

1 The Brain Dump

Get it off your head and onto paper

Like it or not, you're a walking to-do list. Urgent tasks, not-so-urgent tasks, tasks you'd love to do if you had endless time and cash—every waking hour, these thoughts compete for space in your brain. Without a reliable way to track these to-dos, that mental storm can put you in a state of perma-panic that distracts you from the present and makes it harder to get things done.

The **Brain Dump** is a proven method for turning the muffled static in your head into clear-signal action. This mental exercise allows you to get everything out of your brain, so that you can put it all back in again—in an organized way. Basically, it's like rebooting your brain every time you need a fresh start.

Get It Down:

Start with a blank sheet of paper and spend 10 to 15 minutes jotting down all your to-dos. Nothing's too huge or too puny for this list. (Feel free to put "apply to college" next to "buy shampoo.") See the example on the next page.



study for math test
call Matt
text Scott about borrowing CD
organize closet
go to doctor, Tues. 4:00
buy paper, pens
make brownies for bake sale
meet at Kyle's house, Sat. 10 am
write English paper
email Sophie back
buy new jeans
train for triathlon
fold sweaters
send thank-you note to Mom's friend (name?? ask Mom)
put summer photos in album
send out Halloween party invites!
start running every day
go to soccer game, Fri. 5:30 (bring chips for team)
search online for power smoothie recipe
learn to snowboard
redecorate room
feed Smitty

Break It Down

Now that you have your list, sort everything in it into one of the following three categories. Have a notebook nearby that's reserved especially for **Brain Dump** sorting.

1. Do Now

Apply the three-minute rule: If you can do it in three minutes or less, just get it out of the way now. You can't beat the satisfaction that comes with clearing these quickies from your list—especially when you cross each thing off as you go. **Do Now** things do not get entered in your notebook.

	SAMPLE BRAIN DUMP
<input type="checkbox"/>	study for math test
	NOW call Matt
	NOW text Scott about borrowing CD
	organize closet
	go to doctor, Tues. 4:00
	buy paper, pens
	make brownies for bake sale
	meet at Kyle's house, Sat. 10 am
	write English paper
<input type="checkbox"/>	NOW email Sophie back
	buy new jeans
	train for triathlon
	NOW fold sweaters
	NOW send thank-you note to Mom's friend (name?? ask Mom)
	put summer photos in album
	send out Halloween party invites!
	start running every day
	go to soccer game, Fri. 5:30 (bring chips for team)
	search online for power smoothie recipe
<input type="checkbox"/>	learn to snowboard
	redecorate room
	NOW feed Smitty



2. Do Soon

Everything in this category has three things in common. One, they take more than three minutes to do. Two, they are realistically possible to achieve in the near future (that means no note on Wednesday to “train for *this* weekend’s triathlon”). Three, they are important to you or to someone you love.



	DO SOON
<input type="checkbox"/>	study for math test
<input type="checkbox"/>	organize closet
<input type="checkbox"/>	buy paper, pens
<input type="checkbox"/>	make brownies for bake sale
<input type="checkbox"/>	write English paper (decide on subject!)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	buy new jeans
<input type="checkbox"/>	send out Halloween party invites!
<input type="checkbox"/>	search online for power smoothie recipe
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Take your notebook and jot down all **Do Soon** items onto the first page. As you take care of **Do Soon** things throughout the week, cross them off the list. Don't panic if they don't all get done. At the end of the week, just rip out that list, copy whatever's left to do onto a fresh page, then add whatever new tasks have come up. This way you can always refer to one consolidated list at the front of your notebook, instead of flipping through it to find bits and pieces of old lists.

3. Do Someday

Even if something isn't doable for you right now, it's still important to preserve the idea. This makes it more likely to happen in the future and lets you relax in the knowledge that your dreams won't be forgotten.

	DO SOMEDAY
<input type="checkbox"/>	train for triathlon
<input type="checkbox"/>	put summer photos in album
<input type="checkbox"/>	start running every day
<input type="checkbox"/>	learn to snowboard
<input type="checkbox"/>	redecorate room
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Using the last page of that same notebook, write down your **Do Someday** list and add to it over time as you think of new things. When you update your **Do Soon** list each week, read over your **Do Someday** list to see whether you're ready to move any items to the front. You may even find that you've achieved a few of your goals without even knowing it.

Appointments

Anything on your list that's time-specific, meaning it *has* to be done on a particular day and time, goes in your planner (see pages 68-69). For now, just mark a **P** next to it.

	SAMPLE BRAIN DUMP
<input type="radio"/>	study for math test
	call Matt
	text Scott about borrowing CD
	organize closet
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	go to doctor, Tues. 4:00
	buy papers, pens
	make brownies for bake sale
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	meet at Kyle's house, Sat. 10 am
	write English paper
<input type="radio"/>	email Sophie back
	buy new jeans
	train for triathlon
	fold sweaters
	send thank-you note to Mom's friend (name?? ask Mom)
	put summer photos in album
	send out Halloween party invites!
	start running every day
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	go to soccer game, Fri. 5:30 (bring chips for team)
	search online for power smoothie recipe
<input type="radio"/>	learn to snowboard
	re-decorate room
	feed Smitty

Why The Brain Dump Works

It works for two reasons. First, your subconscious brain can't tell the difference between realistic to-dos and goals that may not be possible, given the amount of time or money you have right now. As a result, your mind could be muddled with both the doable and the impossible—and unable to accomplish either. When you put each goal down on paper, it becomes easier to see it clearly and decide whether it's realistic. If it's not, you can either 1) adjust the goal to make it doable or 2) ditch it altogether. Neither of these things can happen when things are just floating around in your head.

Another benefit of **The Brain Dump** is that it forces you to define your goals, which is the first step to turning them into action. In fact, the act of writing down goals, even random ones that seem like wishful thinking (like “master the didgeridoo”), makes them much more likely to happen.