

Tips & Tricks for iPhone

# Productivity Hacks for iPhone



**Apps, Settings, and Hidden Tricks  
to Save Time and Improve Your Workflow**

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## Ditch distractions and use your iPhone for good

The iPhone is a brilliant multi-tool, capable of all kinds of clever stuff we would have seen as black magic just a few decades ago. Used correctly, it can make your life so much easier and more productive – but so many people don't use it correctly, instead giving in to the myriad distractions it provides.

We're here to reframe the iPhone from a time-wasting procrastination station to an irreplaceable part of your daily routine. We'll show you the settings to change to shut off temptations, and the apps to use to plan your day. We'll even show you how it can be used to get *Actual Proper Work* done from time to time.

In a world in which working from home is increasingly common, the iPhone plays a bigger part than ever in your day-to-day productivity.

From focus timers to content blockers, to-do lists to email clients, there's a wealth of ways to get your iPhone working for you – not the other way around. This guide will help you implement those techniques and find the best apps for each job without spending hours sifting through the App Store to test each candidate.

We also highlight some criminally underused iPhone features, and detail a few hidden (and not so hidden) tricks to help you get the most from your device. All in all, there's lots to learn – so let's dive in.

Welcome to **Productivity Hacks for iPhone**. I hope you find it useful!

All the best,

**Tom Rolfe**

Editor, [Tips & Tricks for iPhone](#)



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# Organize Your Life

## How apps can save time, not waste it

It's become a cliché to suggest smartphones sap all our time and energy. But there's some truth in that – after all, you can sit there, thumbing through a social network, before realizing with a start that it's gone midnight.

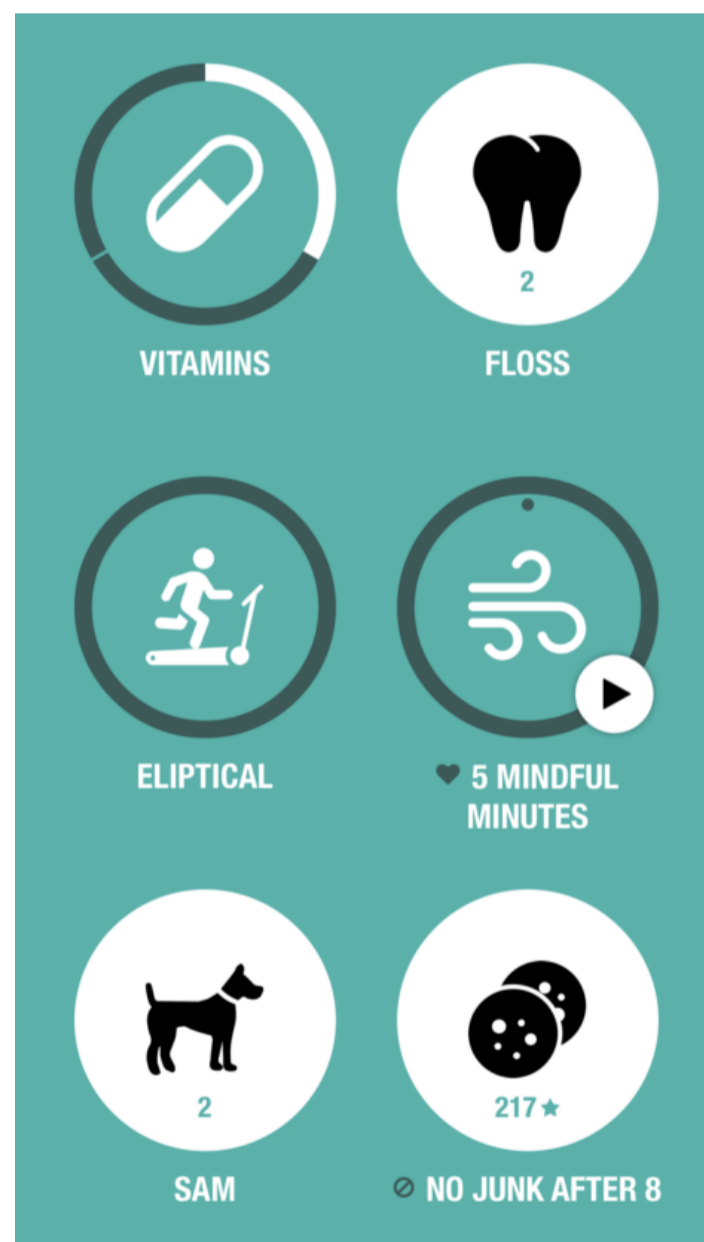
This feature wants to flip things around. We'll look at how your iPhone can save you time rather than fritter it away, by helping you organize your life.

### Use appropriate tools.

You might be stuck in old habits or be tempted by an all-in-one organizational solution. It's more effective to figure out a task you want to perform and employ the most suitable app for it. For example, the built-in Reminders app is good for basic checklists. Rolling, ongoing tasks you want to track on a daily basis, like exercise or walking the dog? Try Streaks. Pocket-based project management? Check out Things 3.

### Share the load.

We live in an age of collaborative tools. Take advantage of them. If you and an associate both run Apple kit, Notes is a smart way to work together on freeform text-based organization. Reminders is excellent for shared shopping lists and packing lists for travel. Remember to share calendar events with others, even if they're not attending but need to be aware of your presence (or absence).



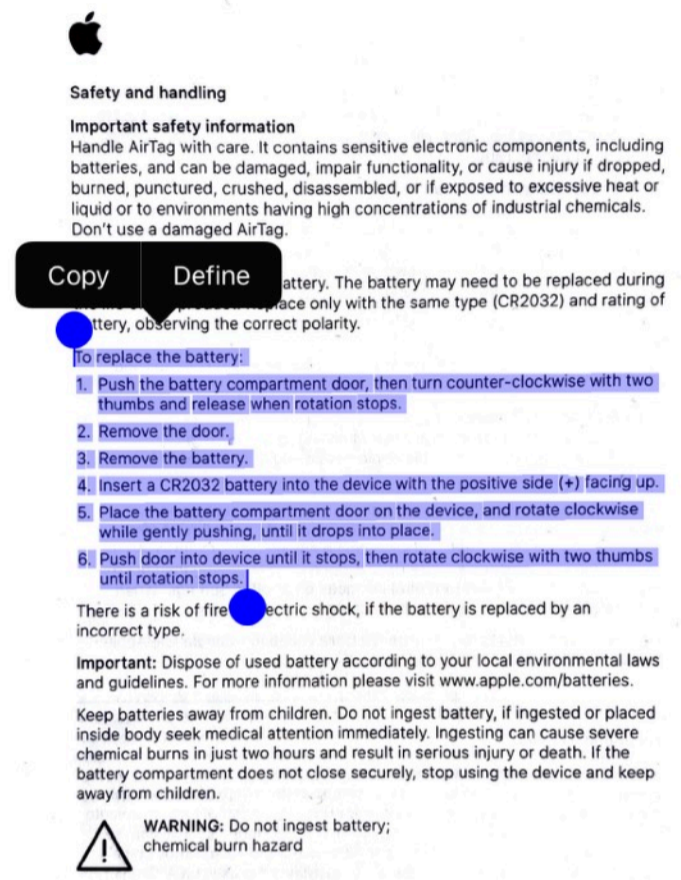
Streaks

## Keep vital information visible.

Whichever methods you use to keep organized, it's all too easy to put in the graft, hide schedules, lists and plans away, and then forget about them all. With iOS 14, it's easier to keep things visible by using widgets. Don't go overboard, but do consider placing calendar, to-do and streaks app widgets on your Home screen – or at least in Today view.

## Digitize everything.

The paperless office remains a dream – we still deal with paper documents and jot down notes on scraps of paper that are easily lost. Get into the habit of scanning everything. Notes has a built-in scanner. Adobe Scan goes one better, capturing typed text that you can copy/paste. Handwriting To Text Recognizer and Pen to Print – Handwriting OCR ambitiously – and often successfully – do the same for handwritten notes.



Adobe Scan

## Prioritize what (and who) is most important.

Being organized in part depends on prioritizing the right things – and the right people. If you use a to-do manager, learn how to pin vital items to keep them in plain view, and to flip the order of tasks between when they're due and how important they are, so you've a better global view of your schedule. With Mail, define VIP contacts to immediately get to the most important messages and ignore cruft.

## File your documents.

This is going to sound like a weary parent, but tidy your room. And by your room, we mean your documents folders. Sure, search can do heavy lifting when it

comes to finding things you've saved. But we are visual beings. Sensibly name things and file documents carefully within a simple folder structure within the Files app (or your cloud storage provider) and you'll (repeatedly) thank yourself later.

## **Effectively manage your time.**

It's easy to get sucked into things you shouldn't be doing. You can avoid this by using calendar blocks and timers. With your calendar, don't just block out meeting and events – add blocks for projects and dedicated time for email and even social media. When getting down to work, use a focus timer app to split your day into focused work sprints separated by short breaks.

## **Utilize photos.**

Most organization is based around text, lists and checkboxes – but sometimes you need to organize something visually. When rearranging an office, a room or cupboard space, you must work with what you see. If you're finding this tricky, take photos, leave the scene, and mull things over elsewhere. That bit of distance can give your mind the space it needs to solve such organizational problems.



**Bear Focus Timer**

## **Create a system that works for you.**

The most important tip is to use apps and methods that work for you. There's no sense in trying to organize your life with your iPhone if you end up being more stressed than you were beforehand. So go easy on yourself. If drowning in apps, streamline what you use. If goals in Streaks are a deterrent rather than an incentive, reduce their number. Do what's best for you.



# Peace and Quiet

## Avoid distractions with targeted alerts

Apple doesn't ship the iPhone with a manual, which means millions of users end up missing out on essential features. My job is to make sure you don't skip over these simple but incredibly useful tricks! Don't worry, there's no existing technical knowledge required – these tips are so easy, anyone could do them!

This week, we'll kick things off with a look at three essential productivity tips for your iPhone. Let's get started.

### Utilize Do Not Disturb mode to kill distractions.

It's hard to overstate the usefulness of Do Not Disturb mode, though many users don't use it to its full potential. Activating this setting will stop distracting alerts appearing on the lock screen. You'll still receive notifications, but they won't make a sound and will be hidden from view until you unlock your device. Basically, peace and quiet.

To quickly enable it, open Control Center by swiping up from the bottom of the screen (or swiping down from the top-right on iPhone X) and tap the Crescent Moon icon. While Do Not Disturb mode is active, a crescent moon is shown in the status bar next to the time.

It's also possible to schedule Do Not Disturb so it turns on and off automatically at certain times of day. I like to configure it to nix alerts during work hours, so I can focus on more important things.

To set this up, open Settings, select Do Not Disturb, and turn on Scheduled. Choose the times you would like Do Not Disturb to be enabled, and voilà! No more unnecessary disturbances.



Unhabit

If you're worried that blocking all incoming alerts might result in missing an important call, I've got one final piece of advice for you. From the Do Not Disturb Menu in Settings, switch on Repeated Calls and set Allow Calls From to Favorites. This way, anyone who really needs to contact you in an emergency will get through on the second try, while phone calls from anyone marked as a favorite in the Contacts app will break through immediately.

## **Configure a VIP inbox for important emails.**

You can make some of your contacts VIPs in the Mail app to help differentiate them from the rest of your contacts. This makes scanning through your inbox to find important messages much easier, and there's a sneaky side benefit, too, that we'll get to in just a moment.

To add some VIP contacts, open the Mail app and tap the *i* button on the right of the VIP mailbox heading. Tap Add VIP and choose a contact from the list to select them. To add more contacts, tap Add VIP again. You can add as many contacts as you want, but don't add too many people or it sort of defeats the point!

Once your VIPs have been chosen, head back to the Mailboxes view and tap VIP. This view filters your emails to see only messages from your favored contacts, and is a really quick way to ensure you're not missing anything important when you don't have time to check every single email in your inbox.

Now for the sneaky side benefit: you can set a custom tone for when emails are received from these people so you can easily tell them apart from lesser emails. Tap VIP Alerts from the *i* section, which takes you straight to the Notifications settings for Mail. In the VIP section, change the designated Sound so it's clear who it's from when a VIP email arrives.

Personally, I leave the VIP alert sound as it is, but set my regular Mail notification sound to None. (You can do this quite easily from Settings > Notifications > Mail.) That way, only VIPs make any noise at all, while all my other emails arrive in dignified silence so they don't bother me.



## Content Blocking

### Boost your web browsing with these apps

The internet is simultaneously one of humankind's greatest inventions and a source of great irritation. It provides limitless potential for education and entertainment. Yet it's peppered with content you don't want to see – or that you do want to see, but should arguably see less of.

This round-up digs into apps that can make browsing better by blocking certain types of content. They help you disable advertising, nuke annoyances, and remove temptation if you intend to visit certain websites for a few minutes – only to accidentally waste hours on them.

### How to use content blockers

Most apps in this round-up exist primarily as Safari extensions, although some provide additional functionality in their standalone apps. They are activated in Settings > Safari > Extensions, or directly in Safari from the AA button in the address bar.

On activating an extension, you'll need to give it permission to access the current website you're using (Always Allow) and, if relevant, all websites (Always Allow on Every Website in the second alert that appears). Do also be wary of simultaneously running too many blockers and extensions designed to do broadly similar things, in case they clash. Run one for while, see how it works, and only then add another.

