

Eat that frog 🐸

Mark Twain once said: "Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

Now, although the prospects of eating an *actual* live frog are daunting, we can interpret these "frogs" as the tasks we dread.

In that sense, "Eating that frog" means you have to do the task you dread *first*, before all other tasks. Once you have "eaten" your "frog", you can rest assured that the worst is behind you, so you're likely to take on a positive approach about the rest of your day.

Who said "eat the frog"?

Brian Tracy, author of – *Eat That Frog! 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time* – was the one who coined the term, inspired by the previously mentioned Mark Twain's quote.

In his book, Tracy advocates that focusing on your most important task, i.e. "ugliest frog", is the best way to gain success, status, respect, and happiness in life – hence the whimsical name of his time management technique, i.e. "**Eat that frog**".

What tasks can be "frogs"?

In gist, any task can be a "frog" – as long as you procrastinate to no end before doing it. However, the following types of tasks are most likely to be classified as "frogs":

- An **extremely difficult** task

This is a task you keep putting off because it would take too much of your time, because it's too difficult, or because it's simply boring.

For example, this may be an extensive research for a project, or filling out a lot of accounting paperwork.

- An **extremely important** task

This is a task you keep putting off because it's too important to be glossed over – but, it also seems to be too demanding for you to fully focus on it for a longer period of time.

For example, it can be a call to a demanding client, or cost and time estimates you have to set for an elusive project.

- An **extremely important and difficult** task

Sometimes, if you're *really* out of luck, a task can be both boring *and* crucial for your work.

For example, this can be a 50-page project research you have yet to make a concise, efficient, and persuading 200-word abstract for – with the deadline being mere hours away.

How to "eat that frog"?

The gist to the "eat that frog" time management technique is simple:

1. Label your tasks to identify your "frog"
2. Work on your "frog" first thing in the morning
3. Once done, shift your focus to less crucial tasks in your schedule

In order to properly label your tasks and identify frogs, you'll need to **prioritize** – by using the **Eisenhower Matrix** time management technique.

By proxy, the Eisenhower Matrix labels tasks according to their level of importance and urgency – but the system works just as well with "frogs".

First, you'll need to create a list of tasks you have to do the following day.

Then, divide your to-do items into 4 quadrants, describing how much you want and need to do a task:

<p>Quadrant 1 – tasks you don't want to do, but need to do</p>	<p>Quadrant 2 – tasks you want to do, and also need to do</p>
<p>Quadrant 3 – tasks you want to do, but don't need to do</p>	<p>Quadrant 4 – tasks don't want to do, and also don't need to do</p>

Your "frogs" are always the tasks you place in **Quadrant 1** – i.e. the daily tasks you don't want to do, but still need to do. At the start of each workday, simply work on the task from **Quadrant 1** – only once you finish this task, should you move on to the tasks from the other quadrants.

What if you have 2 "frogs"?

No two ugly frogs are equally ugly, and no two tasks are equally problematic.

But, when in doubt about several potential "frogs", Tracy advises you use the **ABCDE technique** to identify the task you should tackle first.

Once again, you should create a list of tasks you have to do the following day.

Then, label them with letters:

- **"A"** – your **most important task**, the one most likely to have serious consequences if you don't finish it.
- **"B"** – the **next most important task**, the one not as serious in terms of consequences, but still important.
- **"C"** – the task that **you could do**, but it wouldn't have any real consequences if you didn't do it.
- **"D"** – the task that you **can delegate** to someone, **to free more time** for doing the "A" task.
- **"E"** – the task that you don't really have to do, so you can **eliminate it**.





The important matter is that you don't move on the "B" task, or any other task, until you're finished with the "A" task.

Theories that support "eating that frog"

A couple of theories support the premise that you should do the most important task first, as is advised in the "Eat that Frog" technique.

The Serial-position effect claims that people, when they have to remember items on a list, are more likely to remember the first and last items better than the middle ones.

Also, according to the Attention decrement hypothesis, people are more likely to pay attention to the information they hear first, than the information that follows.

This effect and hypothesis support the idea that you should do the most important or most difficult task first, because you are more likely to be able to focus on it at the beginning of the day.

Advantages of "eating that frog"

It's an impact-driven technique

Doing the most difficult or the most important task first thing in the morning will have a great positive impact on the rest of your day.

This little achievement will help energize and motivate you, and you will glide through the rest of the day because you'll know that all the other tasks that await you are easier.

It makes prioritizing easier

When you start thinking about your tasks in order to find "frogs", you'll gain a great perspective about your daily workload.

You'll be more likely to recognize what tasks aren't important, what tasks you can discard entirely and what tasks you should really focus on.

