

# Overwhelmed? Organize work with this basic tool that rarely fails

Consider this a reminder that when things get hectic, there's one friend you can always rely on to help you organize work. It's the humble checklist.

Many of us rely on them in one way or another, whether it's a mess of sticky notes fixed to your monitor, reminders on your Outlook calendar or some lines in your phone's memo app. Though technology may have changed the way we use them, they're still indispensable. Could anything, really, ever replace the checklist as a tool?

On National Public Radio's *Hidden Brain* podcast, recent and historical examples of checklist miracles in high-stress professions showed how valuable this tool is.

In 1935, the Boeing 299 crashed. Upon investigation into the cause, it was found that the experienced, well-trained crew had simply forgotten to unlock an interior elevator lock. The military began to explore and implement checklists. It was gradually found that incompetence wasn't to blame for errors, but a certain kind of arrogance was.

Take pilots, for example—they're actually so good in their profession, so expert, that they don't think they need to slow down, to go back over the basics. Could the same be said of someone on your team, or even you yourself?

Surgeons are an excellent example of occasional overconfidence. Dr. Atul Gawande was inspired by the military's success in this arena and with studies by Dr. Peter Pronovost on the effectiveness of lists on improving patient safety. Atul and his team developed a safe surgery checklist, which has been applied around the world.

What's *your* checklist procedure? Would the last error you made at work have been caught ahead of time if you'd had one?

"Checklists are one of humanity's oldest tools to combat our blind spots and our arrogance. The humble checklist reminds us of the importance of humility because, in the end, we're only human," says NPR science correspondent Shankar Vedantum on the podcast *Hidden Brain*.

So they might not be so humble, after all. These little workhorses can benefit us at every level, from saving lives to just simply remembering to respond to your supervisor's email.

What they do best is force our minds to slow down and think in a strict procedural fashion. Too often in our rush to move on to the next task, we connect dots that shouldn't quite be connected yet.

If you have to write out a checklist by hand, even better. The act of writing will get you thinking more slowly. Checklists have a way of making you "monotask," a good way to deal with overwhelm.

Finally, they're a natural instiller of humility. It's good to be reminded that our memories are constantly

overtaxed, and that as human beings under constant pressure, we simply can't go it alone.

## Stay organized with 'to do' apps

Find a free 'to do' keeper: Here are three of the top ones to consider. All work on multiple platform devices.

**ToDoist:** Extremely easy to use. Use natural language like "every Wednesday," and ToDoist understands how to set the reminder. You can categorize and prioritize tasks, as well as invite others to take some on. Visit [ToDoist.com](https://todoist.com) or look for it in your device's app store.

**Wunderlist:** Very much the same in ease of use and design is Wunderlist. Wunderlist has recently partnered with Microsoft to create Microsoft ToDo. You can share lists and even restore deleted ones! Go to [Wunderlist.com](https://wunderlist.com) or look for it in the iTunes app store, as well as Google Play.

**Habitica:** This is to do, gamified! Built more around creating good work, self-care and behavioral habits, this little app is fun. You create your avatar, tell it what you want to work on and even designate rewards for a job well done! Find Habitica at [Habitica.com](https://habitica.com) and in your Apple or Android app stores.