



9 Hacks for a Better Semester at MIT

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For informational purposes only

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It should not be relied upon to suggest a course of treatment and should not be used in place of consultation with, or the advice of, a physician or other qualified care provider or therapist.

You should not delay seeking medical advice from your physician or other qualified healthcare provider or therapist, and you should not disregard advice given by one of these professionals because of something you have read, heard, or seen in this workshop.

9 Hacks for a Better Semester



Today's goals and objectives

By the end of this workshop, I will be able to:

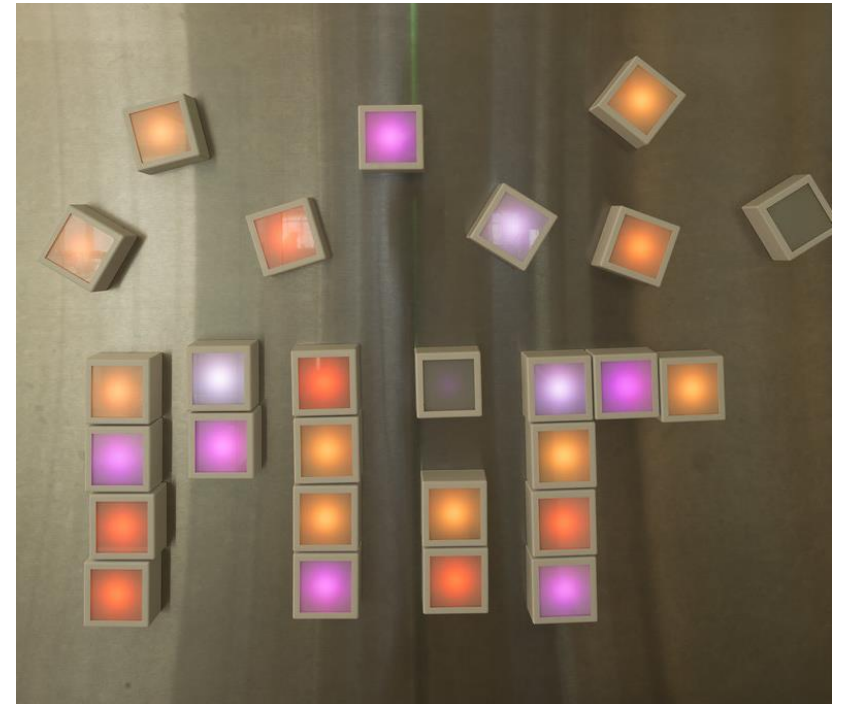
1. Understand self-management strategies that can lead to a better semester
2. Identify resources to help support better sleep, nutrition, and overall health
3. Make a SMART goal to take action on a chosen area of self-management this semester

