

The Beginner's Guide to **Working from Home**

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Introduction

It is a truism to say we live in unprecedented times. For the foreseeable future, many of us will be forced to live and work in very different ways.

This short e-book aims to look at how we might best accomplish this. It is designed to be a useful checklist of things to consider in order to make the best use of our time at home.

There are four main sections - the New Normal, Workspace and Tools, Time Management and Productivity, and Physical and Mental Well-being.

You may be familiar with much of the advice, but it is useful to stop and reflect once in a while nevertheless; use the book as a mirror, up to which you can hold your current practice and see what you can do better - there will always be something!

THE NEW NORMAL

Many of us find ourselves at home for extended periods of time. This section will explore the pros and cons, including Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT).

WORKSPACE AND TOOLS

If you are used to working away from home, with everything provided for you, it can feel a bit daunting at first. This section will attempt to get to grips with what you need - and what you *don't need* - to work from home.

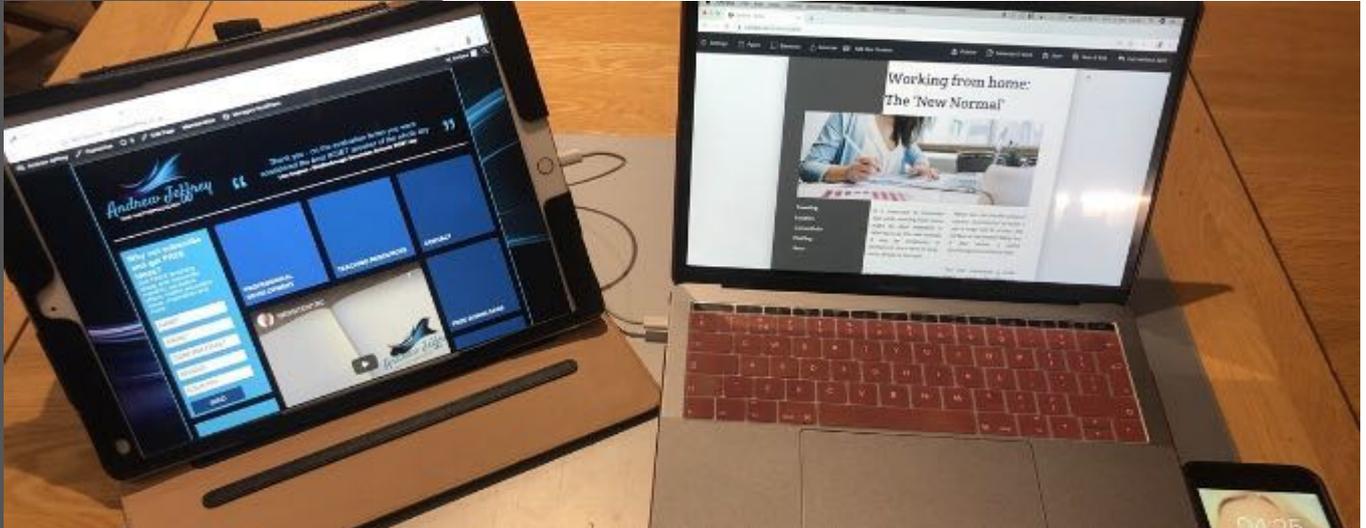
TIME MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY

With nobody looking over your shoulder, you need to make sure you are working efficiently. That's not easy, but luckily there are some awesome tools to help.

WELL-BEING

Your physical health and mental health are arguably the two most important attributes. This section looks at how to optimise both.

Working from home: The 'New Normal'



The 'New Normal' is different for everyone.

We need to rethink our location, the way we connect with colleagues and clients, the way we dress and present ourselves, the hours we work, and the relationship between our working and non-working lives.

None of this comes naturally, but it is all achievable.

This e-book will guide you through it.

It is important to remember that while working from home might be what everyone is referring to as 'the new normal', it may be temporary or permanent, short-term or long-term, chosen or imposed.

No two people's circumstances are exactly alike. As you read through this e-book, bear in mind that what works for me may not work for you, and vice-versa. However there are some general principles, for example in choosing where to work, that can be applied to all of us. The first thing to decide is WHERE in your home you will base yourself. How should you go about picking the perfect spot?

