

# Create Better Habits

and Save Time



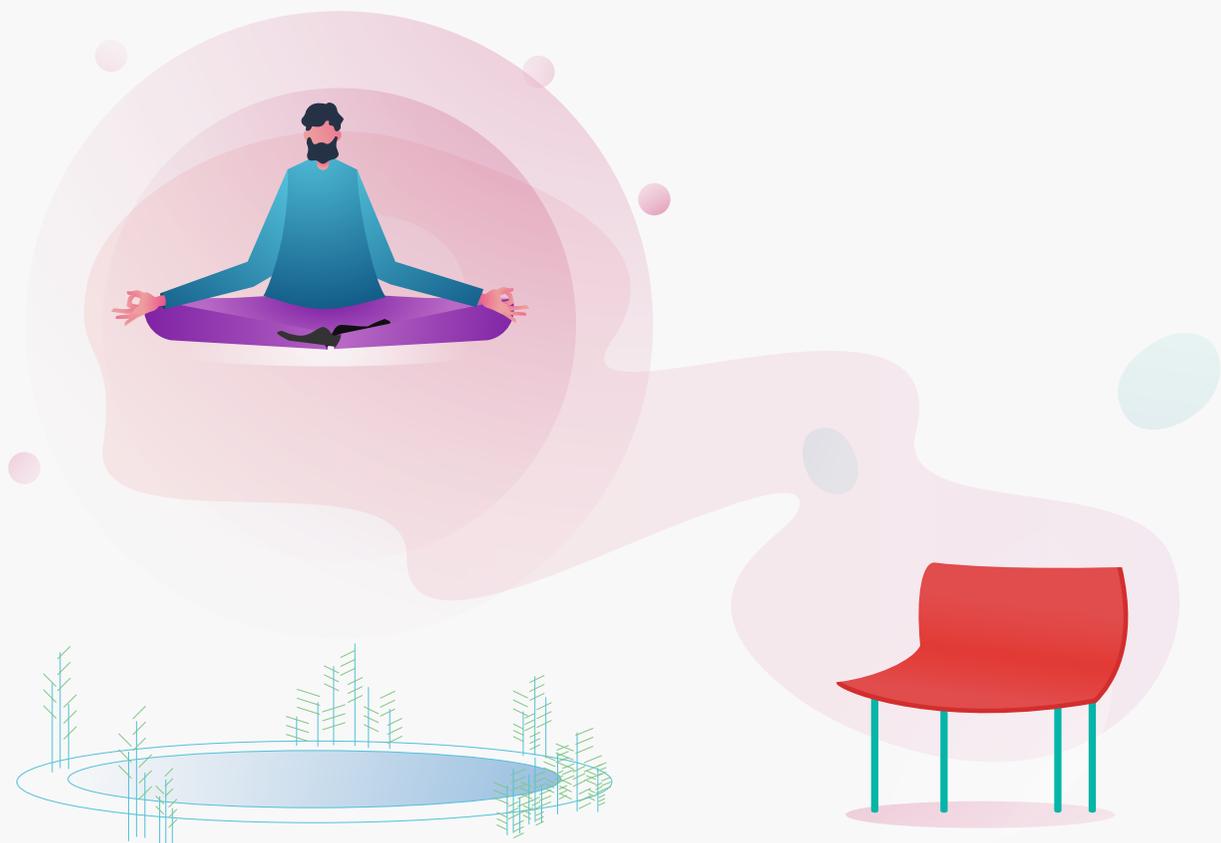
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*and How to Solve it in Jira*



## Executive Summary

Time is precious, and too often professionals feel they don't have enough of it. That's why it's worth learning how to make the most of our time at work, which starts with properly planning and tracking time. When using tools like Tempo Planner, we have a habit of chronically underestimating how much time we will spend on tasks and projects, so we need to learn strategies for accurately estimating how long things will take. Making the most of our time also means managing ourselves and breaking bad habits, like procrastinating and neglecting to take any breaks. By optimizing the time we have with better planning and better habits, we make it possible to get projects done on a realistic schedule with minimal stress.



**“A year from now  
you may wish you  
had started today.”**

—Karen Lamb

# Break the Procrastination Habit with Tempo

Here at Tempo, we believe in the value of tracking time, but what happens when you keep putting off work that needs to get done? It's easy and surprisingly common to get trapped in a dangerous cycle of procrastination. In fact, about 20% of adults claim to be chronic procrastinators, based on research by Joseph Ferrari, a psychology professor at DePaul University. The impact of procrastination can be significant. One 1997 study from Case Western Reserve University found that students who procrastinate have higher stress, more illness and lower grades once the semester is over.