## Unhabit

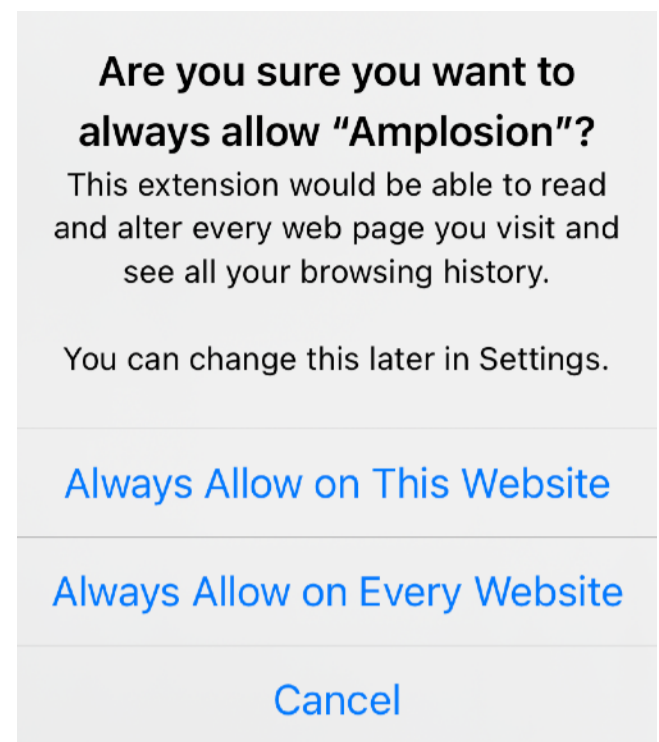
### Best for cutting down on website visits

You're probably familiar with Screen Time, which – counter-intuitively – lets you define daily time limits for websites. Unhabit works in a similar fashion, only it's much better and far more user-friendly than Apple's solution.

Once the extension is activated, you can trigger it when visiting any website you'd like to waste less time on. Confirm you want to block the site. When you next visit, you'll get a 15-second cooldown before an unblock option becomes available.

Head to the app itself and your blocked sites will be listed, with color-coding helpfully noting those you've visited the most often. In each case, you can dig into settings, to disable blocking on specific days, adjust the cooldown time, and peruse your visit stats from the previous week.

Unlike many competing apps, Unhabit doesn't track your browsing and doesn't even have a price tag. For a few bucks, we'd recommend it. For free, it's a steal.



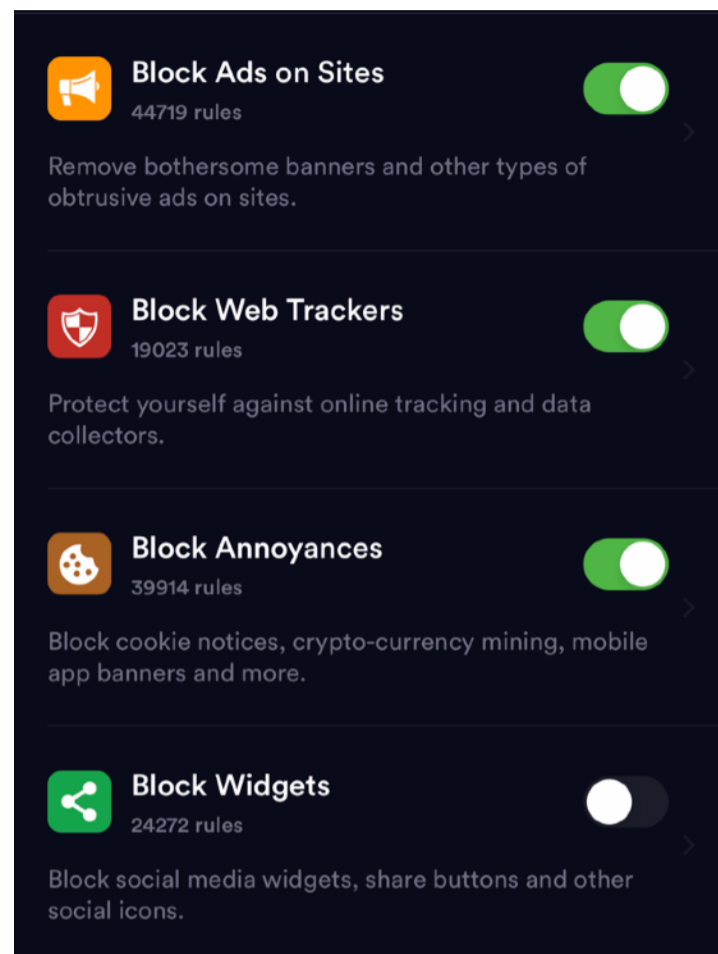
# 1Blocker

## Best for blocking advertising

The idea behind 1Blocker is to let you eradicate anything online that will stop you from enjoying browsing, while giving you as much control as you need. At its most basic, it's a set of switches in Settings. Tap them and you can instantly block ads, annoyances, trackers and more.

In this form, the app proves effective. It removes the vast majority of adverts, including videos, often vastly speeding up websites. But this isn't a brute-force blocker: you can dig into a wealth of customization options, including whitelisting sites you want to support or blocking JavaScript and specific page elements from user-defined sites.

All this comes at a price, since the app has a subscription (\$14.99/£14.99 annually) – or a hefty lifetime purchase option (\$38.99/£33.99). We'd argue although 1Blocker isn't cheap, it does represent great value because of how it improves your browsing experience. We wouldn't be without it on our devices.



1Blocker

## Stop the Madness Mobile

### Best for eradicating minor niggles

This entry is, from a visual standpoint, best described as workmanlike. Regarding features, it offers nothing splashy or grand either – it won't block all ads, nor specific sites. What it will do is deal with everything else – little niggles that are the website equivalent of paper cuts.

If you're irked by Google AMP, this extension will send you to the original web pages. It stops clickjacking in search engines and blocks trackers. URL shorteners? Tamed. Sites that block drag and drop, contextual menus or copy and paste? Circumvented.

The extension also has 'use with caution' settings that are worth exploring. Turn on 'show native video controls' and 'stop video autoplay' and YouTube in Safari suddenly becomes a joy to use – and compatible with iOS picture-in-picture. In all, StopTheMadness Mobile is perhaps less essential than 1Blocker, but all those little things it can do ensure you get value for money.

## Also consider...

### Amplosion

Effectively redirects AMP pages to their original counterparts. AMP's decline makes this extension less useful than it once was, and it's redundant if you have Stop the Madness Mobile. But as a standalone AMP squasher, it's the best.

### Ka-Block

This open-source ad-blocker works well, removing most ads from web pages – although some video ones squeeze through. For free, it can't be beaten, but the lack of nuance means you cannot whitelist sites you'd like to support. 1Blocker still reigns supreme there.

### Super Agent

Plenty of apps are designed to bulldoze their way through cookie consent forms. Super Agent performs this function well, working invisibly in the background, and also providing you with a few options, including whitelisting specific sites.

### Vinegar

Like Amplosion, you won't need this app if you own Stop The Madness Mobile and turn on the relevant options. Otherwise, Vinegar is an excellent way to tame YouTube, removing ads and making the service compatible with picture-in-picture.



## Getting Things Done

### The very best task manager apps

Your iPhone tends to be framed as a time-waster – a device you sink hours into, frittering your life away on the trivialities of social networking, videos and games. But with the right apps, your device can be a productivity powerhouse, helping you to manage tasks and get things done.

Apple provides basic tools to help you achieve this. Reminders is good for checklists, which can be shared with friends and family; and, as of iOS 15, the app gains smart list functionality. Notes goes beyond words with formatting, tables and basic checklists.

However, neither app is a task manager in a conventional sense, to which you'd trust organizing your life. The four apps in our round-up are, though, and each brings its own individual approach to helping you get things done.





# Things

## Best for elegance, clarity, and focus

Things manages to simultaneously be about small details and the bigger picture. You start by stashing ideas in an inbox, and each can optionally have a hard deadline or a more abstract ‘intention’ regarding completion – be that today, tomorrow, or ‘someday’. Further organization comes from tags that link arbitrary tasks, projects that collate and structure larger goals, and ‘areas’ to separate different elements of your life.

From a visual and usability standpoint, Things is superb, with a friendly, almost playful interface. You’ll revel in the tiny pie charts in the main screen that denote how complete each project is, the integrated Quick Find feature that helps you rapidly access tasks, and how intention-based tasks roll over when incomplete – rather than the app stressing you out by adding them to an overdue list. There’s also great clarity in the app’s design, not least in the excellent Upcoming view.

There are drawbacks. This is solo fare – there are no collaboration features – and you cannot attach files nor location data to tasks. Custom views are limited to filter-based searches. The app isn’t cheap either: beyond the iPhone version, it costs \$20/£20 on iPad and \$50/£45 on Mac. That said, this is a one-time purchase, not a subscription, and the creators have to date provided four years of regular updates; beyond that, the app’s elegance and efficient nature set it apart from its contemporaries.

### Upcoming

#### 9 Tomorrow

10:00 AM Interview with Lydia  
1:00 PM Benefits presentation

Prepare interview questions  
Work

Make reservation for dinner  
Throw Party for Eve

#### 10 Wednesday

Work from home  
1:00 PM Monthly conference call

Buy movie tickets for Friday 📌

Get copy of signed contract  
Onboard James

Order a cake  
Throw Party for Eve

Call Mom and Dad  
Family

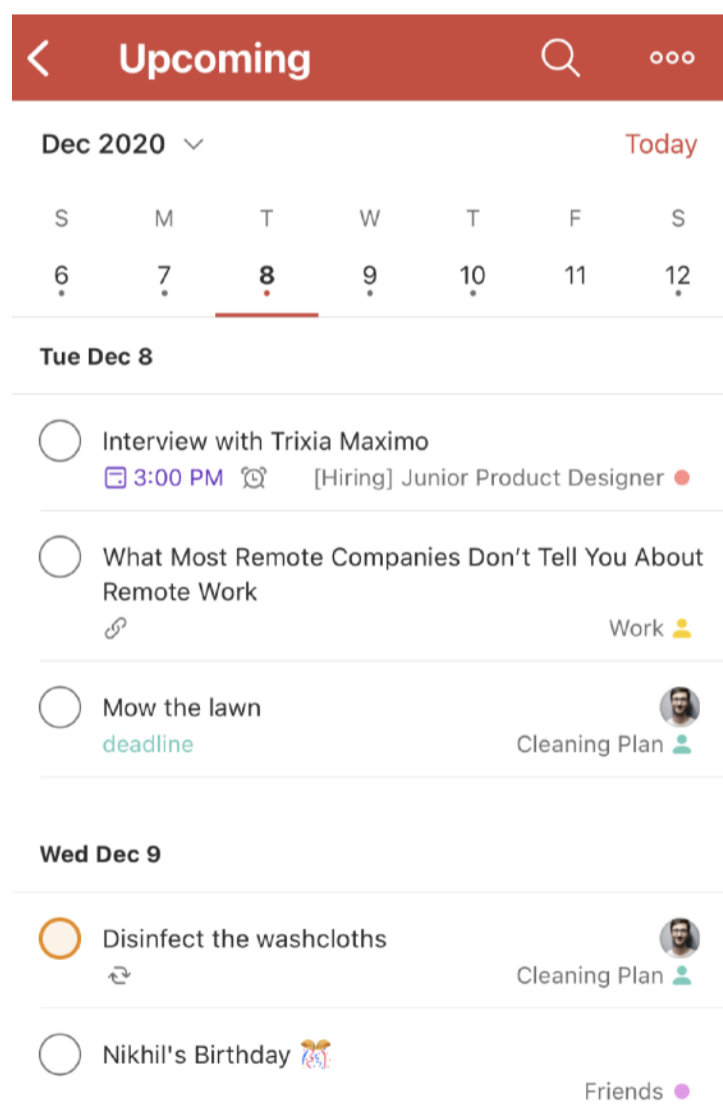
Things

# Todoist

## Best for speed, efficiency, and working with others

Todoist doesn't muck about. Adding new tasks is swift, due to a responsive interface that enables you to quickly assign tags, priorities and deadlines, and file tasks accordingly. There's natural language input, so you can type in the likes of "Lunch with John on Friday" or "Update weekly schedule every Monday at 10am #team" and let Todoist deal with the drudge work.

For the solo user, there are additional notable features: filters you save to the main screen that adjust your view based on user-defined criteria, and a 'karma' system for working up a streak of getting things done. But the app really excels when you collaborate with others, adding links and attachments, making comments, and digging into a task's history.



What you don't get is much 'Appleness.' The app feels comparatively basic and doesn't pull in Calendar data. However, it is available across a range of platforms – including the web – which is ideal for collaboration. The free tier is generous too, and may be enough for a solo user. But if you feel restricted, you can opt to pay \$36/£36 per year to up active projects from five to 30, increase collaborators from five to 25, attach larger files, use more filters (150 rather than just three), and set reminders for tasks.