Read on...

Above you can see the setup of my own simple 'workstation' at home. I use a large mat to protect the surface of the kitchen table, but it also serves a useful psychological purpose.

The mat encompasses a finite space. I make a big effort to keep laptop, second screen, phone and sometimes a notebook on the mat. Once work is over, the mat can be put away quickly to represent the end of the working day.

Psychologically that can be important - having a different 'work' space and 'home' space is good for us.

I use a great piece of software called Duet, which allows me to use my iPad as a second screen.

More on that later.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

STRENGTHS

Autonomy
Faster commute
No wasting time on office gossip
Cheaper travel/food
Less stress

WEAKNESSES

Human connection
No tech support
Potentially harder to share ideas and to network

OPPORTUNITIES

Comfy clothing
Choice of music, or silence
Flexibility around timings
Better lunch choices

THREATS

Isolation
Distractions
Meetings harder to organise
Family using up wifi
Boredom (and over-snacking)
Blurring of your work/home boundary

WORKPLACE AND TOOLS

LOCATION: EQUIPMENT: NOTES: SOFTWARE



1: PICKING YOUR LOCATION

You should take enormous care when choosing where in your home you will work. Some of you may have plenty of choice about where to work, others less so. Here are the benefits and challenges of five possible options. Don't be afraid to try more than one location to find out which works best for you.

Your bedroom

Benefits: This option is probably available to almost everyone. Most of us have a room we call our own, or that we share with a partner.

Challenges: If you have a partner, it is hard to get up and work when they may be sleeping. Also, your bedroom should be your sanctuary away from the rest of the world. Your brain may not cope well with it being your place of employment as well. When you go to bed at night, your office is right there with you - not an ideal way to switch off and reset.

The Lounge/Sofa

Benefits: It's very comfortable working here! Also, you will not feel cut off from anyone else who may be at home.

Challenges: Concentration is likely to be the big issue with this option. Your TV will probably be in the same room, as will other members of your family. Also it can be hard to keep track of your things on a sofa.

Kitchen/Dining Room

Benefits: You may well be able to benefit from a proper table to sit at. In addition, it is easier to separate work from play.

Challenges: Mealtimes, snacking, and food preparation times mean that your work will very likely be constantly disrupted.

Spare Bedroom

Benefits: This is likely to be a quiet option so concentrating will be easier.

Challenges: Few spare bedrooms have a desk or suitable writing space, and many are used as storage so the room may not be overly conducive to work in.

Garden Office

Benefits: Peace and quiet, and a clear boundary between home and work. The gold standard!

Challenges: can feel isolated, temperature can be difficult to control, wifi signal may be poor, power and lighting may not be adequate.

2: Setting up your Workspace



Once you have chosen a location in your home, the next step is to choose what you will - and won't - include there.

Choose wisely; getting this right can contribute massively to the success of your project or enterprise.

If you can, do treat yourself to a good pair of noise-cancelling headphones, preferably with a microphone. This will help you concentrate and void distractions as well as making you sound better on conference calls.

Once you've found your perfect location, the next thing to think carefully about is what to put there.

Desktop or Laptop?

These days most people work from either a desktop or laptop computer. About a year ago, I made the decision to ditch my desktop in favour of the flexibility that a laptop would provide. But that may not be the right decision for you. Let's look at the pros and cons of both.

A desktop computer usually affords a larger screen and perhaps a second screen. However, it is fixed in place. It would take time to move it to a new location, and it is impossible to 'put away' so requires its own permanent, dedicated area.

A laptop on the other hand may have a smaller screen, but is ultimately portable, and can even be taken out of the house for meetings, coffee shop working, etc.

My laptop and ipad have a small piece of software called 'Duet'. It allows me to use the ipad as an extended laptop screen. This is particularly useful if, for example, you are replying to an email about dates and availability. I can have the calendar open and type on it while also reading and setting up an event via email. Apple have something similar called 'SideCar' but Duet works so well for me that I have not yet switched over.

You can see a picture of my setup on page 2, but whatever you decide, having a second screen will certainly give you a huge boost in your productivity.