In contrast, if you don't prioritize your tasks, and do your work in random order, you may spend too much time on trivial tasks, and have no time left for your most important tasks.

It leaves you with more time for enjoyable tasks

Everyone has a certain type of tasks they don't enjoy.

Some don't like creating project estimates, some don't like writing reports, and some don't like making phone calls or answering emails.

In any case, if you do these "dreadful" tasks first thing in the morning, you'll actually feel like you have more time for tasks you actually enjoy.

Disadvantages of "eating that frog"

It makes the start of the day difficult

Focusing on a new "frog" each day can be difficult, because we are essentially labeling out the start of our workday as the time for our worst ghouls, which may be demoralizing on its own.

But discipline and practice can help you finish these worst tasks faster.

In order to finish these “frogs” faster, you can practice your “ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task”, or **“deep work”**, as Cal Newport calls it.

When you start this demanding task, don’t shift your focus on anything else until you’ve finished it; you can take breaks, but when you’re working, avoid distractions.

By practicing your ability to perform “deep work”, you’ll finish these important tasks faster, move on to “regular” tasks quicker, and even finish your daily workload earlier in the day.

You’ll have a great sense of progress, which will help you feel more motivated, and your productivity levels will be on the rise.

Too rigid and impractical at times

The rules of the “Eat that Frog” technique state that you must tackle the most important/difficult task first, which can be a strict rule.

What if your most important task changes during the course of the day, and you have to focus on something else?

In such cases, it’s best that you act according to your **new priorities**: for example, you can add the new task on your ABCDE list and label it as “A”, marking all the other tasks as less urgent.

In the end, the best you can do to thwart the disadvantages and make the most of the advantages of this technique, use the “Eat that Frog” rules as a starting point – and tweak them to fit your needs.

Tips for “eating that frog” easier

Practice planning

“Eat that Frog” technique is all about planning: you think about your tasks, write them down and prioritize them, so you’ll know what task to do first.

You identify your goals and objectives for that day and act accordingly.

It may sound time-consuming to write down all your tasks each day, but this actually saves you time – According to Tracy, 1 minute of planning may save you as much as 5-10 minutes during execution.

As time goes by, creating these lists and prioritizing tasks on paper will become a habit, and you’ll learn to do it faster, which will save you even more time.

Build a sense of momentum

Once you have made your plan, don’t hesitate, just dive right into your work. Focus on what you are doing, and focus on your goals and objectives.

You’ll notice that it’s much harder to start working on a task than to continue working on it. This is known as building your momentum – once we start going, we’ll keep going until we are finished.

So, if you feel demoralized at the thought of doing your most demanding tasks first thing in the morning, remember that the first step is always the hardest. It’ll be easier once you gain momentum and really focus on a task.

Parse the tasks into smaller chunks

When working, people love the feeling of reaching their goals, because they love the sense of completion.

But, reaching the end goal of a project may seem far from reach, especially when you're just starting.

In order to get that sense of completion at equal intervals in the project, and not just at its end, you should parse your project into smaller tasks – this will make your goals seem more manageable, because you'll be striving for one part of that goal at a time.

For example, your "frog" is a project you have to complete in 2 hours.

So, you put this project on paper, and notice you can parse it into 3 tasks – these tasks are parts of a larger goal (the project), and you can treat them like mini-goals you have to complete.

Once you complete each of the three mini-goals, you should take a short break and reward yourself for your efforts thus far.

You'll feel a sense of completion, and the end of the project will come quicker than expected, at least from a psychological point of view.

Want to make sure you stick to a routine and take breaks from your "frogs"? Combine "Eat that Frog" with the "Pomodoro" time management technique, and work with a Pomodoro Timer that automatically tells you when to take a break from your "frogs" or resume work on them.

In the end, why should you "Eat that Frog" first?

Imagine that you have 6 tasks to finish by the end of today.

You work and you work, and you actually manage to finish 5 out of 6 tasks. Yet, despite all that, you feel a dark cloud of failure looming over you.

Why? Well, you forgot to eat your frog.

The phenomena of "eating" or "not eating your live frog", **in terms of productivity**, means the following – although you've finished 5 out of 6 tasks, you still didn't tackle your most demanding task, so you lack that feeling of achievement over finishing the other 5 tasks.

What's worse, you know this 1 task will be waiting for you the next day, and the next day, and the day after that.... And, until you finish it, your "5 out of 6" score will always leave you indifferent.

Eating your frog, i.e. dealing with your most demanding task first thing in the morning is like the wind beneath your wings when it comes to your work schedule – because finishing 1 *crucial* task will always bring your quicker, more efficient results, less fatigue, and a stronger sense of accomplishment than finishing 5 out of 6 mundane tasks.

And that's why you should always aim for it.