

Which to-do list method works for you?

If the top item on your to-do list reads “Organize to-do list,” you know how difficult they can be to manage. Is there a secret formula for a great to-do list?

That’s what one reader asked recently on the Admin Pro Forum: *“Everyone seems to have a different way of creating their to-do lists. I’ve always been interested in how they go about it, and what their lists actually look like. Am I the only one who just scrawls things in a big notebook and messily crosses them out? How many people use Excel, Outlook, sticky notes, legal pads, posters, whiteboards or even email themselves? Is there some method that seems to work wonders for admins?”* —Joe, Editorial Assistant

Readers and experts offered their take on the issue.

If you prefer an electronic method of tracking to-dos, readers and experts alike recommend Microsoft Outlook’s calendar and task features. “The key is consistency when managing your to-do lists and the to-do lists of others,” says Amy Cooper Hakim, a workplace consultant and the author of *Working with Difficult People*. Use Outlook to color-code tasks so you can see who needs to do what, or the urgency of the task, she says. Also, you can set reminders for due dates.

A notebook or legal pad can be useful for times when you’re not in front of the computer. Hakim suggests creating two columns on a page—the left for immediate tasks and the right for ongoing or long-term items. Cross tasks off as you complete them; when you get to the bottom of the page, transfer undone items to the next page.

Many readers say they use a combination of written lists and Outlook. You can jot down notes and items in a notebook, then transfer them to Outlook.

“I have tried everything from OneNote to Task Manager to Trello, and I still go back to my notebook,” says one reader, Lynn. “I think if you find something that works for you ... stick to it. ... Do what makes you productive.”

However you track your to-dos, be sure to include the task and a due date, says Leslie Shreve, a productivity expert and the founder of Productive Day. “Any system that doesn’t include both what you want to do and when you want to do it is just a flimsy wish list of a few things to do.”