1. Tetris your time



Tetris your time

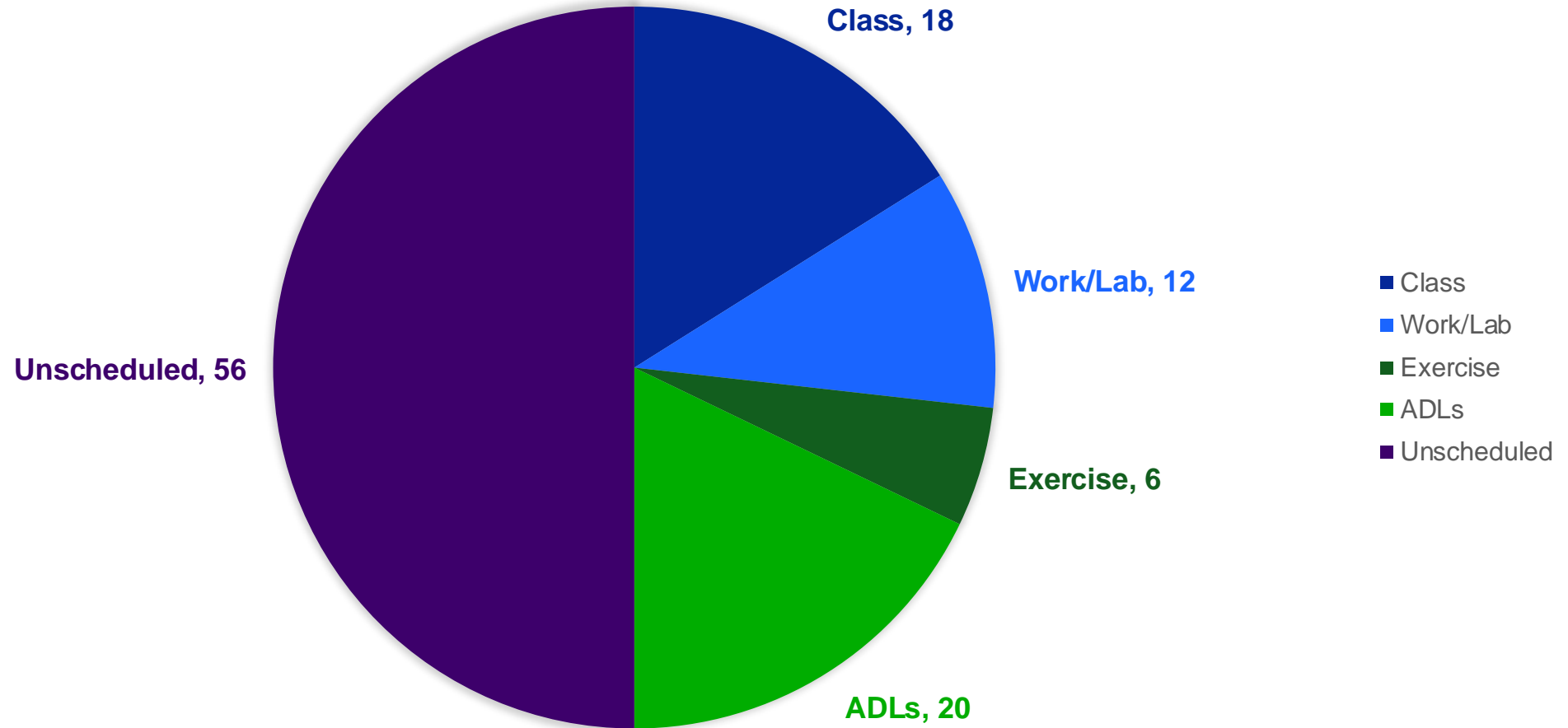
- Chunk your time / don't duplicate efforts
 - do all your Central Square errands at the same time
 - pack snacks for the week, clothes for the day, etc.
 - use small, weird blocks of time



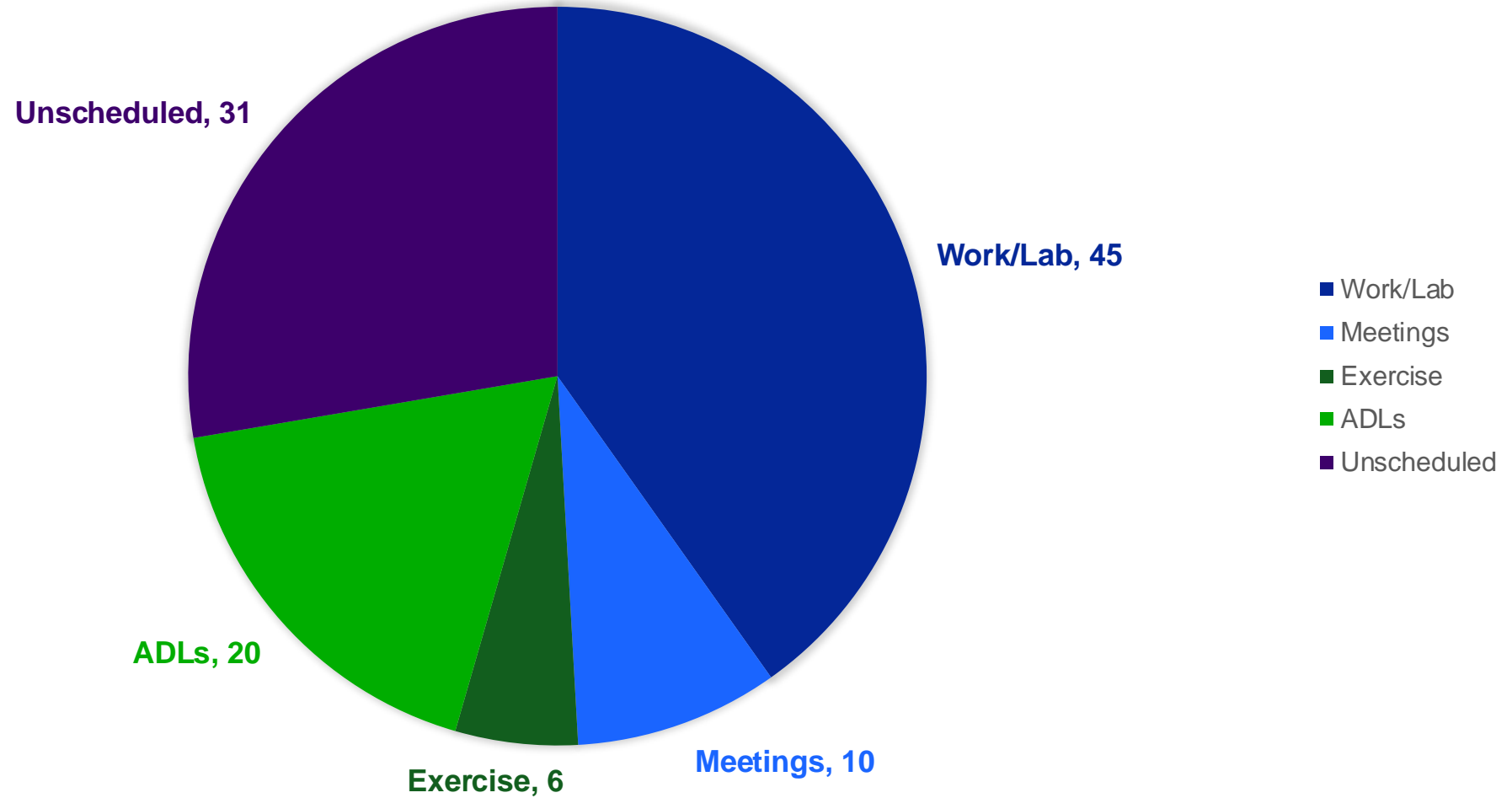
2. Treat your
time budget like
a money budget