3: Preparing To Take and Make Notes

There are three main tools which allow you to take notes as you work. In no particular order, these are:

A) Sticky Notes

IBM's Post-It Notes changed the world (other brands of sticky notes are available of course!). These work best for a short-term things; job lists, single tasks, reminders, etc. Once the job is done - screw it up and recycle!



B) Virtual Notes

If you prefer virtual sticky notes, there are many apps that can help. I have experimented with a few, such as AntNotes or Stickies, but there is plenty of choice for both Windows and IOS platforms. This method has the advantage of having reminders without the paper clutter.



C) Notebook

The original but still effective tool. Yes it takes up space on your desktop, but a more effective tool than sticky notes for ongoing projects. The sense of achievement that comes with crossing' off a completed a completed it em cannot be underestimated! There are both paper and electronic notebooks; choose whichever suits you.



My current electronic notebook is the Remarkable tablet, but paper works fine!



However you choose to make notes and lists, try each of these and see which of them is the most convenient for you. When you are starting out, I recommend a paper notebook and sticky notes.

As you gain experience, you may find that one of the other methods works better for you.

SOFTWARE AND APPS

You probably already have the software you need. If not, there is no need to spend a fortune. Depending on your business, you will need some or all of the following:

- Email software
- Online calendar
- Word Processor or Desktop Publisher
- Video/Audio conferencing software
- Note-taking or list-making or task management software

For email, the two most popular clients are Outlook and Gmail. Both have a key feature of allowing users to work when offline and send emails once back on the internet. This can be useful if you wish to turn off the internet to aid concentration, for example, or if it goes down for any reason, and you can keep working.

Whichever email software you use it is good practice to only look at it at predetermined times. This is very hard if you are self-employed, or have a particularly demanding boss, so one more realistic tactic you might like to try is to turn it off for a particular hour or two when you are trying to concentrate on finishing a project or important task.

Taking of concentration, it is important to schedule breaks away from a computer to ensure that you remain working optimally. One effective technique is the Pomodoro Technique - see section 4.

I like to use this free [simple timer app](#), that works on the same lines as the Pomodoro technique. but is very flexible. There are paid options, but I have not yet found them necessary.

Other useful apps you might want to think about at home include task management software, which allows you to track how much time you are spending on a range of tasks. In addition to that, it allows you to bill clients fairly if you are working on an hourly rate.

Finally, depending on your role, the ability to control a colleague's screen (or vice versa) can be invaluable. My app of choice for this task is [Team Viewer](#) - free for personal use but corporate licenses are also available.

For conferencing, there are dozens of software options. [Zoom](#) is very popular and easy to use, as well as being free for most users. Again, expect to pay for corporate use.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY

Diaries: Quadrants: ABCs



1. How Should I Plan My Day?



Different styles of planning suit everyone, so it makes no sense to offer you a meaningless one size fits all, but as the old saying goes, "If you fail to prepare you are preparing to fail."

So here are my top tips:

The **LAST** thing you do for work each day should be to create a written list of jobs for the following day. This will help your mind rest and sleep better.

Use a system - don't just write an arbitrary list. See page 9 for more details of how to prioritise your jobs.

Put your diary online. Google Calendar is powerful and free, and works on any platform. You can also control who sees it, and who can edit it. Useful for families and small teams as well.

Create recurring tasks and timings on your electronic diary. Use it to set dates and times when you will revisit a project. Set reminder popups for those times.

Acknowledge that you will have down times and embrace the opportunity, rather than feel guilty - schedule some crossword/walk/ring a friend or relative/bake/reading time into your day.

Managing your time is one of the most crucial things to address when working from home.

No longer do you have the luxury of regular start, finish and break times. You are the sole manager of 86,400 seconds every day.

How will you spend them? Because however you spend them - they will all be gone by tonight!!

The three key things to have in place are a clear vision of:

WHY you want to achieve something

WHAT you want to achieve it

HOW you plan on doing so.



2: PRIORITISE LIKE A PRO

You are about to learn two techniques used by the most powerful and successful people on the planet. What's more - they are easy to do. You could be implementing these tools in no time.

The first is referred to as the ABC technique. I first learnt it from an audiobook and almost overnight it transformed the amount I get done in a day. The second is more well-known, and known as the four quadrant matrix. I first came across it in Dr Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People".