Todoist

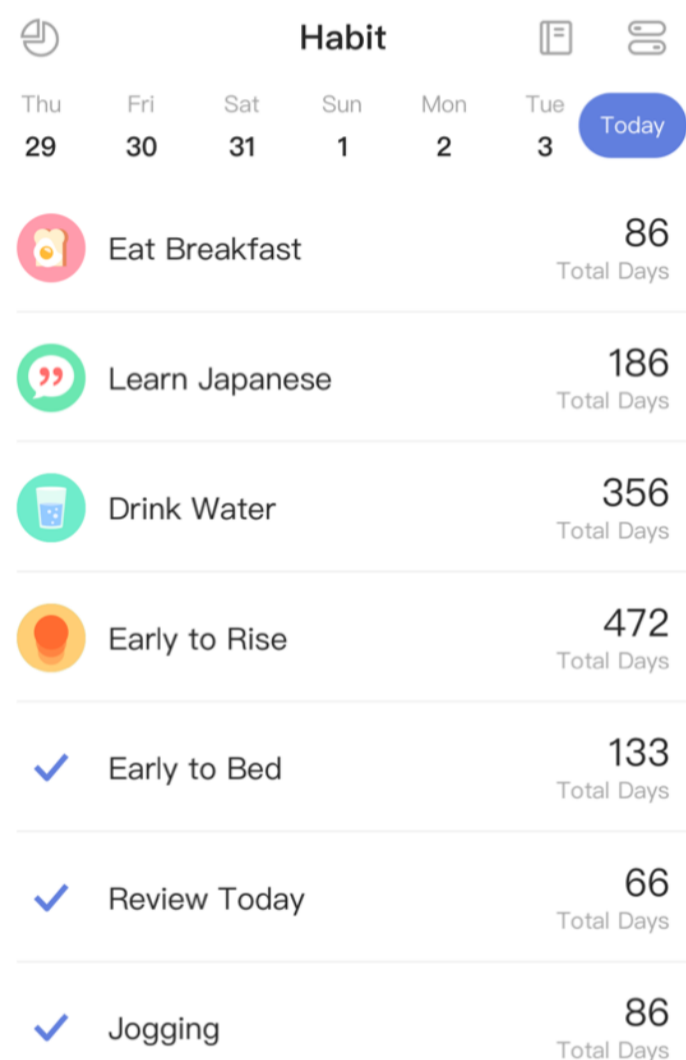
# TickTick

## Best for combining tasks and wellbeing

Despite sporting a moniker that suggests a bomb's about to go off, TickTick has a lot going for it. The main view resembles a basic task manager, where you add items with due dates, tags, and priority flags, and then dump them in the inbox (to later sort) or a list. What makes TickTick interesting is its range of built-in features designed to help you focus and reduce stress.

The Today view shows what's going on today and has a button to trigger a focus mode that encourages you to deal with urgent tasks one at a time, swiping them away when they're complete. Another tab features a Pomodoro timer, for distraction-free work sprints; you can optionally place your phone face down while the timer runs, like with Bear Focus Timer. TickTick also has a tab where you create and track habits, the app's creator reasoning that they can often be more beneficial to you than dealing with timed goals and defined projects.

Generously, much of this functionality is free. However, there is a paid tier – \$28/£26 per year – that unlocks alternate calendar views, filters, checkbox item reminders, themes, and white noise, along with the means to set task durations so tasks don't clash. Either way, TickTick is a novel take on a task manager that successfully does something a bit different.



TickTick

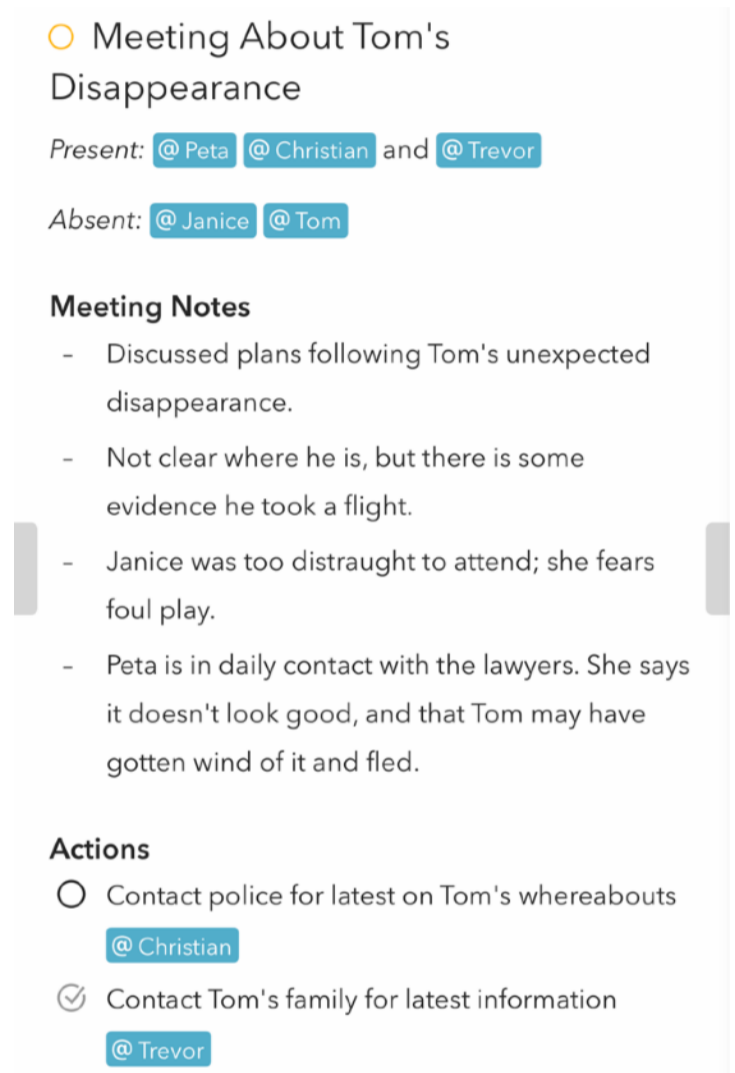
# Agenda

## Best for freeform tasks with context and history

All task managers afford you some flexibility, but Agenda is the most freeform around. It's like someone greatly expanded on the basic organization elements in Apple's Notes. So within Agenda, tasks can have any combination of text, headings, lists, tables, photos/scans, dividers, tags, and even freeform sketches.

Two sidebars can be pulled in from the screen edges: from the right, you get a calendar and links to recently edited and related notes; from the left, you can access notes you've placed in the 'On the Agenda' overview, today's tasks, search, and projects.

Smartly, Agenda includes several sample projects, which show off how the app can be used for everything from planning to journals. Dig into them and you'll grasp how useful context and the ability to scroll back through lists and text can be to task management. They also instantly show how Agenda is far more than a mere checklist – albeit overkill and overly complicated if your task needs are basic.



The app's free to try, gating premium features – templates; subcategories; pinned notes and footnotes; annotations – behind a paywall. A one-off charge – \$15/£13 for iPhone/iPad or \$35/£30 for iPhone/iPad/Mac – permanently unlocks those premium features that were available when you paid and any that arrive over the following year. But whether you pay or not, Agenda's worth a look for a unique, genuinely useful approach to task management.

# Time-Saving Tricks

## Lesser-known iOS shortcuts that save time

There are so many shortcuts on the iPhone, and so few of them are obvious to the average user. Apple has done a good job of making iOS intuitive to use, but it's also guilty of hiding some great features away. Luckily, I'm here to bust this joint wide open and reveal some of the lesser-known features I wish somebody had told me when I first got an iPhone. Let's dive in!

### Use Quick Actions.

If you have an iPhone with 3D Touch capabilities (that's everything from the iPhone 6s and up, minus the iPhone SE) you can take advantage of the pressure-sensing display to get quick shortcuts to popular actions, right from the Home screen. Quick Actions – and 3D Touch in general – are cool features, but they're criminally underused and many people aren't even aware they exist.

Quick Actions allow you to launch an app straight to a particular stage to save extra navigation and load times. Simply deep press an app icon – that is, press down harder than you normally would – from the Home screen and the screen will blur, unveiling a menu of shortcuts. Tap any one of the options to launch the app straight into the chosen function.

These include quick access to popular actions like Take Selfie from the Camera app icon, Play Beats 1 from Music or Directions Home from Maps. You can slide your finger to any of these options or just tap it to launch the action.

In addition to the quick shortcuts, many apps will also show a widget previewing important information straight from the app. Some of my favorites include checking my next planned event in Calendar, the current weather in Weather, or the time it would take to get home in Maps.

Quick Actions work with all the default iOS apps, and many others too. Experiment with your favorite apps to find the shortcuts that will work best for you.

## **Customize Control Center.**

Control Center is a really handy bank of quickfire shortcuts. You can control media playback, brightness, and volume here as well as quickly toggling settings like Do Not Disturb, Portrait Lock, and much more besides. It's one of my favorite things about iOS, and it's so useful it should be second nature to all iPhone users. If you're not yet familiar with Control Center, though, it's accessed by swiping up from the bottom of the screen (or down from the top right if you have an iPhone X or above).

As good as Control Center is, the default layout isn't ideal for most users. Luckily, since iOS 11 was released last year it's been possible to customize the menu to your liking. I'd recommend you remove the buttons you never press and add extra shortcuts you might actually find helpful. Here's how.

First, launch the Settings app, then tap Control Center. On the next menu, tap Customize Controls. Here, you'll see options with either a red – symbol or a green + symbol. Tap the former to remove from the Control Center, and the latter to add. If you want to, you can rearrange their order by dragging the items up and down from the bars on the right side of each entry.

Most default icons can't be removed, but some less essential options like Torch, Timer, and Camera can be ditched. Meanwhile, items like Apple TV Remote and Low Power Mode can be added. If you have visual or aural impairments, you can add quick access to all kinds of helpful accessibility shortcuts here like Magnifier and Guided Access

Personally, I get the most use from the Calculator button – it's the quickest way to figure out quick sums, and I don't have to keep the app on my Home screen!

## **Make your own app icons for the Home Screen.**

Did you know an app icon can be created for any website and added to the Home Screen? It's a great way to quickly access your most visited websites as if they were standalone apps, without typing in the Safari search bar every time.

To make a custom app icon, open Safari and navigate to the website you want the icon to link to. Tap near the bottom in Safari to reveal the toolbar. Tap the share button (a square with an upward arrow) followed by the Add to Home Screen option.

Some websites supply an icon; for others, a shot of the current view is used as the graphic on the Home screen. Tapping the icon on your Home Screen launches Safari and takes you to the website directly. It's by far the quickest way I've found to access a particular website, and it's great for linking to "web apps" such as Dark Sky and Wordle.

## **Quickly annotate images and documents.**

This trick is a quick and easy way to annotate more or less anything and then share it. It's useful for all kinds of things: marking up maps, annotating text, "signing" forms, doodling over photos, you name it. And it all starts by taking a screenshot of whatever it is you want to draw over.

Reminder: to take a screenshot, press the Home and Power buttons at the same time and let go. (On iPhone X and above, press Volume Up and Power instead.) The screen flashes and you'll hear a camera shutter sound.

Next, if you have iOS 11 or higher, you'll notice a small preview of the screenshot will appear in the bottom left corner of your screen. Tap this thumbnail to enter Markup mode. (If you don't tap the thumbnail within a few seconds, it will disappear, so watch out!)

Here, you can use your finger to draw over the screenshot. At the bottom, you can choose between several tools: pen, highlighter, pencil, and eraser. Once

you've drawn something, you can circle it with the lasso tool to adjust its position, or tap the color icon to change the color of your tools. Annotating by hand like this is crude but effective!

Tap the + button for access to more advanced tools, including shapes, text boxes and handwritten signatures. There's even a magnifier tool that allows you to zoom in on important points of the image. These are really helpful for quickly filling out forms or creating visual instructions. I like using it to highlight screenshots from Google Maps when planning a meetup with my friends in an obscure location.

When you're done, tap the share icon in the bottom left to send the annotated image via Messages, Mail, or any other sharing method. Finally, hit Done and choose whether or not you want to save the image to Photos for future use.



# Home Screen Habits

## How to stop wasting time on your iPhone

The iOS Home Screen lets you keep all of your favorite apps front and center in a visually pleasing format. But it can also be an unnecessary distraction if you allow it to clog up with non-essential apps.

If you're the sort of person who spends a lot of time procrastinating on your iPhone, making a few easy changes to your Home Screen could help you quit those bad habits. Say goodbye to pointless newsfeed scrolling and "one last turn" casual gaming.

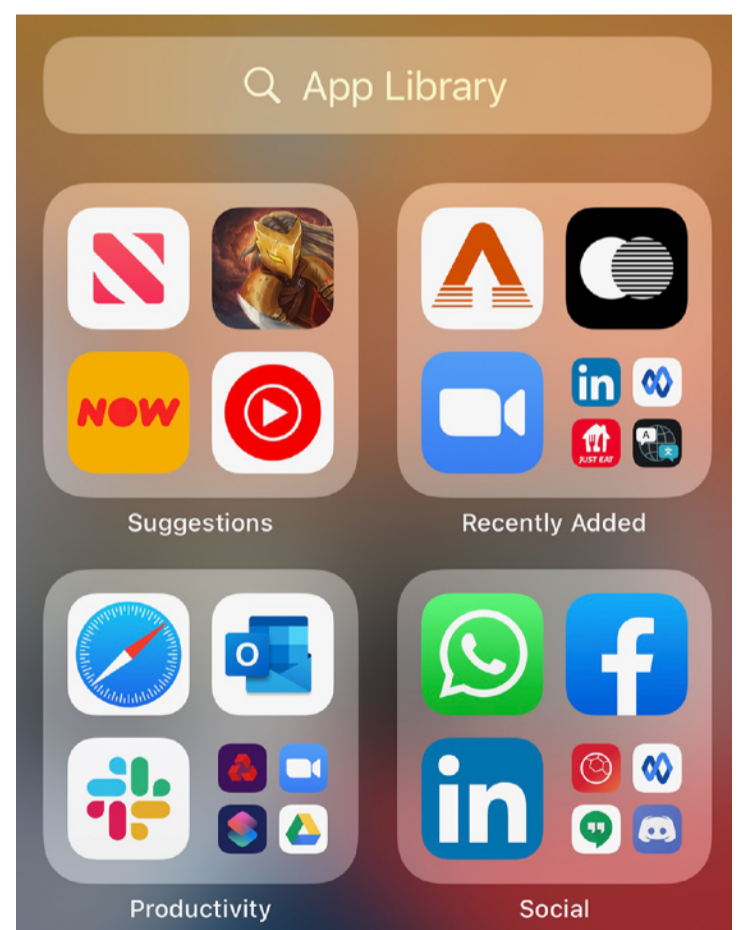
Our proposal is that you hone your main Home Screen right down to the core essentials. It's amazing what a focused app layout can do for your productivity.

### Goodbye, social media.

A little distance from non-essential apps can be healthy, and curb the temptation to tap into them every time you unlock your iPhone. We'd suggest purging any "bad habit" apps from your Home Screen – though you don't have to fully delete them.