112 HOURS



112 HOURS

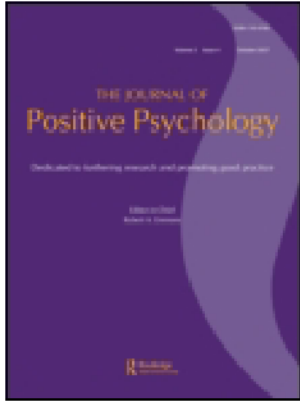


What 3 things should
you spend your
unscheduled time on?

What should consume
less time (when do you
waste your own time)?

3. Do less but
savor it more





The Journal of Positive Psychology

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ISSN: 1743-9760 (Print) 1743-9779 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpos20>

Does savoring increase happiness? A daily diary study

Paul E. Jose , Bee T. Lim & Fred B. Bryant

To cite this article: Paul E. Jose , Bee T. Lim & Fred B. Bryant (2012) Does savoring increase happiness? A daily diary study, The Journal of Positive Psychology, 7:3, 176-187, DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2012.671345](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.671345)

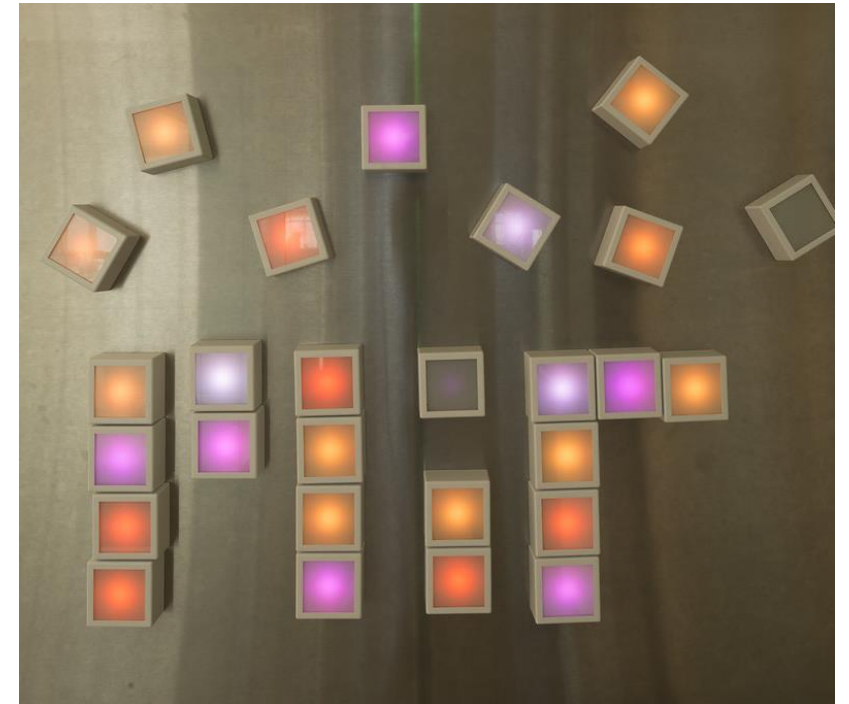
To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2012.671345>