## What defines procrastination?

According to Ferrari, procrastination is “the purposive and frequent delay in beginning or completing a task to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort, such as anxiety or regret.” According to Joel Anderson, an associate professor in the department of philosophy and religious studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, procrastination is “culpably unwarranted delay.” Whatever the formal definition, we all know when we're doing it.

Procrastination can stem from several emotional factors, including depression, stress, low self-esteem, and poor impulse control. It starts, however, with how you feel about a given task. When you strive to accomplish a particular task, according to Timothy Pychyl, a professor at Carleton University, you “have this strong reaction to the task at hand, and so the story of procrastination begins there with what psychologists call task aversiveness.” The less you want to do a task, the more you'll resist doing it, and the more you'll procrastinate.

“Most of us seem to tacitly believe that our emotional state has to match the task at hand. I have to recognize that I'm rarely going to feel like it, and it doesn't matter if I don't feel like it,” said Pychyl. Sometimes that's easier said than done.

If you're struggling to get things finished, here are some ways of overcoming your habit of procrastination:

## Track your time

If your relationship to time has gone slightly askew because of procrastination, using Tempo Timesheets is one way to get a handle on your schedule, tasks and plans again. By forcing yourself to account for how you spend your hours at work, you become conscious of how much time has been lost by your reluctance to get started. For some, the shock of accounting for those lost hours will be enough to jump-start them back into productivity. For others, the problem is more difficult to get rid of - but there are still ways of defeating it!

## Turn the triggers around

There are many different triggers that make a task subject to procrastination. Namely, if it is:

- **Boring**
- **Frustrating**
- **Difficult**
- **Ambiguous**
- **Unstructured**
- **Not intrinsically rewarding**
- **Lacking in personal meaning**

When you find yourself procrastinating on a task, ask yourself which of the seven procrastination triggers above has been set off. Then find a way to think differently about the task. If a task is unstructured, for example, start by imposing a workflow to ensure you get it done.



## Work for just five minutes

Don't imagine you'll be working for hours at a time on a particular project. Start working for 15 minutes, or even 5 minutes. It doesn't matter how little you plan to work for, just start. Even Tempo Timesheets can be made to work in 15-minute increments. Odds are, you'll keep working at a task once you've started, and once you do, research suggests you'll also be more likely to return to the task later. This can be credited to the Zeigarnik effect, which says you're more likely to remember unfinished tasks.

## Break the task into small chunks

While you may feel overwhelmed thinking about the time it takes to finish a particular task, in reality work gets done in small spurts. If you start by dividing a large task into several smaller tasks, you'll be in a much better position to start. After you start, you can quickly check items off the list and get a feeling of accomplishment that will spur you forward.



## Think about your future self

“When making long-term decisions, [people] tend to fundamentally feel a lack of emotional connection to their future selves,” says Hal Hershfield, a psychologist at UCLA Anderson School of Management. “So even though I know on some fundamental level in a year’s time, I’ll still be me, in some ways I treat that future self as if he’s a fundamentally different person, and as if he’s not going to benefit or suffer from the consequences of my actions today.”

To overcome this disconnect between present and future, try imagining your future self as vividly as possible. How much will that future self appreciate having your list of tasks done? How will your future self benefit from you getting things done in the present?

## Conclusion

Procrastination can waste hours upon hours of time. Instead of taking a passive approach and accepting it as inevitable, make an effort to manage yourself and your procrastinatory behavior. You’ll benefit from these kinds of active strategies to overcome procrastination and be grateful for the time you save.



**“Almost everything  
will work again if  
you unplug it for  
a few minutes,  
including you”**

—Anne Lamott

## You Should Take More Breaks

Here at Tempo, we know how it goes. Your email inbox is overflowing. Your to-do list won't even fit on one page anymore. The new guy at the office keeps asking for your help. There are only so many hours in the day, and you're a busy person with too much running at once. But you should also know that the longer you hunch in front of that computer without stepping away from the screen, the more the quality of your work suffers. Regular breaks are just what your brain and body need to produce good work, even if breaks are the last thing you plan to do.

