



ACADEMY

STAGE 2: Bailing



To-Do Lists Done Right

How to Manage Your Tasks
without Losing Your Mind

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To-Do Lists Done Right: How to Manage Your Tasks without Losing Your Mind



"Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time, because the days are evil"

EPHESIANS 5:15-16(CSB)

This course is part of Stage 2: Bailing in Redeeming Productivity Academy. In this stage we're working on the systems you keep your productivity in ship-shape. We look at how to properly manage tasks, appointments, and schedule checkups with yourself so your systems never take on too much water.

We are looking at one of the most basic productivity tools, but one which people nevertheless, often use wrong: The To-Do List.

In this course, we'll look at both the **principles** and the **practices** that make a commitment-management system actually work. The aim is to give you a basic understanding of what makes for a good to-do list so that you can apply these high-level principles and routines to any kind of app, planner, or productivity system.

Let's get started!



PART 1

Principles

Why Do We Need To Do Lists?

To-do lists are a necessary part of the times we live in. But there really several reasons every modern person should keep a to-do list:

- The complexity of our times
- How God designed our brains to work
- Noetic effects of the curse

"Your mind is for having ideas, not holding them."

DAVID ALLEN
Getting Things Done

If we want to be productive in the modern world, we must learn to get commitments out of our brains and into organized and trusted systems

Why Should Christians Care?

You might agree that a commitment management system is useful, but still be resistant to using one.

Here are a few reasons Christians should care enough to use a to-do list properly:

- God is an orderly God, we should be orderly people (1 Corinthians 14:33)
- We want to be faithful stewards of God's gifts (1 Corinthians 4:2)
- We want to be faithful servants to others (Matthew 20:26)

The Zeigarnik Effect:
the psychological tendency to remember an uncompleted task rather than a completed one



PART 1: Principles



PART 1: Principles

What Are the Features of a Good To-Do List?

Regardless of what tool you use to manage your to-do list, there are certain features that should be present in any commitment management system you use.

External

Gets your commitments out of your head and into a system.

Singular

There should only be one place you need to go to capture or review your tasks.

Actionable

Tells you what you need to do next with minimal interpretation.

Trusted

You must have confidence it won't be lost, destroyed, or forgotten about.

Simple

Provides clarity in chaos. Your to-do list is where you go to reorient.

Engaging

It should invite you to focused work, not overwhelm or confuse you.

As you compare and contrast different to-do list systems—paper vs. digital, this app vs. that app, bullet journaling vs. a formatted planner—Let these features serve as a checklist of necessary criteria.

Next, let's look at the steps involved in effectively shepherding your tasks from vague ideas to well-defined projects with next steps...

The C.O.P.E. Framework

A proper to-do list should follow a step-by-step procedure to move tasks from a master repository into orderly projects and well-defined next steps. The C.O.P.E framework gives us four simple steps to do just this.

These are the four steps:

1. **C**entralize
2. **O**rganize
3. **P**rioritize
4. **E**xecute

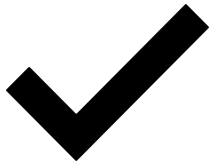
The 5 Lists

The reason most people do to-do lists wrong is because they mistakenly think there is just one type of to-do list.

These are the five lists you need:

1. **Inbox**
2. **Projects List**
3. **Actions List**
4. **Future List**
5. **Daily List**

Next, we'll put C.O.P.E and the 5 Lists together to see how the whole system works in practice...



PART 2

Practice

The C.O.P.E. Framework

1. Centralize

Capture all incoming tasks, requirements, anything that requires your attention into *one* master inbox.

Having multiple task management systems is a recipe for disaster. If some tasks are written on sticky notes, some are on your phone, and some are on a notepad at your desk, you'll never know if you really have your commitments under control.

The goal is to collect anything that represents a task you are responsible to perform. But often these tasks are buried in other noise. Places you might find tasks:

- Emails
- Conversations
- Text messages
- Memos
- Stray shower thought
- Upcoming event on your calendar

The goal is to train yourself such that when you think "oh, I need to do something about that" you capture a note about that in your centralized inbox.