1. Put away your phone
2. Take a video or snapshot with your mind
3. Replay it at least once

Savoring also helps stress recovery

- Savor favorite activities after the fact
- Recovery *regularity* is more important than length

APA (2023) *Speaking of Psychology* podcast
#244 “Why you should take a vacation”



4. Set boundaries



Functions of a cell wall (Kenji Yamaguchi, PhD)		Functions of good boundaries
Keep bad things out		Reduce negative impact of experiences
Let good things in		Amplify positive impact of experiences
Keep the cell components from falling apart		Maintain mental and physical health
Keep individual cells distinct from one another		Appreciate your uniqueness
Allow individual cells to interact		Allow you to have healthy interactions with other humans

5. Skipping
sleep is
inefficient



“Scientists have discovered a revolutionary new treatment that makes you live longer. It enhances your memory and makes you more creative. It wards off colds and the flu. You’ll even feel happier, less depressed, and less anxious.”

- Matthew Walker (2017) *Why We Sleep*

Is it better to sleep before or after I study?



Yerlin Matu
unsplash.com

A full night's sleep before you study

- Prepares the brain to form new memories
- Decreases the saturation of synapses; synaptic pruning makes room for new learning

Walker, M. (2017) *Why We Sleep*

Cirelli, C. (2024) *Sleep and Synaptic Homeostasis* webinar August 29, 2024, University of Arizona

A full night's sleep after you study

- Transfers memory from short- to long-term storage, helping “cement” it into the architecture of the brain
- Improves the ability to retain, recall, and use the knowledge

Walker, M. (2017) *Why We Sleep*

Capello, K. (2020) *The impact of sleep on learning and memory*, U. of Pennsylvania Chronobiology and Sleep Institute

Sleep is a primary drive, not an inconvenience

- Eating
- Breathing
- Water

How can I tell if I am
getting enough sleep?

Sleepiness indicators

- If you are sleepy during the day, 2 hours after you wake up, you may not be getting enough sleep
- If you fall asleep within 0 seconds of getting into bed, you may not be getting enough sleep

6. You can eat
well and cheaply
if you plan



Food and financial resources

- Learn to eat better: Fitness & Nutrition PE course:
mit.daper.edu
- Food and financial resources:
<https://doingwell.mit.edu/foodandfinancial/>



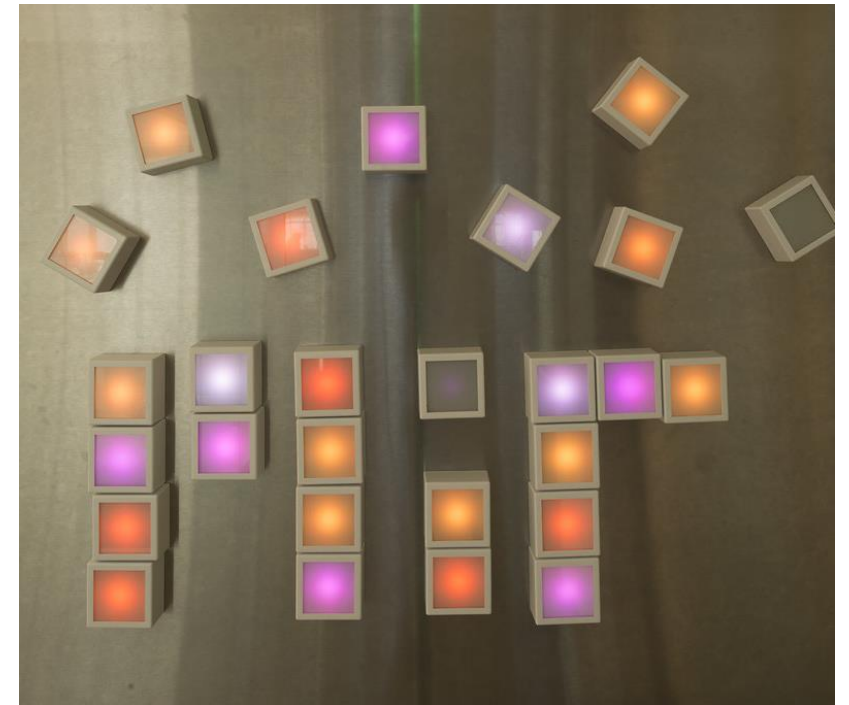
7. Don't count on perfection



8. Don't count on motivation



- There is no perfect time to start
- The semester will not go perfectly
- Plan with the assumption of nonperfection



Remember:
everyone faces
setbacks

““ The goal is to avoid the feeling of
“Oh, no!” wherever possible.