Tempo Timesheets is designed to account for a full day of work, but users can easily schedule in breaks as well. By becoming more aware of how you and your colleagues spend your days, you increase the likelihood that you'll take that much-needed break, instead of getting buried under an avalanche of tasks without respite.

## So Why Take More Breaks?

### Your productivity plummets without them

A 2014 study on the routines of office workers revealed that without a full and proper lunch break, daily productivity is lowered. John Trougakos, who coauthored the study, says that's because our brains have only limited psychological energy.

"All efforts to control behavior, to perform and to focus draw on that pool of psychological energy. Once that energy source is depleted, we become less effective at everything that we do," he explained. Rest assured: if Tempo Timesheets regularly shows you working 50 and 60-hour weeks, you're getting less done than you think.

## Your body needs to move

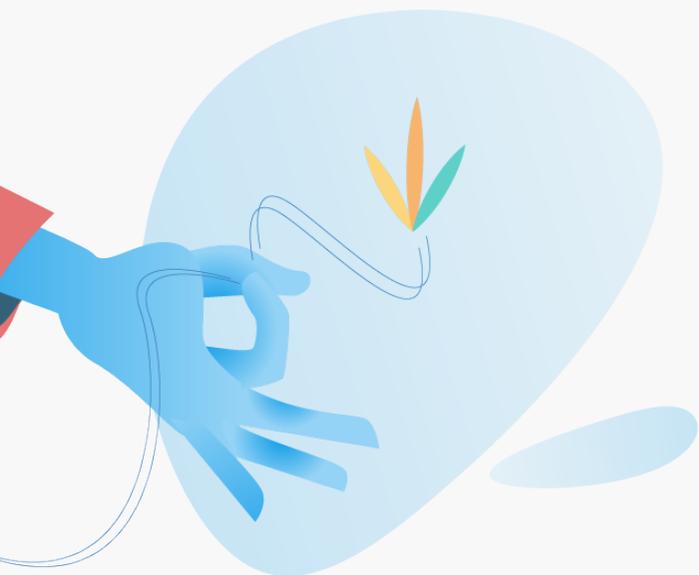
Sitting at your desk all day is bad for your health. Some have even called it the “new smoking.” “Sitting is the most underrated health threat of modern time,” said Tom Rath, author of the *New York Times* bestselling book, *Eat Move Sleep*. He writes, “On average, we now spend more time sitting down (9.3 hours) than sleeping in a given day.”

A new study published just this year by Dr. Prabha Siddarth at UCLA showed that living a sedentary life is correlated with lower thickness of the medial temporal lobe, which contains a part of the brain that is crucial to learning and memory. Notably, the study did not find an association between the amount of physical activity and the thickness of the medial temporal lobe, so it is likely that occasional strenuous exercise is insufficient to protect against the effects of general sedentary living.

Moral of the story: Get up from your desk and walk around!

## Your brain suffers from “decision fatigue”

A 2011 study analyzed what factors impacted the decisions of judges to grant parole for prisoners. Shockingly, researchers found that, in each scenario, the most telling factor was how long it had been since the judge had last had a break. The reason? The longer the day wore on, the more the judge’s ability to make good decisions was impaired, and he or she simply went for the path of least resistance: not granting parole.



# A few tips to keep you rested and productive throughout the day:

## Schedule breaks into Tempo Timesheets.



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Make sure to schedule in a good long lunch break away from your desk, and take short breaks throughout the day, ideally every 45 to 60 minutes or so. Google Calendar is one tool you can use for scheduling breaks that integrates into Tempo Timesheets. Set a timer to remind you when to take each break.

## Take high-quality breaks.



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Breaks need to be taken away from screens. That means no internet surfing or fiddling with your phone. Real breaks involve chatting with colleagues, going for a stroll, or even reading a book for a little while.