This might be a social network like *Facebook*, or a time-sapping game like *Candy Crush*. Whatever it is, long-press its icon and tap Remove App from the menu. Then choose Remove from Home Screen from the next prompt to store it safely in the App Library.

Out of sight, out of mind, as they say.



## Hello, new skills.

Okay, so you've removed all those pesky time drains from your initial Home screen. But now things are looking a bit sparse. Surely we can find some apps more worthy of this prime real estate?

It all starts by filling your Home screen with the right apps that will help you redirect your wasted time in a more positive way. The key here is to identify apps that can help you build new, worthwhile habits to replace your old, bad habits. Thankfully the App Store is fit to bursting with worthy apps screaming out for your attention.

Try to find apps that you'd like to incorporate into your daily or weekly routine. Something that you'd consider a good use of your time. Really the apps you add here will vary wildly based on your own preferences, but in case you're short of inspiration we've got you covered.

Or, stick with us and keep reading for some quickfire suggestions that cover a range of genres.

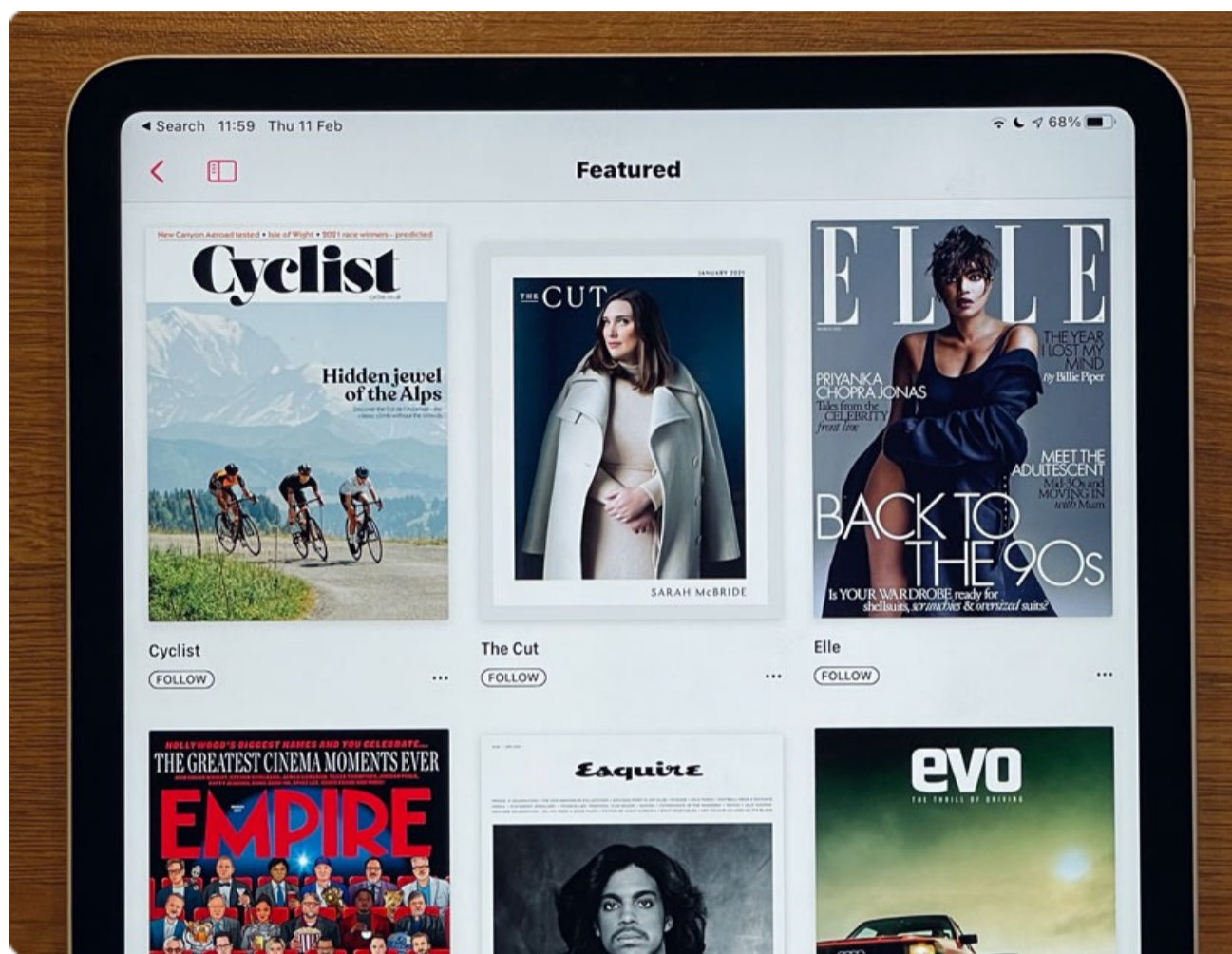
Note that making too many changes at once is a recipe for disaster, so try to pick two or three apps from these suggestions for your Home screen to avoid being overwhelmed by new routines. Once your habits start to change, you can come back and add more over time.

## Our app suggestions...

If you want to read more often, get Apple's Books or Amazon's Kindle, depending on where you prefer to buy your eBooks. And if you're worried you won't have time for full books, Blinkist can summarize popular non-fiction into 15-minute chunks.

Short-form content makes good reading, too; it's easier to digest, and you can put the muscle memory you picked up scrolling through Facebook's news feed to good use. Try adding Apple's own News app to stay abreast of current affairs, or

get into the habit of saving website articles to Instapaper so you've always got a well-stocked source of interesting stuff to read.



### News+

If you long for a break from the real world, try a meditation app like Calm or Headspace – both free for beginners, with subscription plans for aficionados. If you don't want to dive fully into the world of mindfulness, try listening to Brain.fm to help you focus on work or study.

Finally, consider dipping into one of the App Store's many "gamified" education apps that breaks down lessons into bite-sized chunks, perfect to dip into throughout the day. Try Duolingo to pick up a new language, or Codecademy Go to try your hand at coding.

Before you know it, the charts in Screen Time will be tip further toward categories like Reading & Reference, while Social Networking and Games drop away. Now that's progress!

# Focus Home Screens

## Custom layouts for different tasks

One of the big additions to iOS 15 is Focus mode, which enables you to set a number of custom Do Not Disturb profiles depending on where you are, what you're doing, and at what time.

It's also possible to set up custom home screen layouts to activate when you enter those specific Focus states, to ensure easy access to the things you need for a specific task – and no unwanted distractions.

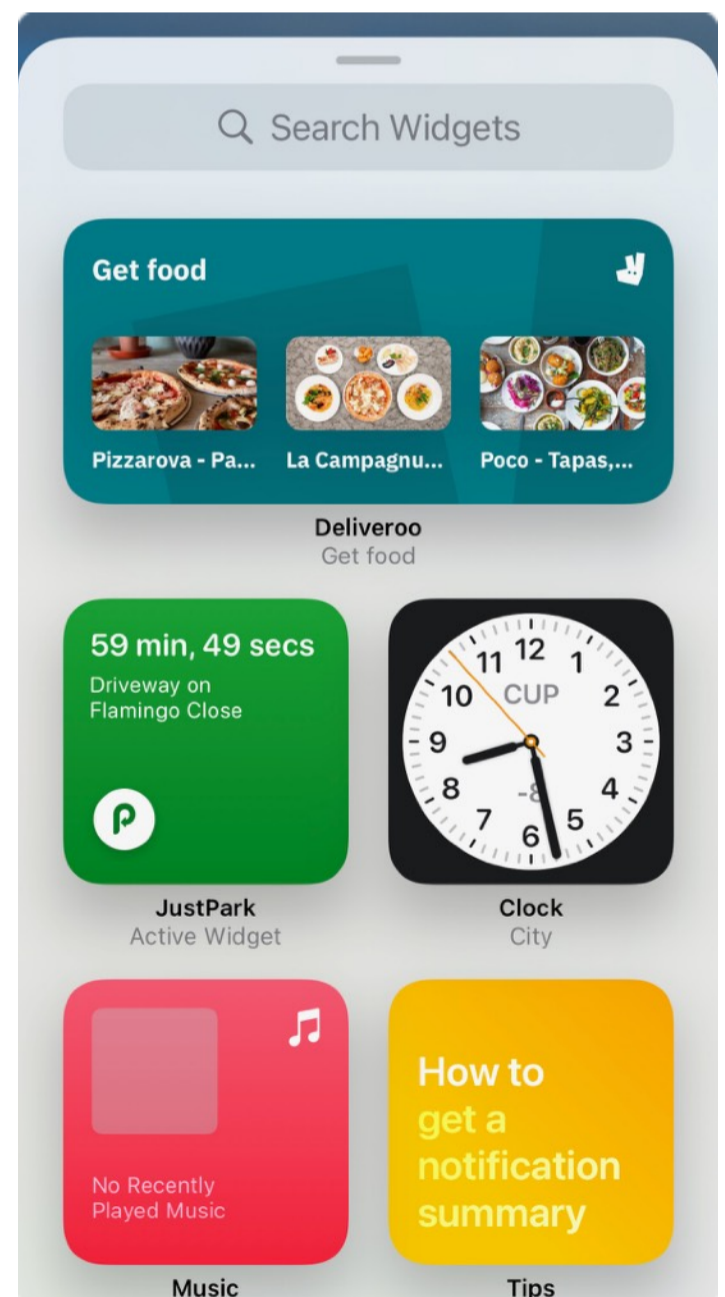
Here's how to make the most of Focus mode and its Custom Pages option.

### Set up your home screens.

It makes sense to work backwards when setting up your custom pages. First things first, create some bespoke home screens the traditional way.

Tap and hold a blank section of the home screen to bring up the home screen edit controls, then scroll right until you get to new blank home screen. Hit + to add the widgets of your choice, thinking specifically about what you'd want to access in any given Focus scenario. Also drag any app icons you'd like to include directly onto this home screen.

Repeat to add as many custom home screens as you think you'll need for your profiles. It's worth mentioning that the same app/widget can appear in multiple home screens.

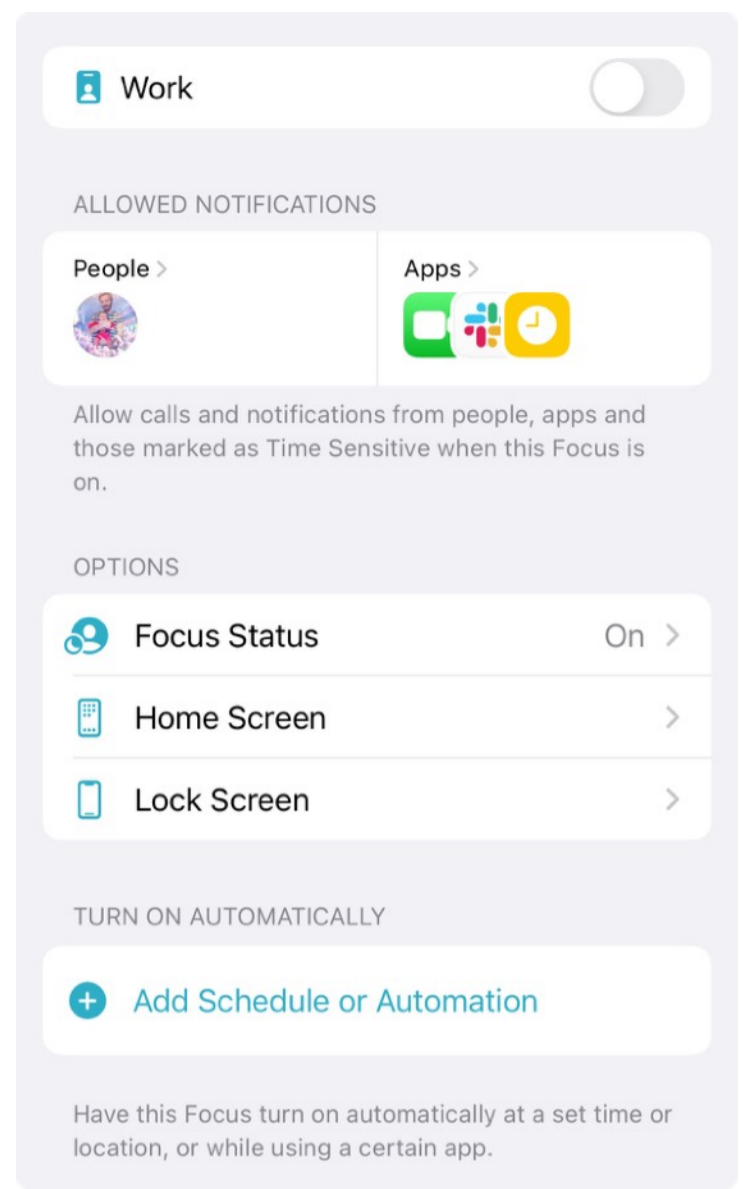


## How to set up custom pages

To attribute specific home pages depending on your current Focus mode, go to Settings > Focus > Do Not Disturb (or another Focus profile, like Work). Now hit Home Screen and flick the Custom Pages toggle to the on position.

You'll be presented with a list of your home screens (hence why it's good to set them up beforehand). Select any you'd like to include when you enter that Focus mode.

Now whenever your phone is in a particular Focus mode, it will only show the specific home screen you just attributed to it. The rest will be hidden from view.



## Custom home page examples

When you really start to think about it, this provision starts to make an awful lot of sense. For your Work focus, for example, you might want to get rid of distracting social media apps and news widgets, and have only a VIP email widget, a clock widget, and the *Slack* app icons at your fingertips.

If you've set up an At Home focus, meanwhile, you might want to stack all your streaming, messaging, and food delivery apps onto one page for ready access.