Replace it with sentiments closer to
“Now what?” and “Let’s see what
can be done with this.” ”

—Ward Farnsworth, *The Practicing Stoic*

We won't feel
motivated
all the time.

Adapted from *Get It Done*
(Fishbach, 2022)

That is why we
create habits.

Habits will carry you
through times of
low motivation

Decisions are
expensive.
Habits are cheap.

How to create habits

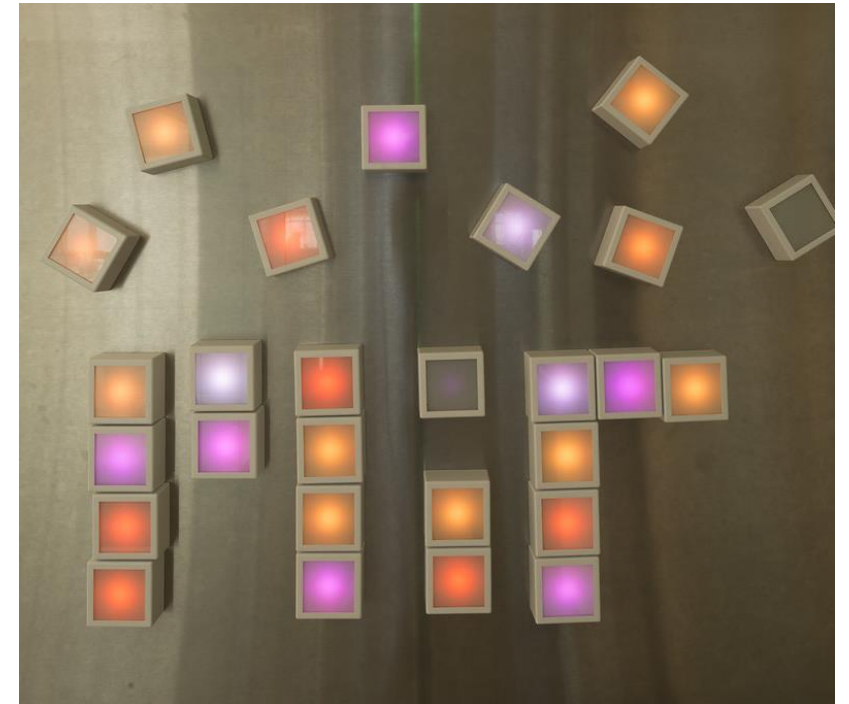


Pre-commit as much
as possible: Make
decisions once

Pre-commitments

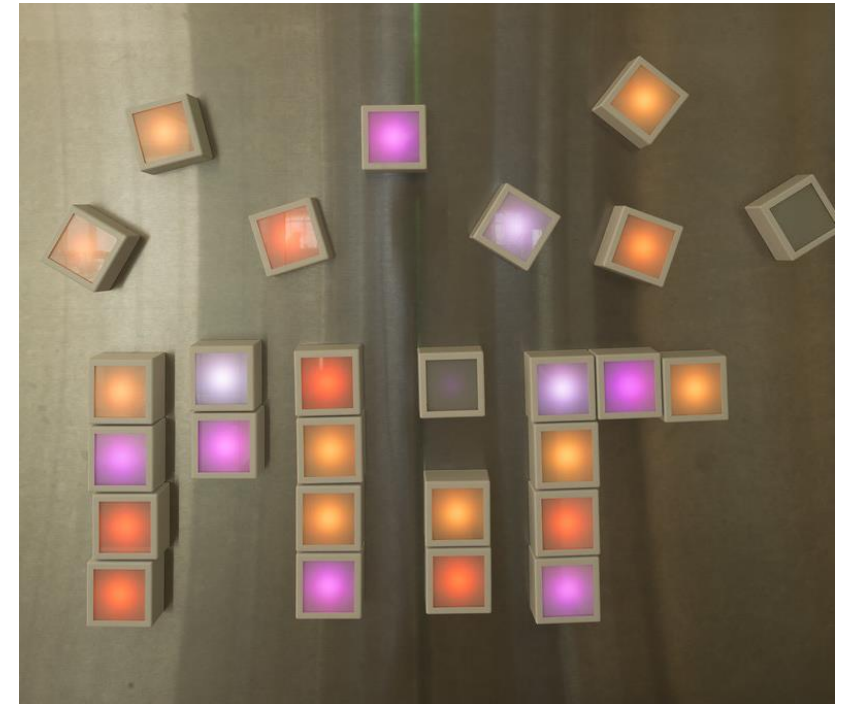
- Keep a regular calendar
- Sign up for a group
- Make a rule (“I go to all my classes unless I’m sick”)
- Social commitment is usually the strongest form of pre-commitment