The ABC Technique

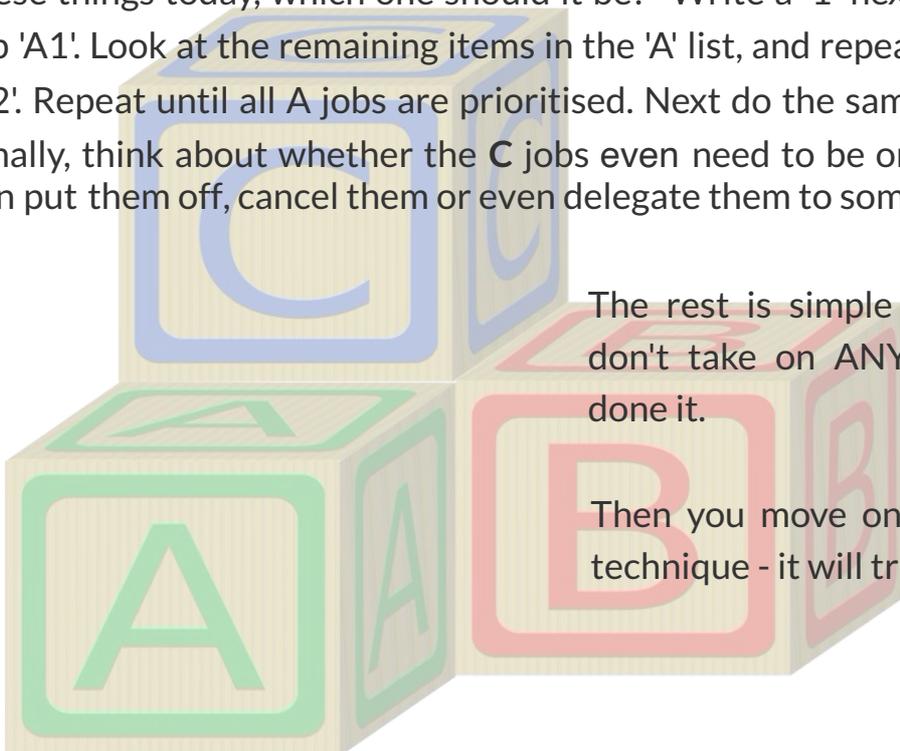
First, make a list of the things you have to do. Now go through the whole list and next to each item on your list, write either 'A', 'B', or 'C', according to the following criteria:

- If you have to get this done today, write an A.
- If you would prefer to do this today, but it's not essential, write a B.
- If you don't need to do this, or could possibly delegate it, write a C.

Now, consider the items marked with an 'A'. Ask yourself 'If I could only finish ONE of these things today, which one should it be?' Write a '1' next to the A - this becomes job 'A1'. Look at the remaining items in the 'A' list, and repeat the question to find job 'A2'. Repeat until all A jobs are prioritised. Next do the same process for the B jobs. Finally, think about whether the C jobs even need to be on the list, or whether you can put them off, cancel them or even delegate them to someone else.

The rest is simple - start doing job A1, and don't take on ANYTHING ELSE until you've done it.

Then you move onto A2, and so on. Try this technique - it will transform your productivity.



The Four Quadrant Matrix

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly-Effective People*, Dr Stephen Covey outlines a very simple concept - the four-quadrant matrix. The premise is simple - all your tasks can be sorted into one of four categories: they are either urgent, important, neither, or both.

Quadrant 1: Urgent and Important

Fire alarm. Crisis. Report due in 20 minutes. Impending deadlines. Customer query.

Quadrant 2: Non-Urgent and Important

School development plan. Arrangements for next year. CPD goals/needs for all staff. Exercise. Personal Development. Reading for expertise. Relationship building. Coaching staff.

Quadrant 3: Urgent and Non-Important

Unexpected phone calls. Many meetings. Emails requesting fast answers. Knocks on the door followed by "Do you have a minute?" These MIGHT be important but can usually wait.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	Quadrant 1	Quadrant 2
NOT IMPORTANT	Quadrant 3	Quadrant 4

Quadrant 4: Not Urgent or Important

Social Media. Emails with funny videos of cats. Magazines. Time wasters wanting a chat. Workplace gossip.