Or maybe you're a student, and you've set up a School focus. For this you might want to include a home screen or two that contains a *Calendar* widget, your chosen to-do app, a calculator app, and anything else you use on a daily basis for your lessons. The possibilities are really quite extensive.

# Universal Clipboard

## Copy and paste between devices

When you ‘copy’ a file, where does it go?

There are two ways to answer this question, depending on whether it was meant in a theoretical or purely practical manner. In the former case, what you’re doing when copying a file (or some content within an app, such as text or an image) is sending it to the device’s clipboard. This temporary storage repository keeps hold of only the most recent thing you copied. When pasting the item, a duplicate copy of it is made in a location of your choosing.

### Bizarre fossils reveal Asia’s oldest known fore

Copy

Look Up

Share...

The spindly trees had surprisingly complex roots—setting the stage for the formation of coal seams still mined today.

Traditionally, the clipboard was tied to a single machine, but modern Apple devices have a feature called Universal Clipboard. This enables you to copy and paste between two devices (any combination of iOS/iPadOS/macOS), if they’re both signed into iCloud with the same Apple ID and have Bluetooth and Wi-Fi active. Universal Clipboard is part of the Handoff system, which also allows you to, for example, continue an email on your Mac that you were writing on your iPhone, or send an open web browser tab from iPhone to iPad. Handoff can be turned on or off in Settings — go to General > AirPlay & Handoff.

As to the specifics of where you files go in a strictly practical sense... wherever you send them!












## Best Email Clients

### 5 alternatives to the default Mail app

There's nothing inherently wrong with the Mail app that comes with your iPhone. However, it's an unambitious app that merely gives you the basics. Other apps show you can do much more with email, enabling you to be more efficient and productive when dealing with the messages you receive.

As of iOS 14, you can set an alternate email app as your default. Head into its page in Settings and select it under Default Mail App.

But which alternate email app should you choose, from the many available on the App Store? That depends on what you need, but one of these should do the job...

-  Spark
-  Boomerang
-  Outlook
-  Spike
-  Airmail
-  Email
-  Mail
-  HEY
-  Gmail

# Airmail

## Best for efficiency

This former Apple Design Award winner's been around on iPhone for five years and on Mac since 2013. After a few days, you'll need to start paying, but ten bucks a year seems reasonable, given what's on offer.

Adding accounts is a cinch and the combined mailbox works much like Apple Mail's. However, a raft of productivity features propel it far beyond Apple's email app. The inbox can be rapidly filtered in a number of ways. You can perform a slew of actions on individual emails, such as snoozing them or muting a sender.



When composing email, you can directly scribble a hand-drawn sketch, schedule when to send your message, and set a reminder to follow it up later. Further time-savers include message templates and the sidebar's Attachments category that previews the documents in your inbox.

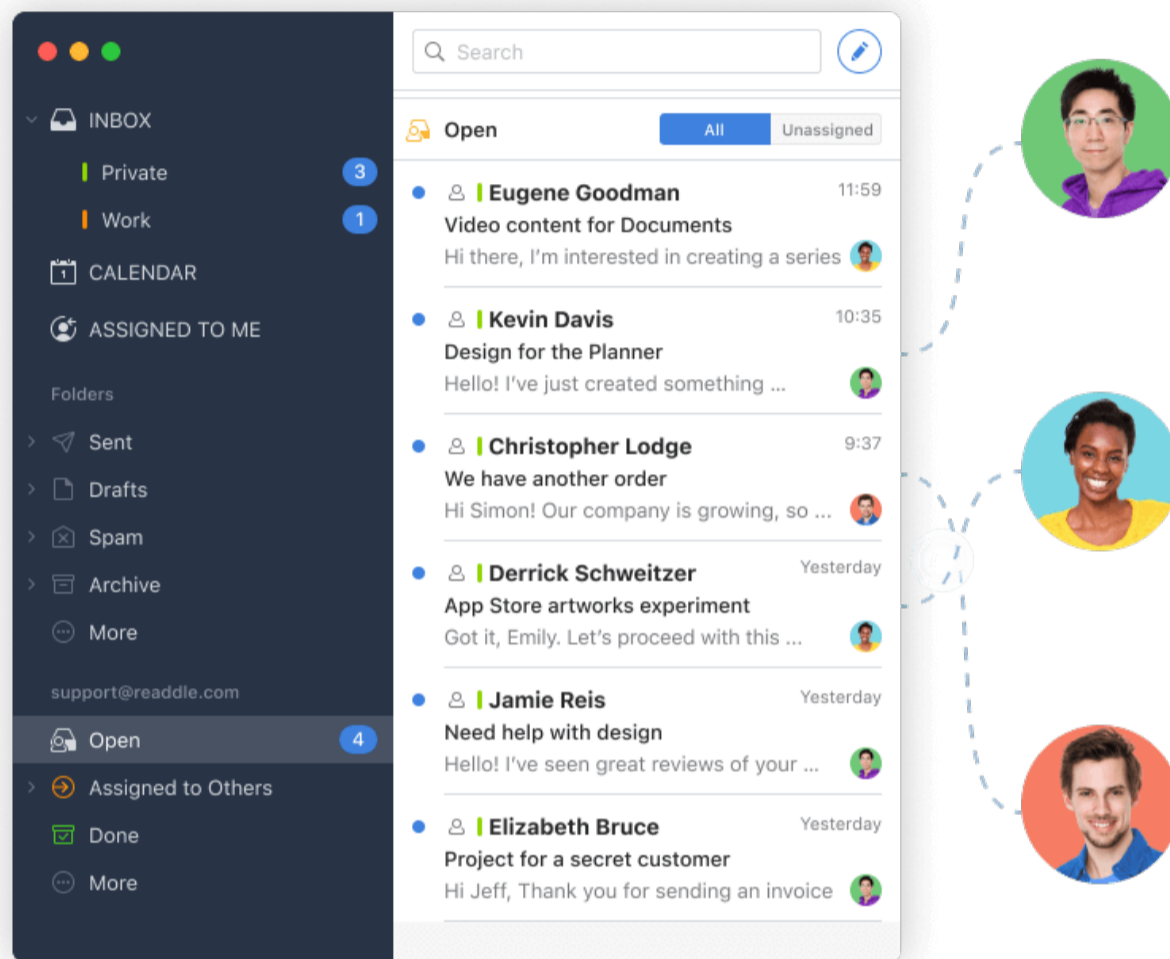
Paying for an email client might seem odd in an era of free, but you get your money's worth here.



# Spark

## Best for free features

This email app from Readdle has also been around for years, and so there's a good chance investment in it won't be wasted. But said investment will only be time-oriented, since Spark is free.



The good bits start in the inbox, which with a switch can be made 'smart.' What this means is your messages are automatically grouped, starting out with unread important messages. Beneath those sit generic notifications, newsletters and read messages.

Important messages can be pinned. Ones you haven't time for can be snoozed. Need to confirm receipt of an email, but don't fancy typing anything? Emoji-based quick replies exist for that. And during composition, you can work with templates and schedule when a missive should be sent.

During testing, the app didn't feel as refined as Airmail, and setting up new accounts was fiddlier. But if you're unwilling to pay, Spark is a solid free alternative to Mail, if you feel held back by Apple's app.

# Spike

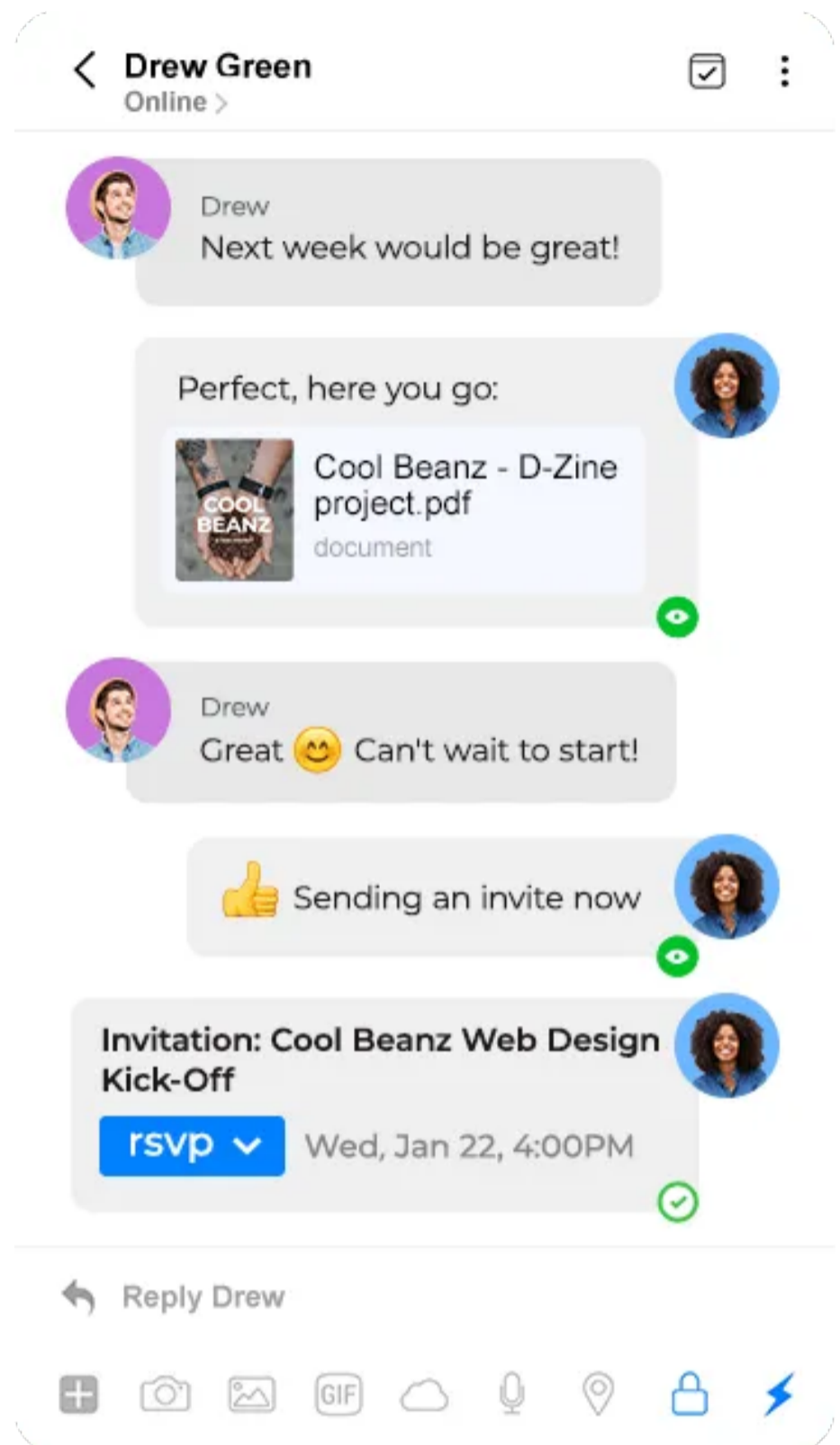
## Best for looking at email in a new way

For some people, email is a relic. They prefer conversing using messaging apps. But the reality is email isn't going anywhere. Spike's cunning plan is to combine the two, transforming email into a people-centric conversational medium.

It's odd, but it works – especially when you've been using the app for a while and resist any long-standing temptation to manage your inbox. You then end up with a bunch of threads that resemble what you'd see in Messages. It all feels very human – very friendly.

But Spike isn't a gimmick bereft of power-user features. It smartly sorts mail to keep low-priority messages from your main inbox. You can snooze and auto-archive messages. And there's a collaborative notes space for working with others.

There are limitations to the free tier – although nothing that would impact on the typical user. It's worth checking out if you'd like email to be more like messaging and less like, well, email.



# Gmail

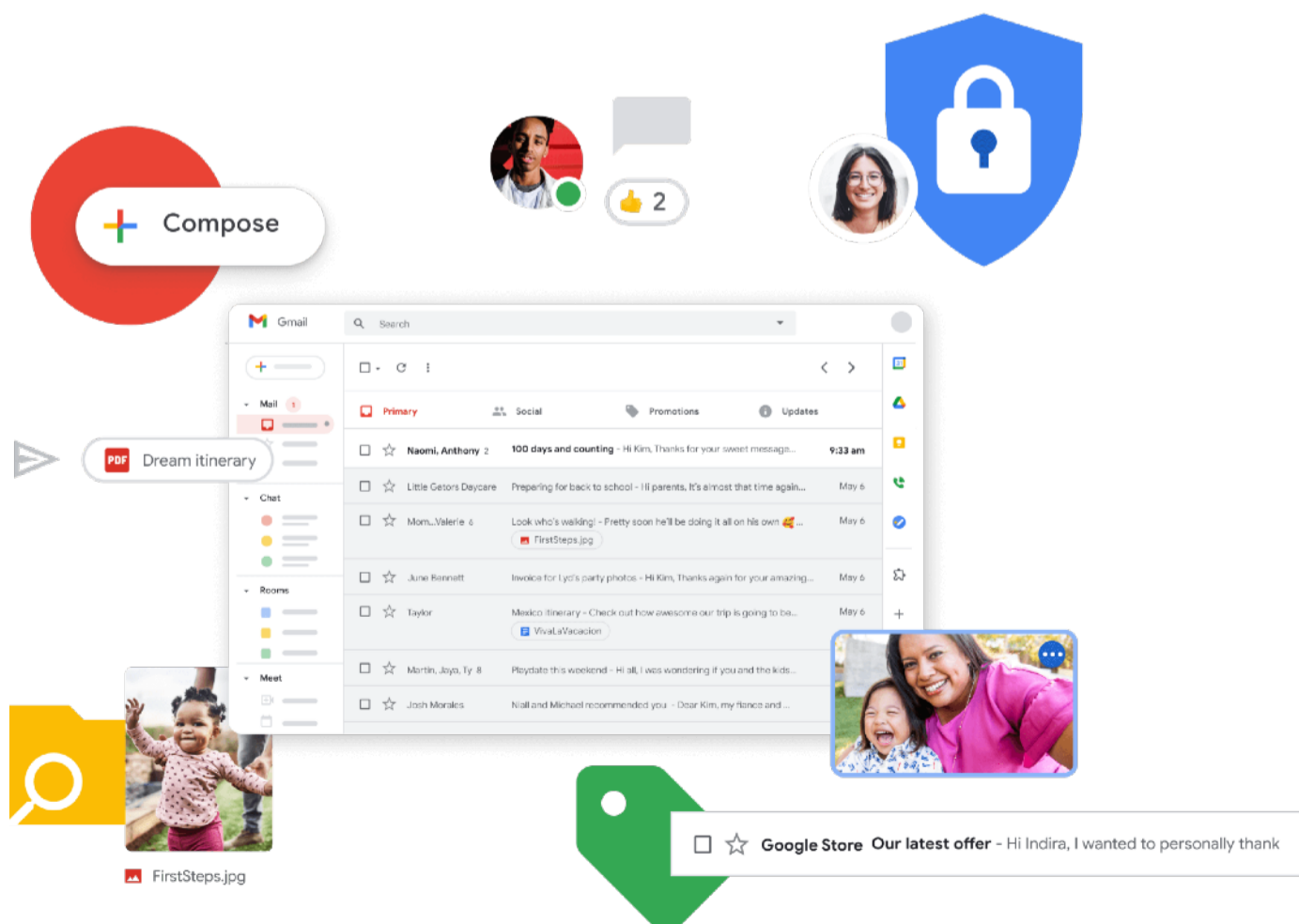
## Best for Gmail users (obviously)

Google's email service is hugely popular, free until you've got 15GB of messages, and packed with useful features. If you've been using Apple Mail for sending and receiving Gmail messages, though, you won't be aware of those features.