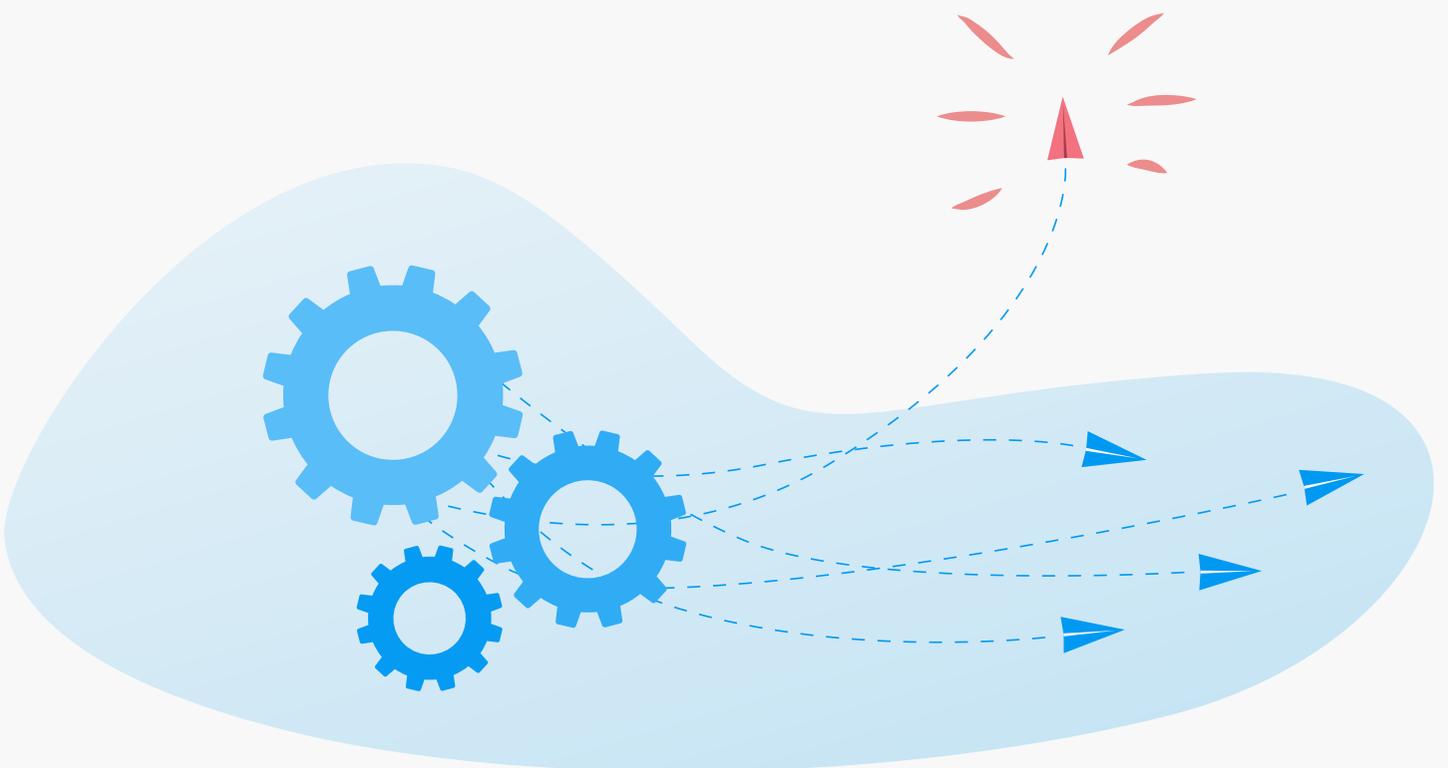
## Make realistic to-do lists.

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As humans we chronically underestimate how long a given task will take. Don't get bogged down in an unmanageable to-do list: learn how to accurately estimate how long your tasks will take.



