The Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique is a time-management method created by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s, when he was a university student. He used a tomato-shaped kitchen timer, and pomodoro is the Italian word for tomato. The idea is to work in short, focused sprints, usually 25 minutes long, separated by short breaks. Each sprint is called a pomodoro. We follow Yasmin, a marketing coordinator, as she learns it.

1. One Task, One Pomodoro

A pomodoro starts with choosing one task and setting a timer for 25 minutes. During this time, we work only on that task and on nothing else. When the timer rings, we stop, even if we are in the middle of a sentence. The fixed limit makes starting easier, because 25 minutes feels small, and it makes focus easier, because the end is in sight.

Example: A student wants to revise a chapter of her book. She applies one task, one pomodoro: she picks only chapter three, sets the timer for 25 minutes and puts her phone away. When the timer rings, half of the chapter is revised and she feels ready to continue.

At work: Yasmin has a monthly report to write. She applies one task, one pomodoro: she chooses only the sales summary, sets the timer and closes her email. After 25 minutes, the summary draft is ready, and she knows exactly how much is left.

2. Take the Break

After each pomodoro, we take a short break of about five minutes. We stand, stretch, drink water or look out of the window, and we stay away from work and screens. After four pomodoros, we take a longer break, commonly between 15 and 30 minutes. The break rests the mind, so the next sprint starts fresh instead of tired.

Example: A gardener digs for 25 minutes. Then the gardener takes the break: five minutes of water and shade. The next round of digging feels just as strong.

At work: After her first pomodoro, Yasmin takes the break: she walks to the window, drinks water and leaves her phone on the desk. After four pomodoros, she takes a longer break and then returns to the report with fresh energy.

3. Handle Interruptions

Interruptions are the main enemy of a pomodoro. Cirillo suggests a simple routine for outside interruptions: inform the other person that we are busy, negotiate a better time, schedule it and call back. For inner urges, such as the wish to check messages, we write them on a list and

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return to the task. In the original method, a pomodoro that is truly broken is usually restarted, so we protect it.

Example: A cook is chopping vegetables when a neighbour knocks at the door. She uses the interruption routine: she informs the neighbour that she is busy, agrees a time ten minutes later and promises to visit. The neighbour waits, and the cooking continues.

At work: A colleague asks Yasmin for help in the middle of a pomodoro. She handles the interruption with the routine: she tells him that she is busy, suggests a time after the timer rings and notes it down. The colleague agrees, and Yasmin finishes the pomodoro without losing her focus.

4. Adapt It to Your Work

The technique is flexible in how we use it. Small tasks, such as short emails, can be grouped into one pomodoro, and large tasks can be split across several. Many people adjust the length of the sprint to suit their work, which is fine as long as the sprint is fixed and the breaks stay. Counting the pomodoros we complete each day also helps us plan, because we learn how long tasks really take.

Example: A teacher has ten small jobs, such as replying to parents and printing worksheets. She adapts the technique by grouping the small jobs into one pomodoro. She clears them in a single sprint.

At work: Yasmin's report needs deep thinking. She adapts the technique: she splits it into six pomodoros over two days and groups her small emails into a seventh. At the end of the week, her count shows how long a report really takes.

Conclusion

In summary, the Pomodoro Technique was created by Francesco Cirillo and uses focused 25-minute sprints with short breaks. We choose one task per pomodoro, take real breaks, handle interruptions with a routine and adapt the method to our work. Counting pomodoros helps us understand our time. A fixed sprint makes starting easy and keeps us focused.

Sources

- Cirillo, F. (2018). The Pomodoro Technique: The Acclaimed Time-Management System That Has Transformed How We Work. Penguin Random House (book, no link).
- Francesco Cirillo: official site – https://www.francescocirillo.com/
- Wikipedia: Pomodoro Technique (overview of the method) – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique
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