The native Gmail experience feels alien on iPhone, but is nonetheless sleek and responsive. The app attempts to separate social and promotional email from your 'primary' inbox. Emails can be snoozed and labelled. There are effective spam and muting tools.

When composing a message, Gmail attempts to speed things along by offering sentence auto-complete – accepted with a rightward swipe. You can schedule messages – and even undo them if you tap the relevant button within a handful of seconds.

Given Google's attitude towards privacy, you might not be keen on going all-in with Gmail if you're not already ensconced in the Google ecosystem. But if you are, taking advantage of the native app's capabilities is a smart decision.



# HEY Email

## Best for rethinking email from scratch

The best email clients try to do new things, but work atop ancient foundations. HEY's thinking is that to revolutionize email, you must start from scratch.

HEY begins with The Screener, where you authorize or mute people sending you email. *Important* messages go to your *Imbox*; non-urgent ones head to The Feed. Receipts are housed in The Paper Trail. Spy pixels (to check an email's been read) are blocked.

### The Screener

The people below are trying to email you for the first time.  
You get to decide if you want to hear from them.

WANT TO GET EMAILS FROM THEM?



**SV** **Sunny Vacations** <sunnyvacations@example.com>  
Timeshare Investment Opportunity – Mrs. Young, Are timeshares a good investment? We think they are! We would love to speak with you ...



**LST** **Luxe Salon Texas** <luxesalontexas@gmail.com>  
Luxe Salon New Update – Hello all, We are reaching out to give you an update! We are offering color kits, shine bombs, an...



**TM** **Todd Markham** <bestinsurancepricingintexas@gmail.com>  
Re: Life Insurance Quote – Hello Mrs. Young, I hope all is well with you. I wanted to touch base with you on our conversatio...

Features help you focus on burning through messages. You can label those that need replies and tackle them all at once. When composing, an extra keyboard row helps you get at formatting options.

There are issues with HEY's approach. It's a closed system that doesn't work with existing archives – or even custom domains if you're on the \$99 per year personal account. Some features are missing from iPhone (such as the excellent Focus & Reply mode) and there's cognitive load in retraining how you use email.

But if you want to go all-in with something new, HEY can be worth the outlay. Even if not, the app's worth grabbing to try with a free 'burner' address and get a glimpse of how much better email could be.

# Monochrome Mode

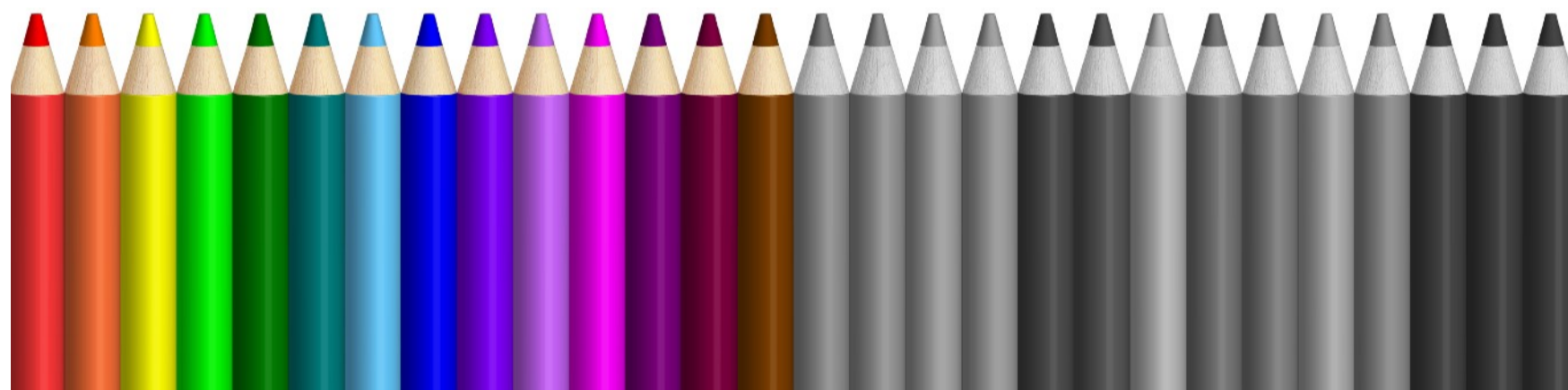
## A psychological trick to make your iPhone less tempting

Your iPhone is an ongoing source of temptation. All those colorful icons just beg to be tapped. During use, your device's gorgeous screen floods your eyes with vibrant imagery.

This is why it can be beneficial to make your screen greyscale instead. It's less appealing, and therefore less likely to distract when you should be doing something else. This tutorial shows how to access the iPhone's greyscale mode – but more importantly also how to trigger it in an instant.

### Turn on greyscale.

Open the Settings app and go to Accessibility > Display & Text Size > Color Filters.



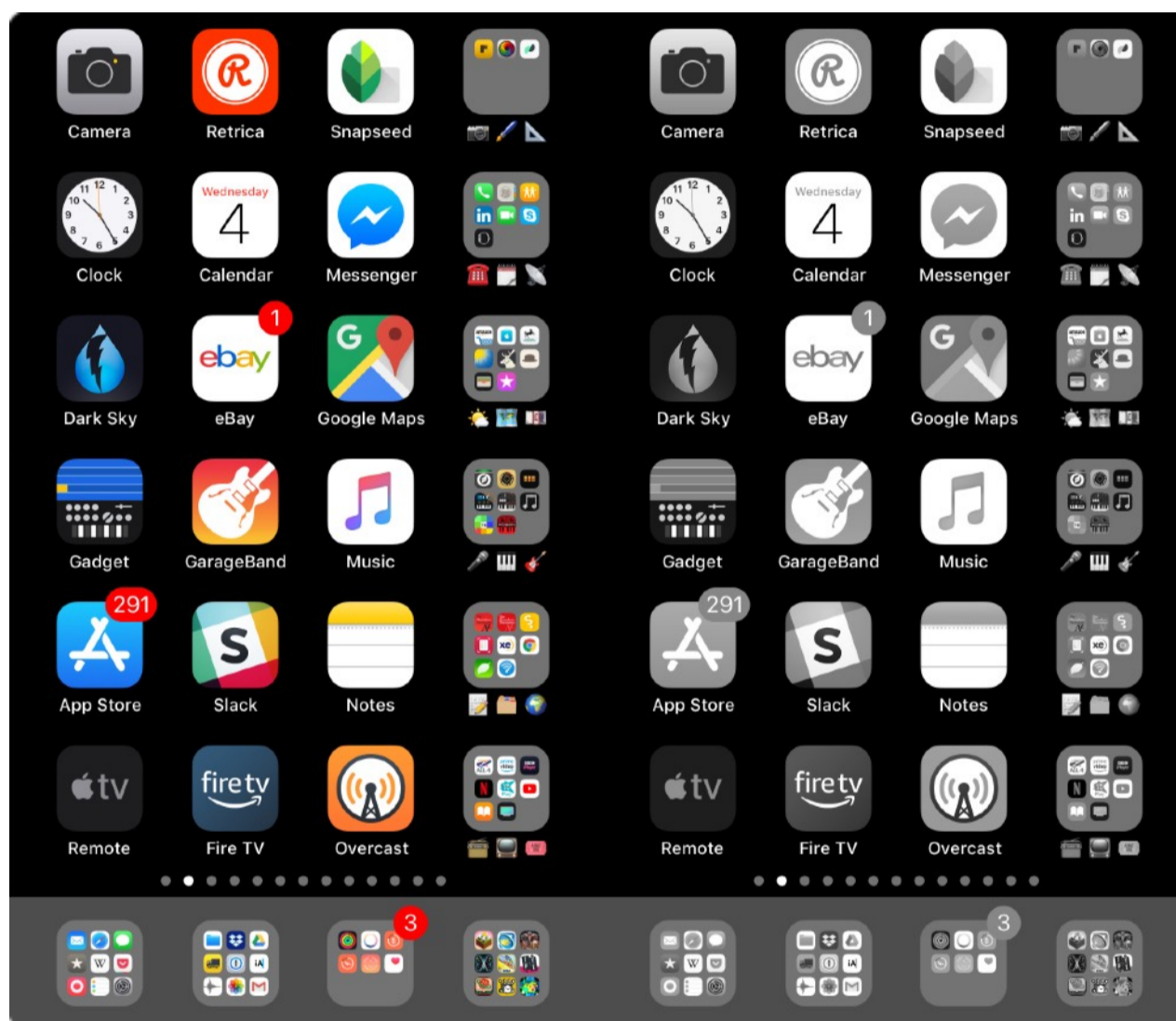
Toggle Color Filters on, select Greyscale from the available options and your iPhone's interface will instantly be devoid of color. Toggle Color Filters again and the color returns.

### Use the accessibility shortcut.

Naturally, you don't want to have to dig deep into accessibility settings every time you want to switch your iPhone's color mode. Fortunately, there's a much faster way.

Head back to the top level of the Accessibility section in Settings and scroll down to the bottom. Tap Accessibility Shortcut and select Color Filters so that there's a tick mark next to it.

Now, whenever you triple-click the Home button (or side button on iPhone X), your color mode will switch. Note that should you select multiple options within the Accessibility Shortcut screen, you'll get a menu to choose from (rather than an instant switch), as depicted above.



See how much difference a simple color switch can make?

## Adjust your triple-click speed

Finally, if you find a triple-click tricky to implement, you can slow down how fast clicking needs to be.

In Accessibility, select Home Button (or Side Button on iPhone X) from the Interaction options, and switch Click Speed from Default to Slow. Be aware, though, that this also affects double-click speeds.



## Focus Timers

### Banish interruptions and boost flow

Focus Mode is a feature baked deep into the heart of iOS 15 and iPadOS 15. It's designed to help you reduce distractions. Your device will turn a focus on automatically, in context, when it senses you need one (for example, if you start playing a game) or they can be triggered manually.

The system can be tweaked and configured in the Settings app. For each focus type, you define which people and apps can break through the notification barrier. Focus types can be scheduled, and you can even define which Home pages are available when a specific focus is active.

All this flexibility is to be applauded. Focus is smarter and more granular than the relatively brute-force Do Not Disturb. But it only goes so far – and there are times when you'll need to get your head down and take things further.

### It's about time

When you need to get things done and the Focus feature isn't quite enough, consider using a focus timer. Various options exist, but they all work in broadly the same manner, breaking up the day into short work sprints separated by breaks – a.k.a. the Pomodoro method.

The idea is you dedicate each work sprint – usually 25 minutes, although most timers allow you to adjust this value – to a single specific task. That might be dealing with an email inbox, working on a paper, or digging into research. Regardless, for that period, you should not do anything else. The exception is if you complete a task within a work sprint – at which point, review what you've done or start on the next.

Because people tend to focus best in short bursts, this system mandates you take a short break (five minutes is recommended) at the end of every work sprint – and a longer one after every four.

## No time to waste

The system can feel limiting and restrictive at first, especially if you're used to juggling jobs and multitasking. But it's effective. Once ingrained into your routine, focus timers instill a sense of urgency. They stop you procrastinating and wasting time, and also force you to take breaks – useful, given that sitting in a chair for several hours straight isn't any good for you either.

However, it's important to note that focus timers are there to reduce interruptions on focus and flow, not to increase stress. So if you do use one, adjust the lengths of sprints and breaks to suit your own personal preferences, and don't sit there watching a countdown timer and fretting about how long you have left in a sprint. Instead, work with a focus timer that uses sound or haptics to alert you to the end of sessions.





## Focus timers to consider...

The App Store has many focus timers to choose from. These are our favorites.

### BeFocused

BeFocused is a generous free timer that enables you to assign timers to specific projects and track ongoing goals.

### Bear Focus Timer

Bear Focus Timer only works when your phone is face-down, putting it psychologically out of reach. And it features bears.

### Forest

Forest has you grow virtual trees during sessions – which the app mercilessly kills should you cheat.

### Focused Work

Focused Work offers flexible timers, bespoke structures and even automations for different tasks.