Adapted from *Get It Done* (Fishbach, 2022)



Self-assessment

- One area where pre-commitment could work for me is...



9. Your brain can
only take so
much focus



Like a muscle, self-
regulation gets
fatigued

Heatherton & Wagner,
Cognitive neuroscience of
self-regulation failure (2011)

Practice letting go



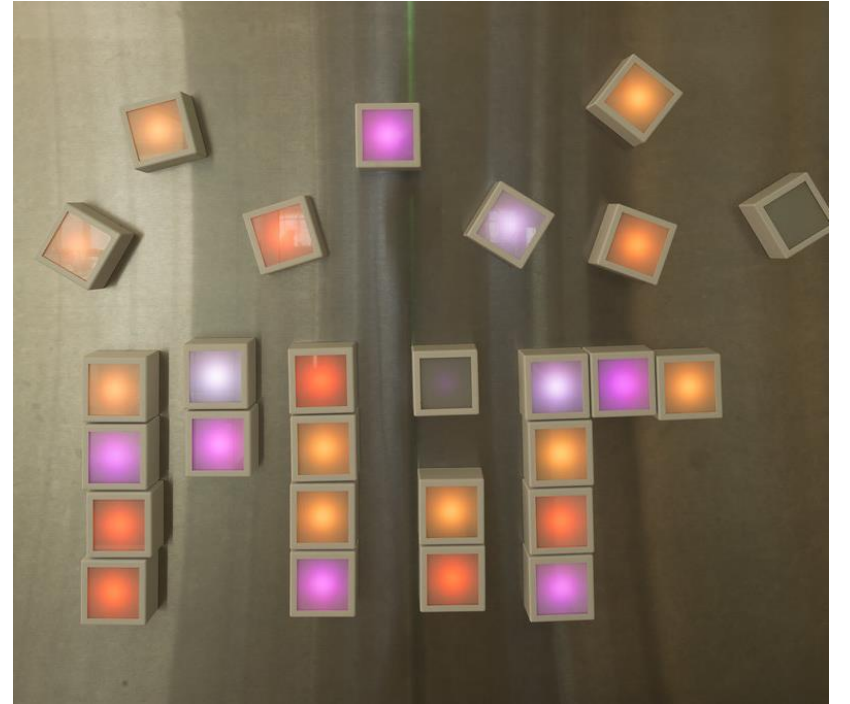
“ Under duress, we do not rise to our expectations but fall to our level of training. ”

—Bruce Lee

Irina Yevtushenko
Istockphoto.com



1. Tetris your time
2. Treat your time budget like your \$ budget
3. Do less but savor it more
4. Set boundaries
5. Skipping sleep is inefficient
6. You can eat well & cheaply if you plan
7. Don't count on perfection
8. Don't count on motivation
9. Your brain can only take so much focus



S

Specific



Who, what,
where, when,
why

M

Measured



You can't
improve what
you don't
measure

A

Achievable



Challenging but
not impossible

R

Relevant



Closely
connected to
the objective

T

Timed



A completion
date holds you
accountable

GOALS

Setting your SMART goal

- A SMART goal is a VERB
- When and where will you take this action? Vividly picture it.
- Are you 90% sure you can do it, if you really try?
- Is it important to you?

Adapted from *Nine Things
Successful People Do Differently*
(Halvorson, 2011)

MIT Resources



food doingwell.mit.edu
sleep wellness.mit.edu

physical activity and stress reduction

mitrecsports.com

daper.mit.edu

health care and
mental health care
health.mit.edu



**CALL
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AND
CARRY
ON**

**live and recorded
mindfulness and relaxation**

wellnessclasses.mit.edu

the MIT Sleep Line

[617-253-CALM \(2256\)](tel:617-253-2256)

email Zan

bars@med.mit.edu



Thank you!

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