

# Top 30 Tips for Staying Productive and Sane While Working From Home

*"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of."*  
Benjamin Franklin

Those of you who know the joys of working from home, whether you're self-employed or freelancing or telecommuting, know also the joys of procrastination and the lures of laying on the couch.

Now, I'm as much in favor of a good nap as the next guy, but a nap should be a break, not your default work mode.

On the other hand, working from home tends to blur the boundaries between work and personal life — if you work too hard, you will have no personal life left.

So how do we stay productive, and at the same time stay sane? As I recently quit my day job, I asked the readers for their advice. They came through, as always, and I've chosen a few of my favorites for others to use as a guide (well, I'm going to use it as a guide too).

A few caveats, before you dive into the list: Again, these are from the readers, so you guys deserve all the credit. Second, I edited them, so any typos are my fault. Third, this is a compilation list, meaning that some tips may seem contradictory — that's because the best way to use this list is to find the ideas that work for you, and give them a try. If they don't work, come back to the list and find a few more ideas. Don't try to implement them all, and certainly not all at once.

**Thank you, readers!**

1. Define your spaces; separate work from home. Have a room dedicated to working. Don't do it wherever you happen to be. Set aside some space, preferably a room (it doesn't have to be big) to be your workspace. That way, when you enter it, you know consciously what you're there to do: go to work. It changes the state of mind from "I'm at home" to "I'm at work".
2. Set regular hours, and stick to the schedule.
3. Don't stay unshaved in pajamas. Instead, have breakfast, have a shower, get dressed. Then make a list of sensible tasks for the day and get started.
4. Close the door. It'll be very easy to leave the door to whatever room or space you set apart to be your workplace open. Don't do it. If the door is open, that represents something to you, and to your family. To you, it represents the idea that if it's a bit tough, or you don't feel like working today, you don't have to. To your family, it represents the idea that Dad is around, and I can go and talk to him.
5. Keep your desk and general work area tidy. A tidy workspace helps keep a tidy mind, which helps make your day more productive.
6. Turn off the telephone when you need to work without distraction. Turn off IM and email notifications too. In fact, if possible, shut off the Internet.
7. Don't stop working if it's a hard day. There'll be times when you haven't got any ideas, or just don't feel productive. Train yourself to do some work anyway. It's a short fall from "It's just not happening at the moment" to "It's a bit tough, I'll stop for the day". Next thing you know, you never seem to get anything done.
8. Keep three lists of three. The first list has three things you will do today. The second is three things you'd like to get done, but aren't essential. The third is three things that need to be done at some point. That way, when you've trogged through your days work, you don't end up sitting twiddling your thumbs.

9. Start the day properly. Have a good breakfast, spend some time alone to just sit and do whatever. Relax, let your mind wander. Pray. Just make sure that your mind isn't in the "I hate working" frame of mind.

10. Have a good chair. Mesh backed ones, or good comfy leather perhaps. It's worth spending some money on.

11. Keep a notepad and pencil nearby. Jot down ideas for blog posts, projects, anything that springs to mind. Then have a pinboard to stick them on. Look at it twice a week to refresh your mind of things that could be done sometime. Some of the best work you'll ever do will come from random bits of inspiration.

12. Give yourself breaks. Don't be locked in the room all the time. For every hour you work, have a 15-30 minute break. Give your mind time to digest what it's just done, then come back. You'll improve the quality of what you produce a hundredfold.

13. Don't go back to work when you've finished. Had a great idea for a post? Fantastic, write down the basics on a note, and pin it up. Don't go back to work when you've finished.

14. Schedule, if possible, around your natural schedule. Some people peak in the morning, others in the afternoon, still others at the witching hour.

15. Have a pint of water by your desk all the time. Try and work up to drinking a few pints a day, if you don't already.

16. Be careful what music you listen to while you work. Music, TV, the weather... Just about everything will influence your mood. Some you can't change, some you can. Make sure that you surround yourself with things that will give you the best frame of mind for whatever you're about to do.

17. No turning on the computer for a quick email check or to do 1 little thing until you've gotten "ready for work" as mentioned above. The nuance is if you have nowhere to be, that 1 little thing leads to showering at 2 in the afternoon with a splitting headache because you've forgotten to eat etc.

18. Know when to stop. Don't work late into the night. Set defined times when you're going to work, and then when it passes, stop. You can have a bit of leeway here, but make sure that you don't end up letting work run your life.

"Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop." – Ovid

19. Don't work an eight hour day. One reader works about 5 hours, in four blocks of an hour, with a 20 minute gap between each. If you do more than that, your attention might start to wander, you'll be restless and your work won't have it's normal level of quality.

20. Designate certain days for certain work. For example: file everything on Friday afternoon, no later than Saturday morning. This allows you to walk out of your office for your "weekend" without feeling like you left work unfinished.

21. Set boundaries for those around you as well. Schedule your work time and make sure the kids and spouse know that you are unavailable for playing, chores, etc. during this time.

22. Sound Canceling Headphones. Seriously useful if you have a 3-year-old.

23. Pay attention and crunch numbers with your accounts regularly. You are less inclined to watch television when you realise how much it can cost you to mess around. Put a reminder that "work NOT done = no money".

24. Have a good lunch. One readers suggested that something with good carb content works best. Puts you in the mood for the second half of the day.

25. Track your time. One reader suggested a simple program called gtimelog (<http://mg.pov.lt/gtimelog/>). You enter what you've done when you've completed it. It's very simple and stays out of your way. At the end of the day, week, you can see a summary. It also allows you to break out work time vs. fun time in a simple manner.

26. Set online times. You don't always need to be accessible for chit chat. This may be more applicable to telecommuters than the self-employed.

27. Don't allow work to consume your life. Easier said than done when working from home. Make sure you set limits for the amount of time you will work.

28. Make time for people. When people ask, give them what you can. Respond in some way to every email. It doesn't matter how long it takes you to get around to it. You don't have to reply that day. Just make sure you do. It matters.

29. Say thank you a lot. Figure out who the people who have helped you and your blog (or your business) the most. If you're a blogger, that's the readers, not the people who gave you mentions on their big blogs. The people who have given their time and energy to helping you get where you are. You owe your life from this point on to them. Make sure they know you're grateful.

30. Be grateful you're working from home and not in some cubicle! That gratitude will motivate you to work harder, so you can continue to work from home.

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