# Working From Home

## The perfect office setup for your Apple kit

People increasingly work from home. Whether you're fully freelance, work at home once or twice a week, or just use a home office to catch up on things now and again (or get some peace), it's important to look beyond the technology.

Don't get me wrong. I'm happy when sitting in front of the latest iPad, using a top-notch iPhone, and tapping away on a keyboard connected to an iMac. But when it comes to comfort and productivity, all the finest Apple hardware in the world isn't enough.

This feature, therefore, looks at how to kit out a home office, in a way that will enhance your enjoyment – and your productivity.

### Get a standing desk

People are these days too often sedentary, which has resulted in widespread health problems. Although your Apple Watch might urge you to move on an hourly basis, spending the rest of your time in a chair isn't great.

Standing desks are a solution, but too much standing can also be dangerous, resulting in Achilles tendonitis and other problems. What you need is a desk that can be quickly, easily, and regularly switched between standing and sitting positions.



I use an IKEA Bekant (from \$379/£455). The motor moves it between modes within seconds, it'll carry a 155lb/70kg load, and I've found it sturdy and well-balanced for typing on.

## Don't skimp on your chair

When you're sitting, your back won't thank you for buying a terrible chair. A typical low-priced office chair is fine if you only use it briefly; but for longer home office sessions, you need to invest in something better.

I have an Aeron, which sits in the wallet-punching \$1200/£800 ballpark. But I figured it was something I'd sit on daily, for hours at a time, and so was worth it. However, when spending such a sum on a chair, do test it first. Also, be mindful you can pick up Aeron refurbs at around half price.

Whatever chair you buy, set it up correctly – your back should be straight, and your forearms flat – parallel with the tabletop when typing. Ideally, your eyes should meet the top third of the display you're using.

## Make some noise

Some computers and displays have built-in speakers that might be fine for your needs. If you primarily work with an iPad, though, you'll want more power than an iPad Pro can provide – let alone Apple's cheaper tablets, with their limited two-speaker set-ups.



Investment will naturally be driven by how much you care about decent audio, and/or how long you'll spend in your office. I really like my Ruark Audio MR1s (£329, depicted), which work wired or over Bluetooth – although they're tricky to find outside of Europe.

However, there are plenty of other decent wireless speakers around, including Apple's HomePod (\$299/£279), and the Sonos One (\$199/£199). Again, try before you buy, to see which option sounds best to your ears.

## Buy useful device stands

Think of device stands as more than just bits of metal or plastic to prop up devices – or ensure you don't misplace them! Buy ones that are functional in other ways.

For my iPhone, I use an Anker Fast Wireless Charger (\$17/£18). The stand is nondescript, and so isn't a distraction. But it usefully charges an iPhone in portrait or landscape; I can leave a passive app running and still see it; and the stand's wireless nature means my phone's readily available whenever I need it, rather than me having to disconnect a cable, or pluck the device from a horizontal mat.



For an iPad, consider a stand that transforms your tablet into something akin to a laptop, enabling it to potentially entirely replace a PC or Mac. Apple's Smart Keyboard Folio (from \$159/£159) takes time to get used to, but in extended use is reliable and comfortable.

Brydge makes keyboard cases that are more laptop-like (one of which is depicted below), with backlit keys and a huge range of viewing angles. Alternatively, if you own an Apple Magic Keyboard, consider the Touchtype Pro (\$69). Shipping in September 2019, this clever case houses your iPad Pro and Apple keyboard, and in a snap transforms into a stand with multiple viewing angles – and, handily, you can set the iPad in landscape or portrait.

## Cut the clutter

A danger of any home office is that it can become a dumping ground for tech junk – or any other junk, for that matter. So if you're rethinking your desk and what goes on it, look at things in a more holistic manner. If you have a pile of leads and accessories, buy some drawers, and organize your things using dividers. Recycle or sell old technology you no longer need. Above all, keep your desk clear, so you can focus on what you should be doing.

That said, there is a fine line between minimal and soulless. Aim for refined and productive rather than sparse. If there are – to coin a phrase from a well-known TV show about tidying – objects that 'bring you joy', keep them around, whether they're pictures on the wall, or the odd treasured knick-knack.



## Safeguard your electronics

Electronic kit is fragile and expensive to repair. If you often drink while you work (as in, coffee or water – I'm not suggesting you're Hunter S. Thompson), get a placemat, and always keep your glass/cup in the same place to train muscle memory and avoid spillages. (Ideally, keep it away from electronics entirely.)

Be aware of where the sun hits, so electronics aren't overheated. (Get and use blinds if that's a problem.) Ensure all your plugs are surge protected, to secure your technology against voltage spikes. Also have on hand a relevant fire extinguisher, just in case of disaster. Chances are that none of your kit will ever catch fire – but you'll be happy to have an extinguisher around if it ever does!

# Streamline Home Working

## How your iPhone and iPad can help

Many people suddenly find themselves working from home for the first time. This can be an unsettling experience; but when armed with the right hardware, set-up, and apps, everything can go a lot more smoothly.

Here are our tips for keeping you productive and fighting fit.

### The perfect setup

Where possible, carve out a semi-permanent space for your ‘office’. If you’ve room, this should be somewhere you can leave your work gear and ‘leave’ at the end of the day, and that’s as free as possible from distractions.

Ensure your home office is beneficial to your physical well-being. We’ve outlined our perfect set-up before, although you may not want to splash out too much cash (for example, on a standing desk) if your home office is only to be temporary.

Even so, get yourself a reasonably good chair (your back will not thank you for working at a dining table), and raise your screen — be it a laptop or iPad — to eye height. A pile of books will do for this, if you don’t want to buy a stand; but do make sure your device is secure and stable, or it’ll cost you a whole lot more should your pride and joy crash to the floor!

Once that’s all done, control apps with an external Bluetooth keyboard and mouse/trackpad. If your iPad is running iPadOS 13.4 or later, it has full cursor support, meaning you needn’t interact with the touchscreen while working.

Should you need help concentrating, White Noise+ (free + \$3/£3) and Brian Eno : Reflection (\$31/£30) block noise without distracting you in a way radio or music might.

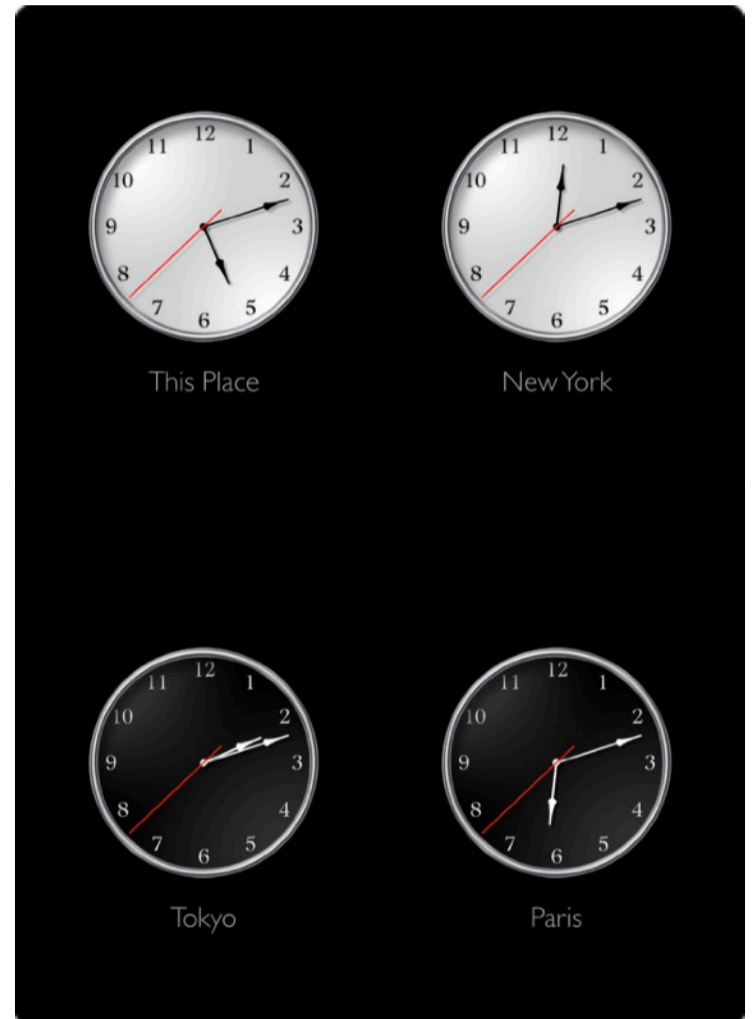
## Organizing your day

Even if you primarily use a laptop, look at utilizing your iPhone or iPad for specific tasks. In particular, get social media off of your main work screen (and limit usage on mobile by way of Screen Time), unless it's a vital part of your job.

An iPhone can be great for other tasks, too: turn yours into a desktop world clock with *The Clocks* (free), if you have clients and colleagues around the globe; also, track and read news with *NetNewsWire* (free), and stash long-reads for later in *Pocket* (free).

iPhone and iPad alike can be excellent second screens for scheduling with Apple's *Calendar* or *Fantastical* (\$5/£5 monthly) with its new time-zone, weather, and meeting smarts. Having said schedule on your device means less flicking between apps (and therefore fewer distractions) on your computer. Similarly, getting messaging and settings on to a second display, respectively with *Slack* (free) and *Zoom* (free), is a good idea — and Zoom's much-derided security and privacy issues are greatly reduced on iPhone/iPad.

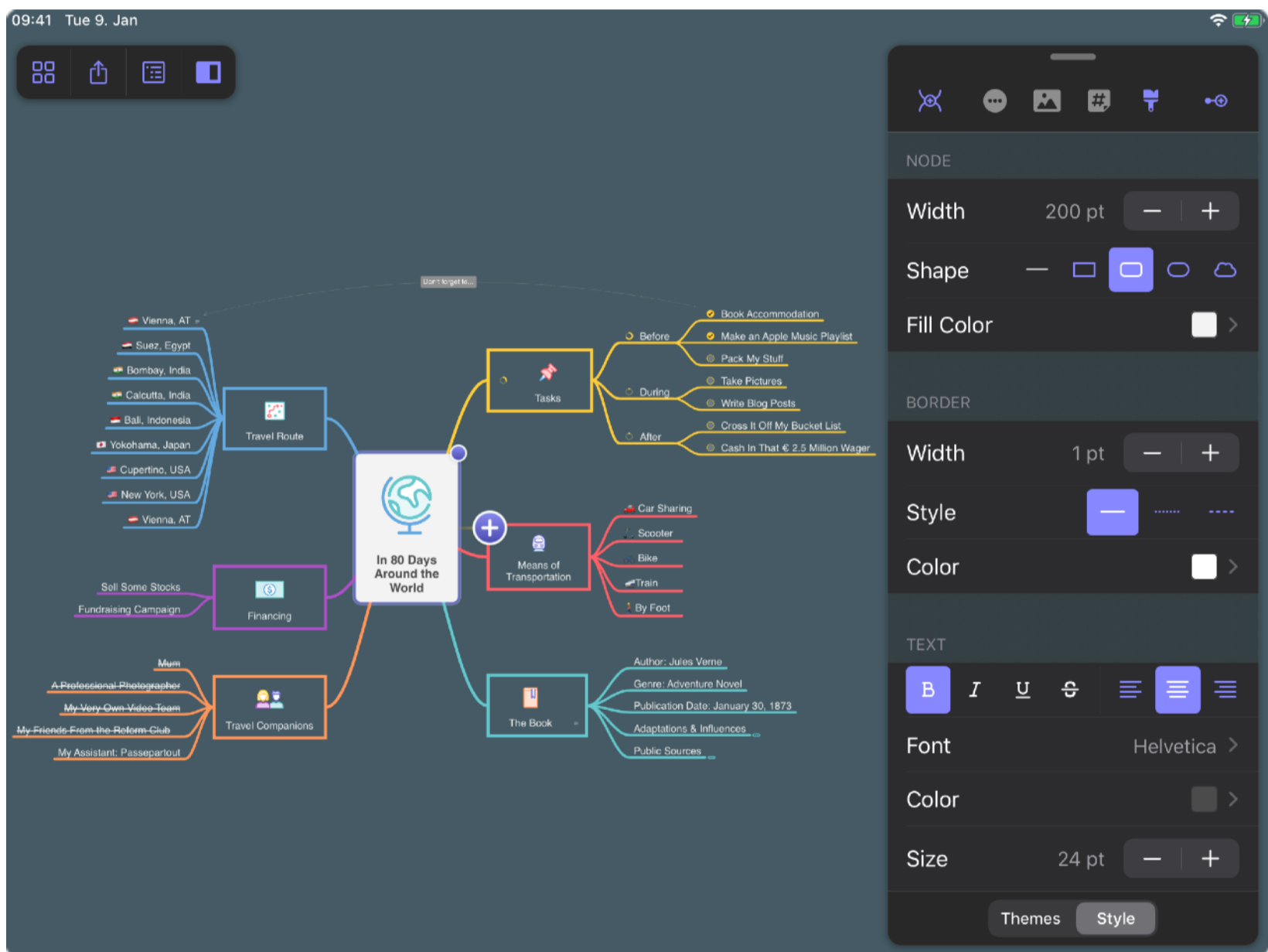
Need to keep yourself honest and not mess around with your phone all the time — or are the type of person who barrels along for hours and therefore needs a break time reminder? Either way, install *Bear Focus Timer* (\$2/£2) on your iPhone. It's a superb, simple work/break timer, which only runs when your phone is face-down (and therefore 'out of reach'). And when it's time for a breather, try short equipment-free exercise sessions with *Streaks Workout* (\$4/£4) or a spot of meditation with *Oak* (free).