# Why We're So Bad at Estimating Time

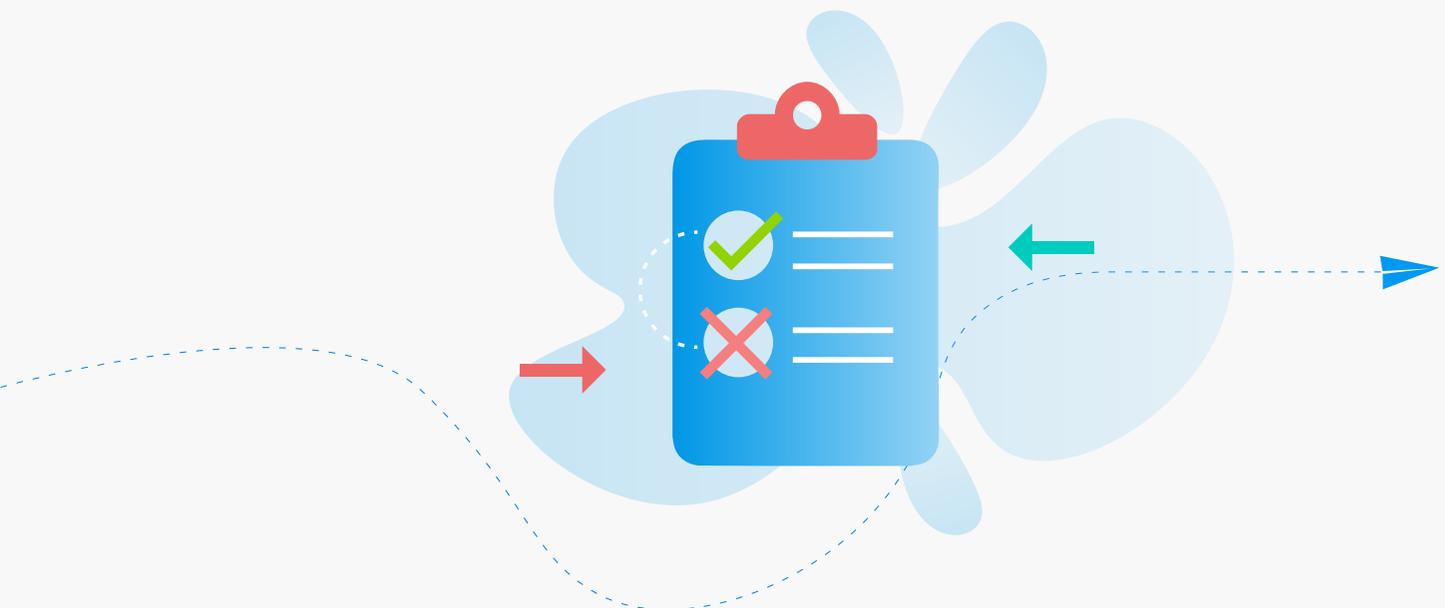
and How to Solve it in Jira

We're all guilty of it: chronically underestimating how long projects and tasks will take us to finish. It's called the "planning fallacy" and whether at work, at school or at home, it manifests itself in our inability to gauge the amount of time needed to complete something. The principle comes from the work of psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in their 1979 paper and has spawned significant research since.

According to Kahneman's recent book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, for instance, one study showed that the typical homeowner expects home improvement projects to cost about \$19,000, whereas the true average cost is more than double that figure: closer to \$39,000. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of high-speed railroad projects have an average overestimation of passengers that sits at 100 percent and budgetary underestimation of about 50 percent.

"The planning fallacy is that you make a plan, which is usually a best-case scenario," Kahneman writes. "Then you assume that the outcome will follow your plan, even when you should know better."

"You simply do not anticipate problems, which you should, because statistics show that you probably will end up spending twice as much money and time as you have budgeted," he continues. "But people don't anticipate accidents, and they don't anticipate their own changes."



## Why Does This Happen?

Most of us see ourselves as more skilled than we really are and assume that the goals we set out for ourselves are readily achievable. This is called the optimism bias, which helps to account for the planning fallacy.

So, if you find your time estimates for Tempo Timesheets and Tempo Planner are chronically underestimated, what can you do?

### Look to the past:

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One way to avoid the planning fallacy is to get information about similar projects you have finished in the past so you can compare. If you want to know how long it would take you to fix a particular bug or finish a piece of code, simply look at how long similar tasks have taken you before.

### Assume the worst-case scenario:

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Success is much easier to imagine than failure. When estimating how long a given task will take, allow for interruptions and roadblocks along the way. Do not assume everything will go as smoothly as you imagine, because it probably will not!

It takes experience to accurately estimate time, and tasks will virtually always take longer than originally imagined. With some practice, Tempo Timesheets can help you get a handle on how long tasks actually take.

## About Tempo

Tempo is a cloud-first software company that helps teams at 13,000+ companies—SMBs and large-scale enterprises—collaborate, plan and schedule resources, manage budgets, and track time directly from their daily workflow. Tempo started as a homegrown time tracking solution, which offered our software and business teams seamless integration with Jira. It changed the way we worked.

We quickly realized this technology could help every team and business gain visibility over their work efforts for better collaboration and decision-making. Today, Tempo is a team of over 100 peers with offices in Reykjavík, Montréal, and Stockholm.

We are one of the largest, award-winning, top-selling developers in the Atlassian ecosystem. Tempo offers three efficiency and visibility-enhancing products that extend Jira to help IT, software development, consultancy, and business teams work smarter.

- Tempo Timesheets:** Painless time tracking and reporting
- Tempo Planner:** Visual resource management and planning
- Tempo Budgets:** Project and portfolio financial management



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