



80/20 Author Productivity Cheat Sheet

For our purposes, **productivity is doing what matters when it needs to get done.**

The 80/20 rule is the heart of productivity. Focus on high leverage tasks (the 20% of actions driving 80% of results) and do them well. Eliminate what doesn't matter.

Simple Five-Step Productivity System

1. **Start with one core objective.** You can have more, but at the beginning, focus on building a habit (or habits) around one. (ex. become a full-time writer)
2. **Reverse-engineer this core objective into a shorter term project.** (ex. write a 60,000 word novel)
3. **Reverse-engineer this project into one daily habit that brings you closer to that core objective.** (ex. write 1,000 words/day)
4. **Eliminate low leverage or irrelevant tasks that don't help you complete your project or core objective** (ex. writing a blog to market your fiction—those words would be better invested in a newsletter or in the book itself)
5. **Set a hard deadline that builds in some slack** (ex. set up a pre-order 90 days from now—thus giving you 30 free days for admin, revisions, days off, unexpected delays etc.)

The 3 x 3 System

Here's a straightforward way to apply the system outlined above to writing.

The **3 x 3 system** is so named because there are three core daily focal points critical to being a full-time author. Like any system, it is not the only approach to productivity. However, this system has a few advantages: it is simple, lightweight, and most importantly, *flexible*.

Here's the 3 x 3 system:

1. Focus on these **three areas**: writing, marketing, and reading.
2. Invest **three total hours in them daily** for 5 – 6 days a week. These can be split equally (1 hour each), unevenly, or you can focus on two, or even just a single area at a time. If you can't invest three hours a day, scale the system down to meet yourself where you are (e.g., you could do 30 minutes or 1 hour a day—it'll just take longer than three years).
3. Doing this for **three years** gives you a good shot at going part-time or full-time.

Assuming 1,000 words written/hr and 60 pages read/hr, over three years that would result in:

- Publishing 12 – 15 full-length novels
- Reading 150 books in the sub-genre (or about writing/marketing)
- Installing your entire marketing funnel, with a solid understanding of ad platforms like Facebook and Amazon Ads (or whatever sources of visibility you prefer to use)

How to Build a Habit

For tasks you repeat multiple times a week or daily, there's an easy three-part formula for creating or changing new habits:

1. **Trigger** (also called the “cue” or the “antecedent”). The best triggers are **automatic actions** (e.g. waking up), **environmental** (e.g. writing in a certain place), **reminders** (automated from apps, or simple notes / organization systems that prompt you to do a habit), and **common repetitive actions** (e.g., going down the stairs, entering a room). Effective triggers occur daily, and the best ones occur multiple times a day (thus allowing you to perform multiple “reps” of your habit).
2. **Behavior** (i.e. the habit in question)
3. **Reward** (also called the “consequence” in psychological literature): the positive result of the behavior. This can either be intrinsic (e.g. the satisfaction of having written) or extrinsic (watching a TV show after your writing session).

You'll notice that, if you use the official psychological nomenclature, this sequence forms an easy-to-remember acronym: A-B-C (antecedent-behavior-consequence). I prefer using the terms “trigger” and “reward,” however, since they better capture the spirit of those two components.

Once you have the components assembled, actually establishing the habit is a two-step process:

1. **Start small** to establish the habit itself (build the skill of showing up). Meet yourself where you are; if that's writing for 5 minutes to begin with, that's fine. The more daily habit reps you get in, the faster it will build. Focus on quality: when you're doing a habit, make sure it receives your full focus. Multitasking kills productivity and progress.
2. Then **scale the habit** to get results (build the skill itself)

You don't need to commit to a new habit forever; just try it for a **trial week**. After the week is up, evaluate whether you want to continue for another week, along with any calibrations that might need to be made. Or, if it's not a good fit, kill it and try a new habit.

Non-Habitual Tasks: The Three Most Important Task System

Not everything is habitual; there are one-off tasks that must also get done. This is a simple way to organize and execute those. **Make a list of up to your three most important tasks** for the day the night before on a notecard. These should take no longer than one hour each to complete; if a task takes more than one hour, it counts as two tasks. Then cross them off as you do them.

When they're complete, rip up the notecard. Start the process again that night. And that's it.

80/20 Action List

1. Set your core objective, then reverse engineer it into a project and habit.
2. Commit to this habit for a trial week and track whether you're doing it or not.
3. Write out your three most important non-habitual tasks each day.
4. At the end of the trial week, assess whether to kill, calibrate, or continue the habit.