The C.O.P.E. Framework

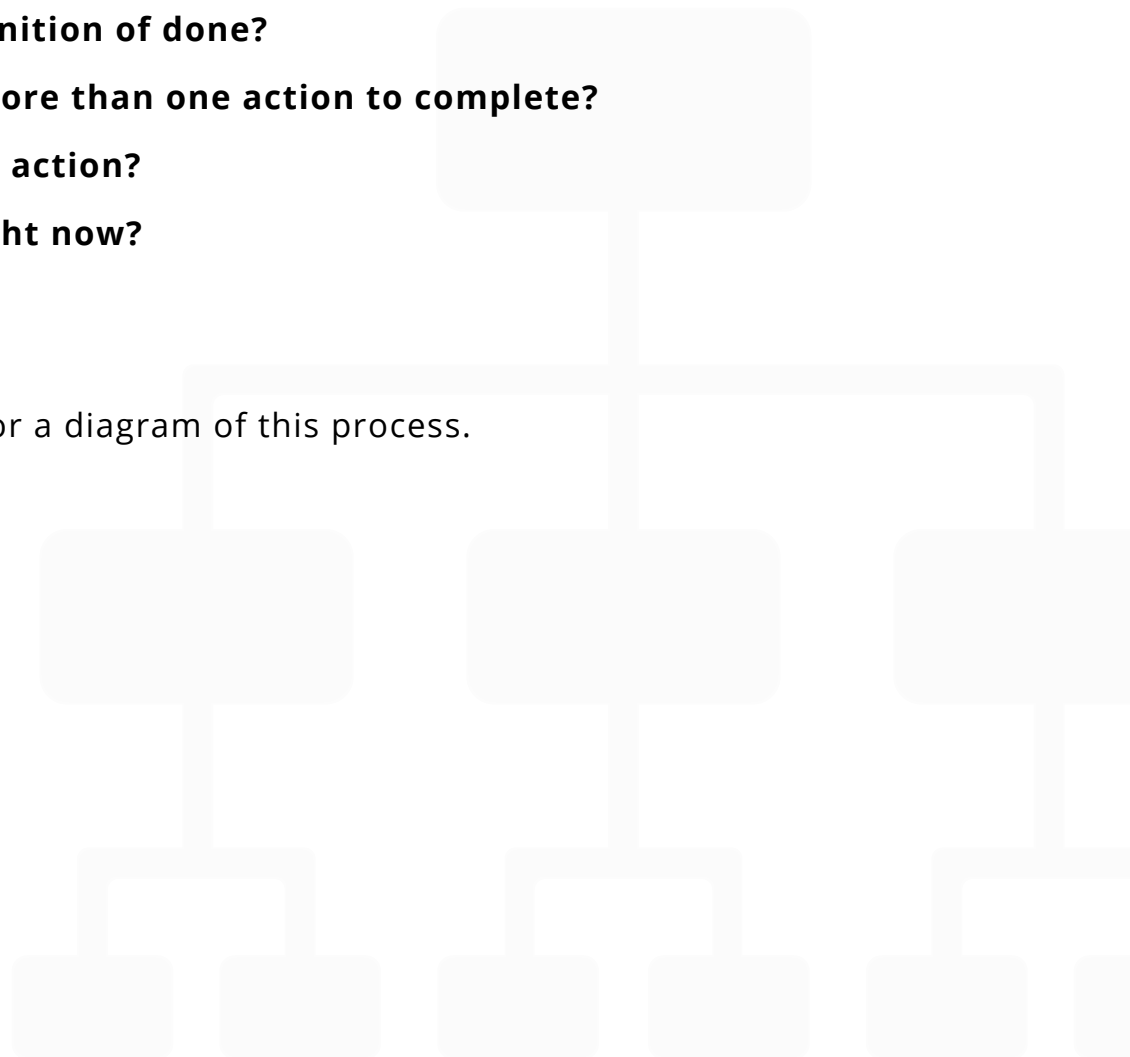
2. Organize

Next, you need to go through a series of questions whereby you make decisions about what to do with each item in your inbox. This is the organize step.

