.

Alternatively, you could spend this time learning a language, playing an instrument or on your hobbies.

### **6. Create time blocks for deep and shallow work**

To plan his day, Franklin created [time blocks](#) to manage his time effectively and protect his day from unexpected interruptions.

Specifically, Franklin allocated two four-hour time blocks—from 8 am till 12 pm, and from 2pm till 6 pm—for deep work and uninterrupted focus on his most important tasks.

Likewise, Franklin allocated a two-hour time block—from 12 am till 2 pm—for lunch and shallow work i.e. reviewing his finances.

By creating time blocks in this manner, Franklin finished his most important tasks for the day, when he had the [most energy to do so](#). Using the [10-minute timer](#) technique can help you with time blocking and getting all your work done efficiently.

### **7. Put things back in order after work**

After a long tiring day at work, it's easy to walk away from our work space and leave things in a disorderly manner, only to return back the next morning to clean it up before getting back to work.

Even though this saves time upfront, it wastes valuable time, willpower and energy, that could've been spent working on important tasks straight away.

To avoid this problem, Franklin made sure to clean up his work space and put things back in order before leaving the office each day.

This ensured that Franklin had enough willpower each morning, to tackle the tedious tasks in the long day ahead.

### **8. Schedule downtime**

After work each day, Franklin would clean up his work space, eat dinner, and spend the rest of the evening relaxing: listening to music and catching up with his friends.

Downtime isn't a waste of time. It's a powerful productivity tool for re-energizing the brain and body, in preparation for the challenges of the next day.

### **9. Reflect on your day in the evenings**

Just before going to bed, Franklin would reflect on his day and ask himself an important question: What good have I done today?

After noting down what went well, and what didn't go so well during the day, Franklin would look to change and improve his daily schedule.

Likewise, an evening audit of your daily productivity will help you to uncover time-wasting activities that drain your energy, and improve your daily schedule for better productivity.

### **10. Don't aim for perfection**

In the book [Daily Rituals: How Artists Work \(Audiobook\)](#), Currey explains that Franklin himself struggled to stick to his daily schedule:

“He was not naturally inclined to keep his papers and other possessions organized, and he found the effort so vexing that he almost quit in frustration. Moreover, the demands of his printing business meant that he couldn’t always follow the exacting daily timetable that he set for himself.”

What matters most isn’t perfectionism, it’s improvement. As Franklin emphasized:

*“I was surpris’d to find myself so much fuller of faults than I had imagined; but I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish.”*

Celebrate your small wins and avoid beating yourself up when you fall short of your plans, because at the end of the day, it’s the effort that really counts.

### **Failing to plan is planning to fail**

Benjamin Franklin’s daily schedule is a simple, highly effective template for improving your productivity.

Even though it was created over 300 years ago, it contains timeless principles that will help you to avoid the distractions of the modern world, and stay focused on your most important tasks, whether you’re a high school student or CEO of [Intel Corporation](#).

Tweak and experiment with Franklin’s daily schedule to find what works best for you, but remember in the words of Benjamin Franklin, what matters most isn’t the contents of the plan, it’s the decision to make a plan in the first place:

*“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!”*

Mayo Oshin writes at [MayoOshin.com](#), where he shares practical ideas at the intersection of science, art and philosophy, for better thinking and decision-making. You can join his free weekly newsletter [here](#).

A version of this [article](#) originally appeared at [mayooshin.com](#) as [“10 Lessons From Benjamin Franklin’s Daily Schedule That Will Double Your Productivity.”](#)

---

### **FOOTNOTES**

1. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin ([Book](#) / [Audiobook](#))
2. Fun fact: In a [letter to his friend](#)—years after the daily schedule was formed—Franklin describes a new addition to his daily schedule, called the “daily air bath.” In the letter, he said, “I rise early almost every morning, and sit in my chamber without any clothes whatever, half an hour or an hour, according to the season, either reading or writing.”

<https://www.theladders.com/career-advice/lessons-from-benjamin-franklins-daily-schedule-that-will-double-your-productivity>