



SDS PODCAST

EPISODE 456

FIVE MINUTE

FRIDAY:

THE POMODORO

TECHNIQUE



(00:05):

This is FiveMinuteFriday on the Pomodoro Technique.

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Today's episode is all about a time management approach called the Pomodoro Technique. I use it almost every single day of my life to structure my work and to stay focused. The technique was developed and popularized by an Italian named Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s with the name Pomodoro being the Italian word for tomato. Tomatoes show up in a couple of contexts with respect to the technique. But the name originally comes from a kitchen timer that Francesco was using in the 1980s that looked like a tomato. The core idea behind the Pomodoro Technique, this tomato technique, is to alternate sustainable periods of uninterrupted focus, typically 25 minute periods with shorter periods of rest, typically five minutes or fewer, but here's exactly how I do it. If you're watching the video version of today's podcast, you'll be able to see this piece of paper that I have.

(01:21):

I have a piece of paper that looks exactly like this for every single day of the year. I print out hundreds of them at a time and I'll describe it for listeners on the audio only format. There's a date at the top of the page that you write in. And sometimes I have notes that I actually look back on for months or even years earlier on some of these Pomodoro pages. And you put the most important task of the day, right at the top of the page. And then you can fill in whenever you've had a 25 minute period of focus. You estimate, okay, my most important task for today was linear algebra review. And I estimated that it would take one Pomodoro, one 25 minute period. And then I colored in, you're supposed to color in with red, the same color as the tomato in these little, in the typical Pomodoro template you color in a circle for every single one of these 25 minute periods of focus.



(02:29):

And so these little red circles as you fill them in, they look like tomatoes, but I've actually run out of red ink from filling in so many of these tomatoes. And so currently, if you're watching the video version, everything shows up as pink. That was the closest color that I had. You fill in these Pomodoro bubbles for every 25 minute period of focus and that linear algebra task it did indeed take one Pomodoro. And you can mark that down that it took as long as you expect it to. And then you have your other tasks of the day fill in below. So a row for each task. For example, right now, we're in row three, which is marked as SuperDataScience, and I've already done two Pomodoros today, recording a SuperDataScience podcast content.

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And now I'm right in the middle of my third Pomodoro and so I use a Pomodoro timer called Focus Keeper on my phone. And so I have an iOS device. And the Focus Keeper is available in the Apple store. It might be available in the Android store as well, but there are tons of different free ad supported or very inexpensive options for Pomodoro timers in various Apple stores, as well as for desktop computers.

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And this focus timer, one that I have, it allows that structure that I described those 25 minute periods of focus and 5 minute or fewer breaks. Those are automatically inbuilt. So what it'll do is it'll run down for 25 minutes and then it has a nice satisfying ding sound. And at that point that it dings, I get out my piece of paper, I fill out another Pomodoro and the typical structure, the one that I follow and the one that's also in this Focus Keeper app is to do four of these periods in a row.



(04:35):

So 25 minute focus, 5 minute break, 25 minute focus, 5 minute break. And you do that four times. So that takes about two hours. If I'm really focused, if I'm really in the middle of something and really, in a sense of flow, then I will skip the break entirely. But generally those breaks are a good idea to make this practice sustainable. So you can get up and get a glass of water, think about what you've been working on. You're not supposed to really check messages or emails in those five minute periods, but if you have the kind of job where that's necessary, then maybe that's a good time to check, but ideally it's at the end of these four periods, four Pomodoros, so about two hours of work, but then you take a bigger break. So I typically take an hour break if that allows me to get caught up on important emails, text messages that have come through, and then I dig into another round of four Pomodoros, then another longer break, half an hour or an hour, get some food.

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And then one final round of four Pomodoros for the day. So that's a total of 12 Pomodoros over the day, six hours of uninterrupted focus. And a key thing about this Pomodoro Technique is that when you're in that Pomodoro, when I'm in my SuperDataScience Pomodoro right now, I don't do anything else, but focus on task. And so that allows me to get into a flow state and feel very focused and satisfied about my work. So to get your own Pomodoro template, you can simply Google Pomodoro template PDF, or query like that in Google or whatever internet search tool you use. And yeah, you'll find lots of similar examples, including official ones from Francesco Cirillo himself. So that's it for today's episode, try out the Pomodoro Technique yourself. If you're feeling like you could use a method to stay on task, there's little more fulfilling than getting to the end of the day, knowing that you had six hours or so of uninterrupted focus and productivity.