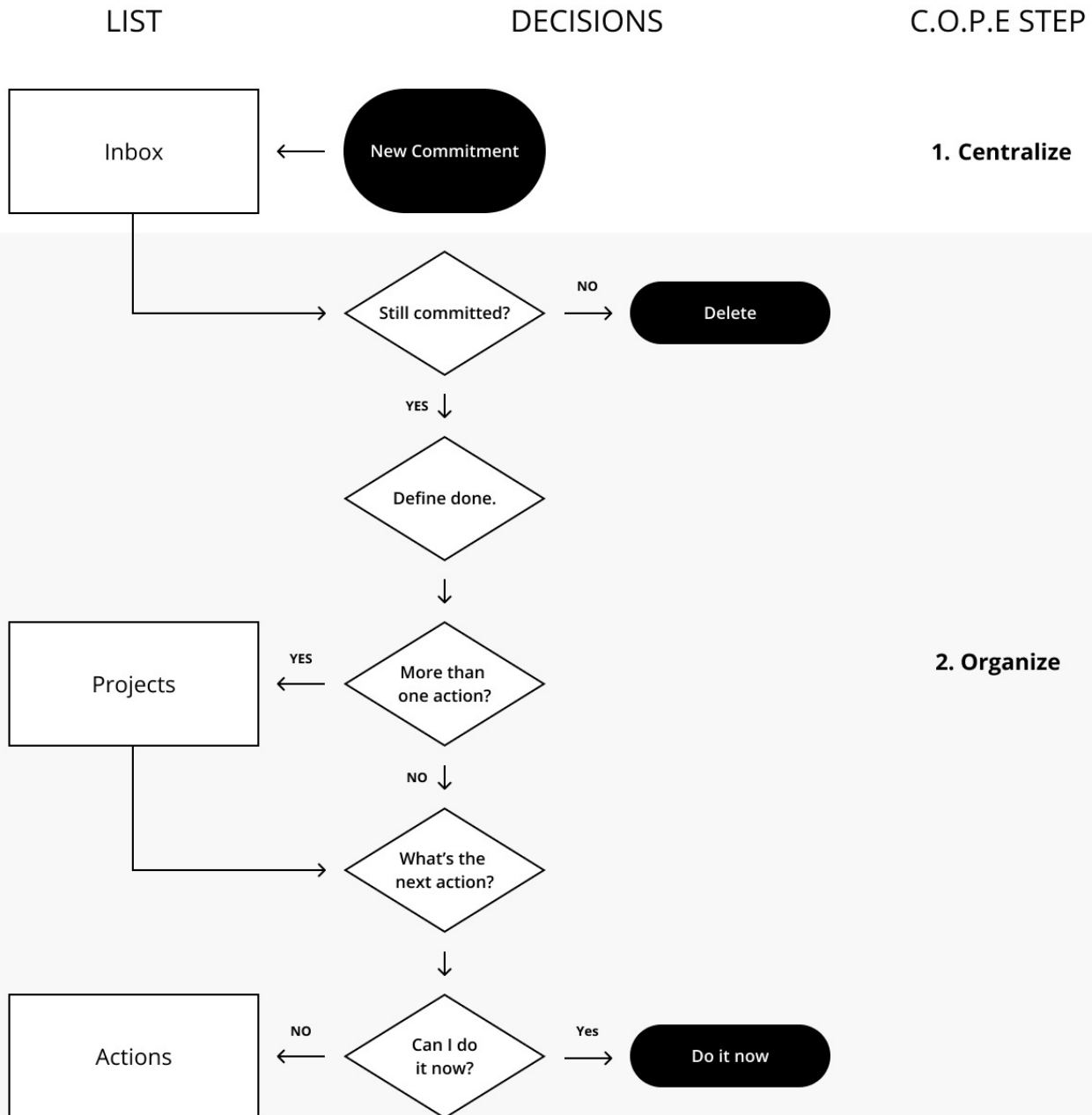
These are the five questions you need to ask yourself about each item in your inbox:

- 1. Am I still committed to this?**
- 2. What is my definition of done?**
- 3. Will this take more than one action to complete?**
- 4. What's the next action?**
- 5. Can I do this right now?**

See the next page for a diagram of this process.



C.O.P.E Organize Flow Chart





The C.O.P.E. Framework

3. Prioritize

Next, we want to prioritize our projects. This step will happen primarily during your **weekly review**, but you may also find yourself doing it throughout the week as you are selecting projects for your daily list.