Stay away from quadrant 4 whenever possible.

Think about all you do in a day. Fit the things that take your time into the matrix. The aim is to clear quadrant 1 completely. Counter-intuitively, the best way to achieve this is actually to *work in quadrant 2*; that way, you are so good at prioritising your tasks that almost nothing ever gets to quadrant 1. Of course there will always be things out of your control that need to be addressed immediately, but if you worry that you are constantly chasing deadlines, quadrant 2 is your friend - aim to spend as much time there as possible.

More Productivity Tips

01

Invest in a good pair of headphones. Being able to shut out background noise can give you a real advantage.

02

Prepare your list of tomorrow's tasks the night before. This will clear your brain and afford you a better night's sleep.

03

Use your online calendar to book in times and dates when you will revisit a project. This allows your subconscious not to worry about remembering it, as a reminder will pop up.

04

Periodically de-clutter your workspace. Paper clutter can have a detrimental effect on your ability to focus.

05

Use the Pomodoro Technique: set a timer for a fixed amount of time (say 25 minutes). Work solidly without distraction on your task for that time, then have a fixed break (say 5 minutes) and repeat.

06

Do a Notifications audit: the chances are, you have quite a few devices currently vying for your attention. Every time your phone, tablet, watch or laptop 'pings' it can take you several minutes to get back into a state of flow, so spend some time turning them off unless you have a very good reason for not doing!

WELLBEING

Physical: Mental

Keeping your body and brain in shape



1: Keeping Physically Fit



One of the dangers of working from home is the temptation to sit and work for long hours without regard to our posture or general fitness level.

Fortunately, this is easy enough to fix. The ancient Romans had a saying: "Mens Sana in Corpore Sano": 'A Healthy Mind in a Healthy Body'. They were definitely onto something!

Whatever your level of fitness, you can always improve it. If this were not true, professional athletes at the peak of their fitness would not bother to train.

But of course they do, so who are we to argue?

As I write this our nation is in lockdown, permitted only one bout of daily exercise. Because this is so precious, many people are going out daily who might otherwise never have done so.

This is not a permanent situation, of course, but it has made many people reflect on the importance of daily exercise.

Even if you not very mobile, a brief walk along the road and back can make all the difference. Here are some other ideas for all levels of fitness:

Go for a walk.

Go for a run.

Go for a cycle.

Do a spot of gardening.

Find an online workout. (This is a good option as it allows for all levels of ability, flexibility, etc.

If you are lucky enough to have the space at home, try using an exercise bike or rowing machine.

Find a local park that has a FREE outdoor gym- these are becoming more common.

Find local exercise classes and sign up - social media is a great way to find these.

Offer to walk a neighbour's dog (or walk your own!)

2: Keeping Mentally Fit



Here are a few strategies you can use to keep yourself in good shape mentally.

1. **Have a routine.** You can switch it around, but start with some clear times when you commit that you **WILL** and **WON'T** work.
2. **Work to a carefully prioritised jobs schedule.** See pages 8 and 9 for how to do this.
3. **Celebrate successes.** Keep a check of what you have achieved, in case you feel like you are gettin gnnowhere.
4. **Take a proper lunchbreak.** It doesn't have to be at the same time every day, so be flexible.
5. **Get up and move around at least once per hour.** Use an app to remind you to do this.
6. **Try to have some human contact, however fleeting.** Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and talk to somebody.
7. **Accept that working from home is a unique situation -** there is no need to work slavishly from 9am to 5pm. Find your best time of day and prioritise that time for working.

Keeping our bodies in good shape is one thing, but our minds need special attention too.

Working at home can be a lonely and frustrating business at times, so on this page we will look at seven of the best strategies you can use to keep yourself up to the task.



THANK YOU FOR READING THIS E-BOOK!

I hope you have found lots of useful information, and that you feel better equipped to begin working from home.

I would like to wish you well, whatever your situation, and invite you to connect with me through my newsletters and websites.

For well-being and business success, keep an eye on betterthanyesterday.co.uk, and sign up for more great resources.

For online video-based CPD for teachers, check out magicmessage.co.uk, and finally to discuss consultancy work, magic performances or coaching opportunities, please visit andrewjeffrey.co.uk

Work well!