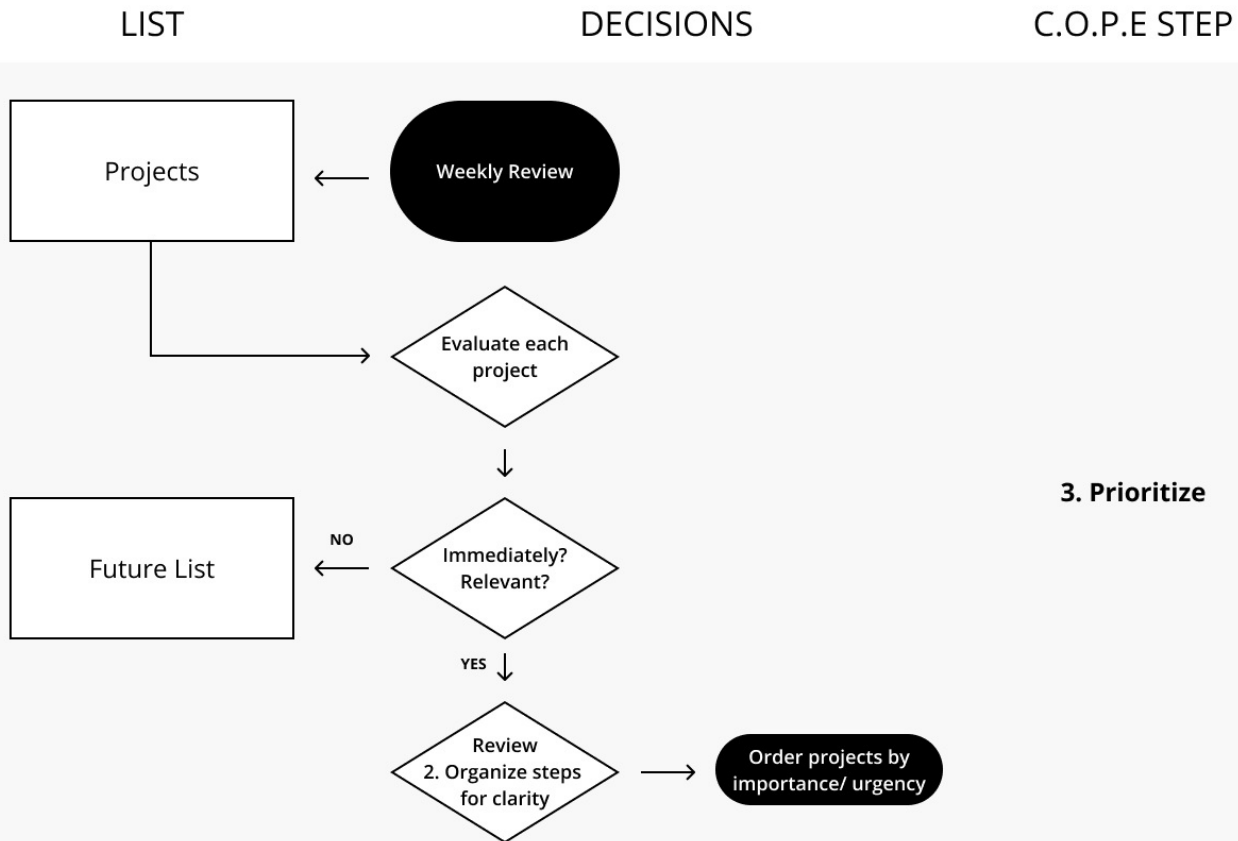
Our priorities are constantly shifting, so it's good to treat this list as a living document.

These are the steps of the prioritize phase.

1. **Move projects that are not immediately relevant to your future list.**
2. **Order remaining projects roughly by importance/urgency**
 - a. **Ask the clarifying question, "What's the one thing I can do, such that by doing it, everything else will be easier or unnecessary?"**
 - b. **Think in terms of your long-term goals, but don't overthink it!**

See the next page for a diagram of this process.

C.O.P.E Prioritize Flow Chart



The C.O.P.E. Framework

4. Execute

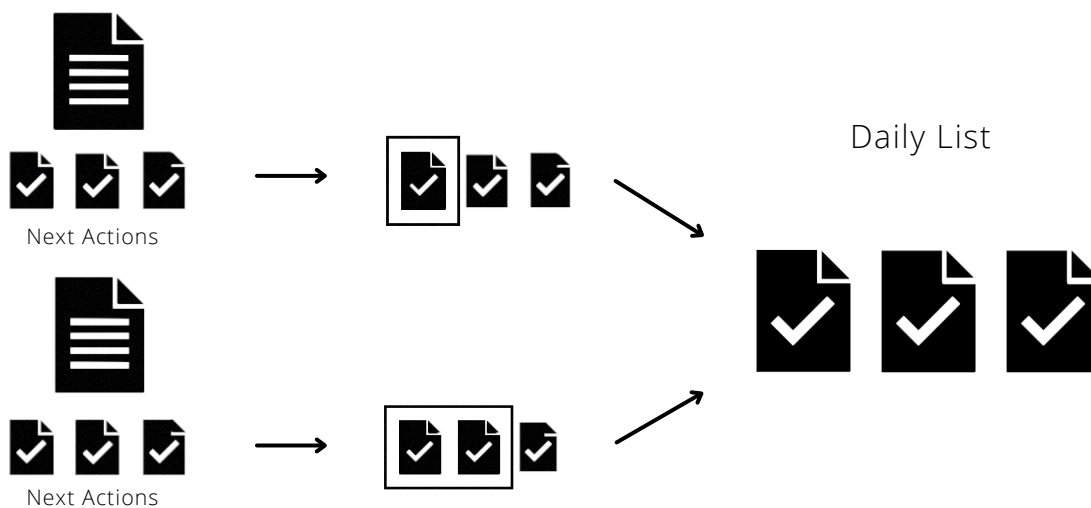
Now, we come to the here and the now. What will you execute on today?

Remember, in this phase, we aren't choosing **projects** to work on but rather the **next actions** within projects. The goal here isn't to get as many actions done as possible, but to make sure are making progress on the most important actions in the most important projects.

These are the steps of the execute phase.

1. **Survey projects list**
2. **Copy next action from 1-3 projects to Daily List**
3. **Decide which *one* action is most important & do that first**
4. **Repeat for each of the actions you chose**
5. **Take 5 minutes at end of the day to go back through your projects list and define the next actions for any projects you've worked on today.**

Projects List





PART 2: Practice

The C.O.P.E. Framework

To see the whole system in action, watch the videos under "Demo of C.O.P.E in Things"

"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

PSALM 90:12

The Weekly Review

The lynchpin of any to-do list management system is regular reviews. Without a regular review, you will lose trust in your system and it will cease to serve you.

While you'll be looking at your projects and actions on a daily basis as you choose what to work on, it's wise to schedule a weekly review of about 1-2 hours to review everything in your system. This ensures that nothing is forgotten about, and you are always bringing more clarity to what needs to be done next.

Follow these 5 steps in your weekly review sessions:

1. Deal with Loose Ends

- Get to inbox zero: Email, to-do list, social media DMs, etc.
- Process meeting notes, loose papers, stray thoughts you've jotted down
- Clean up your work area
- Capture any ideas, potential projects, etc. in your trusted system. Get it off your mind.

2. Look Ahead

- Look at your calendar for the coming weeks, what's coming due?
- Look at projects list, are any becoming urgent? What deadlines are approaching?
- What projects can I drop? Which projects are stalled out?
- Anything needing follow-up with someone else?

The Weekly Review (Cont.)

3. Reflect on the Week

- In a journal or in your head, spend a few minutes thinking about the highs and lows of the week
- What habits are working? Which ones aren't?
- Where could I improve?
- How's my walk with the Lord?
- How are things going in my relationships?

4. Get Creative

- Once your head is clear, you'll likely experience a flood of creative ideas. Don't let these go to waste.
- Capture all of your creative ideas in your inbox

5. Pray

- Thank the Lord for the previous week.
- Ask for His help to improve where you've fallen short.
- Ask the Lord for wisdom for next week.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

JAMES 1:5

Final Thoughts

Remember, to-do lists were made for man, not man for to-do lists. They are just a tool.

No matter how good we get at keeping up with our commitments, we'll always fall short. But God does not love us based on how perfectly productive we were today but rather based on how perfect His Son and His sacrifice were. I can stand before God and men with confidence even in my daily failure to live up to my own standards because Christ has lived up to God's standards on my behalf.

Additional Resources

Commitment Management Systems

Digital

- [Things](#) by Cultured Code (Apple only)
- [Todoist](#) (All operating systems)
- [OmniFocus](#) (Apple only)
- Reminders (Native on Apple Devices)
- [Microsoft To Do](#) (All operating systems, included in Office 365)
- [TickTick](#) (All operating systems)
- [Trello](#)

Paper

- [Bullet Journal Method](#)
- [Kanban Board](#) - Physical Trello board using sticky notes and columns
- [Ugmonk](#) - Premium analog to-do list system
- [LifeJournal Christian Planner](#) - A paper planner designed by and for Christians
- [SELF Journal](#) - Simple, no-nonsense, paper planner
- [Full Focus Planner](#) - Good for people who follow Michael Hyatt's systems

Books

- [*The Bullet Journal Method*](#) by Ryder Carrol
- [*Do More Better*](#) by Tim Challies
- [*Getting Things Done*](#) by David Allen
- [*The ONE Thing*](#) by Gary Keller and Jay Papasan
- [*Redeeming Your Time*](#) by Jordan Raynor

STAGE 1: Drowning

Overcommitment: The Problem Productivity Can't Solve