## Beyond the basics

Many companies mandate specific work and productivity tools for typical office documents, most often centering around Microsoft Office or Google's G Suite. However, even if Word or Google Docs is the final resting place for your text, consider taking advantage of iPad apps to focus more clearly on the task at hand.

iA Writer (\$9/£9) and Ulysses (\$5/£5 monthly) offer distraction-free writing environments that force you to zero in on just your words.



### MindNode

Additionally, MindNode (\$3/£3 monthly) can take you from bullet-point list to fully interactive and customizable mind-map with a single tap. All these apps can help you rapidly craft and shape ideas before committing them to that all-important final document.

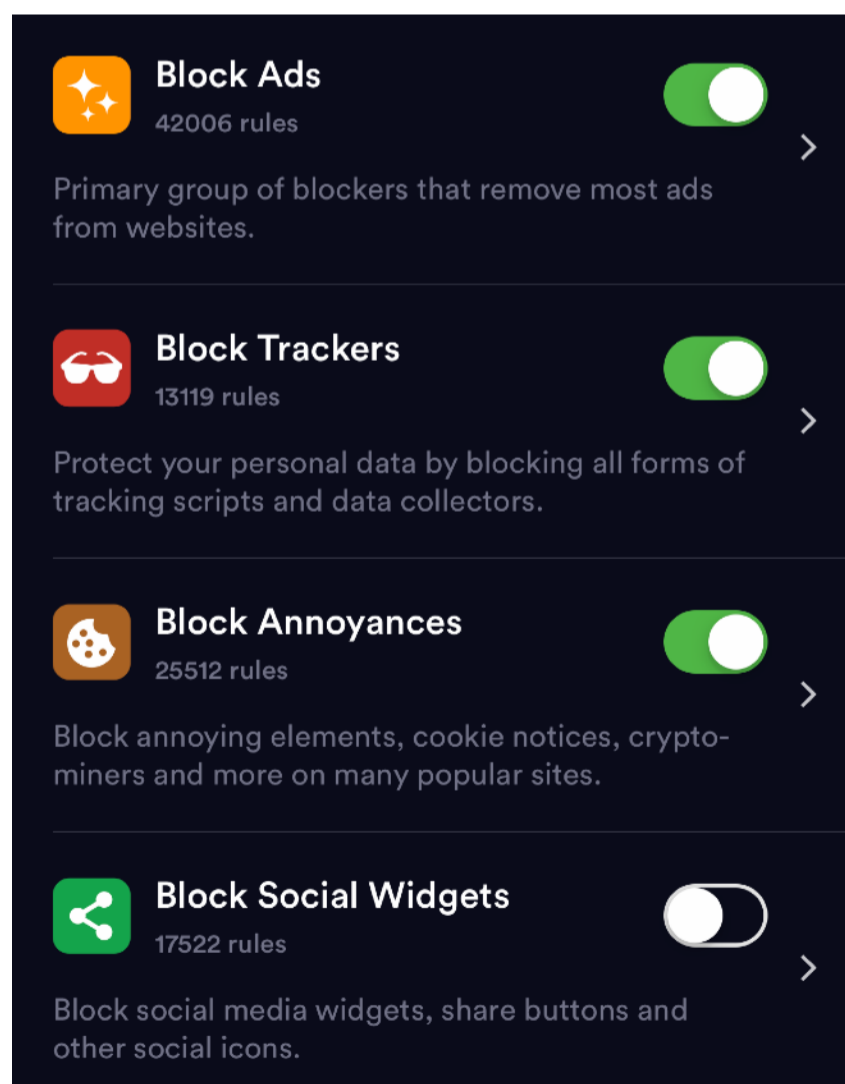


Even as an ancillary tool, your device can be useful to avoid distracting you from your main work display. When writing, for example, Chambers Dictionary (\$10/£10) and Chambers Thesaurus (\$5/£5) help you find the right words, rather than you heading to a browser and then finding yourself in an hours-long Wikipedia rabbit-hole. Elsewhere, Souolver (\$3/£3) lets you tot up figures with ease, with an interface that's like an interactive notepad combined with a simplified spreadsheet. It's far better than wasting time with a traditional calculator.

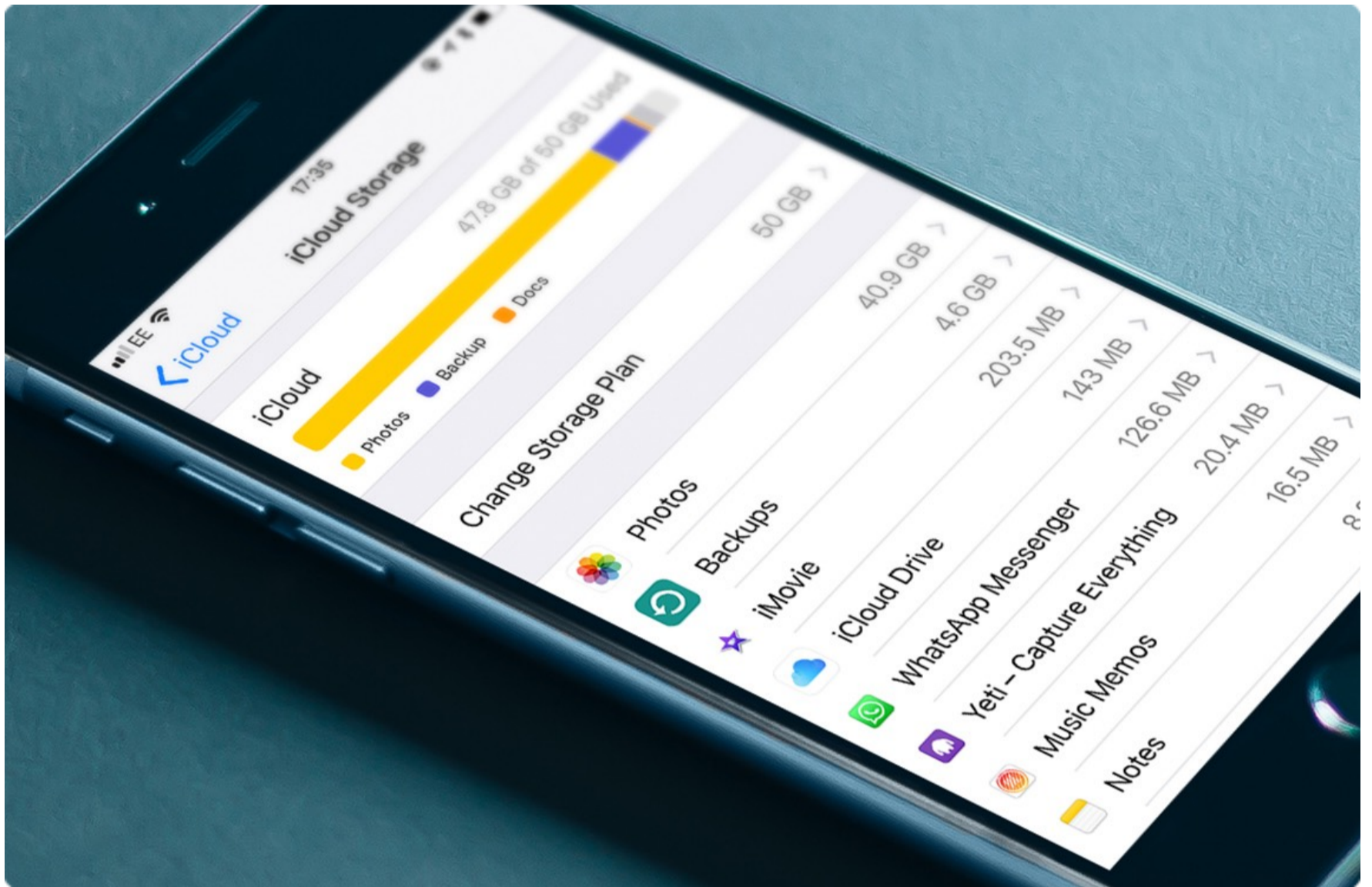
## Connectivity and security

Other key considerations when working from home are getting online and ensuring nothing bad happens to your data. Really, you should already be using a password manager, like iCloud Keychain, 1Password (\$4/£4 monthly), or Lastpass (free). And 1Blocker (\$15/£15 annually) is great for removing cruft from web pages when browsing. But these things aren't specific to working from home.

Connectivity is, though, in one important way. Chances are, you'll be using your home Wi-Fi to get online — and it's unlikely to be as robust as your standard workplace's connection, nor will it have the same service level. You must therefore figure out what to do should your internet access be cut off for an extended period. Tethering your laptop to your iPhone (Settings > Personal Hotspot) can be a speedy remedy — but only if you've a data plan that allows this, and that doesn't cost the earth when you do tether. (The money side of things is also a consideration when using an iPad with cellular capabilities.)



1Blocker



Keeping documents safe is also of paramount importance. Your organization may mandate the use of server-based storage or content management systems. But any documents you create outside of such systems, and which are of importance, should be regularly backed up. Use iCloud Drive to store your files, and you'll be able to fish out accidentally deleted documents for up to 30 days.

Additionally, backup iPhones and iPads to iCloud (from free) daily, in case of disaster, and get a Backblaze plan (\$6 monthly per computer) for desktops/laptops. Should you make sporadic backups to a hard drive, use Clock to set a recurring reminder alarm.

# Working On iPad

## Leave your computer at home with these apps

As someone who uses an iPad as their main computer, I know it's possible to get work done using Apple's tablet — if you have the right apps. We've all heard of Pages and Word, but a number of lesser-known App Store treasures can turn your iPad into a serious computing device for real work. These apps won't necessarily allow you to trash your old laptop, but they might allow you to spend more time away from a conventional computer without sacrificing productivity.

Of course, the iPad became even more of a computing behemoth with last year's launch of iPadOS, making it even easier to get work done on the go. But this piece isn't about iPadOS features — it's about the third-party apps I use to manage my workload from Apple's tablet. Let's take a look.

### iA Writer

The first of these is iA Writer. On the surface, this is a simple text editor: it lets you add text-based notes and it integrates with services like iCloud Drive and Dropbox. The app also supports Markdown: a beautifully accessible syntax for writing using plain text, which calls on simple, easy-to-remember shortcuts for text formatting.

Importantly, iA Writer lets iPad users get around some of the problems with iOS. For example, I find it frustrating that I can't create my own custom hyperlinks in the Mail app. To get around this, I sometimes compose emails inside iA Writer and use a shortcut to convert my writing to rich text and add it to the Mail app. Apple's Notes application might be great for quick note-taking, but iA Writer is a fully-functional text editing app.

## GoodNotes

I really like GoodNotes. This is the app I use when it comes to making notes using the Apple Pencil. In particular, I use GoodNotes for making annotations to PDFs.

You can import PDFs into GoodNotes effortlessly (and you can export your annotated document to a range of apps and services), but the app also lets users create virtual notebooks for their own handwritten jottings. Clever tools, like smart highlighting and shape-drawing, make GoodNotes a cut above some of its competitors.

iPad Pro apps to discuss.

- TextExpander.
- Screens?

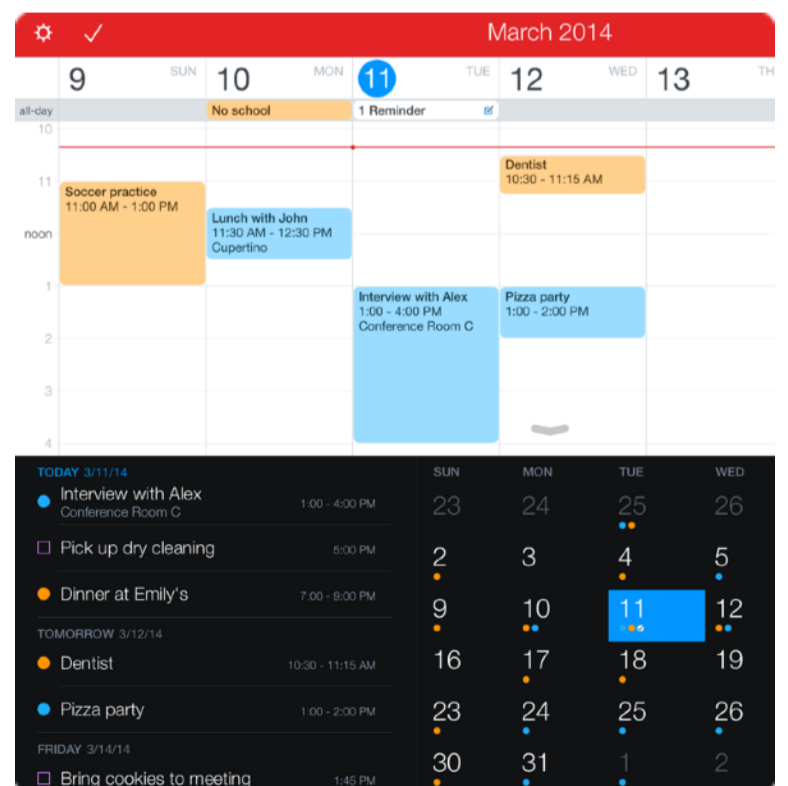
- Ai Writer for text capture
  - Shortcut for HTML.
- Mail app alternative?
- Fantastical 2
  - Calendar and Reminders.
- Scanbot.
- office for iPad
  - Word
  - Excel
  - PowerPoint.
- GoodNotes (PDF annotation).

GoodNotes

## Fantastical

I didn't realize how cumbersome the Calendar and Reminders apps felt until I downloaded Fantastical. This app does an amazing job of combining both Calendars and Reminders into one single interface. Better still, it uses clever parsing to let users input new events or reminders using natural language.

This means that in Fantastical, you can type "get milk tomorrow evening," and the app creates a suitable reminder based on what you've written. Support for Calendars and Reminders not only means you can create both events and to-do items from the same input field, but Fantastical also displays your events and reminders alongside one another. By reducing two apps into one, Fantastical has boosted my

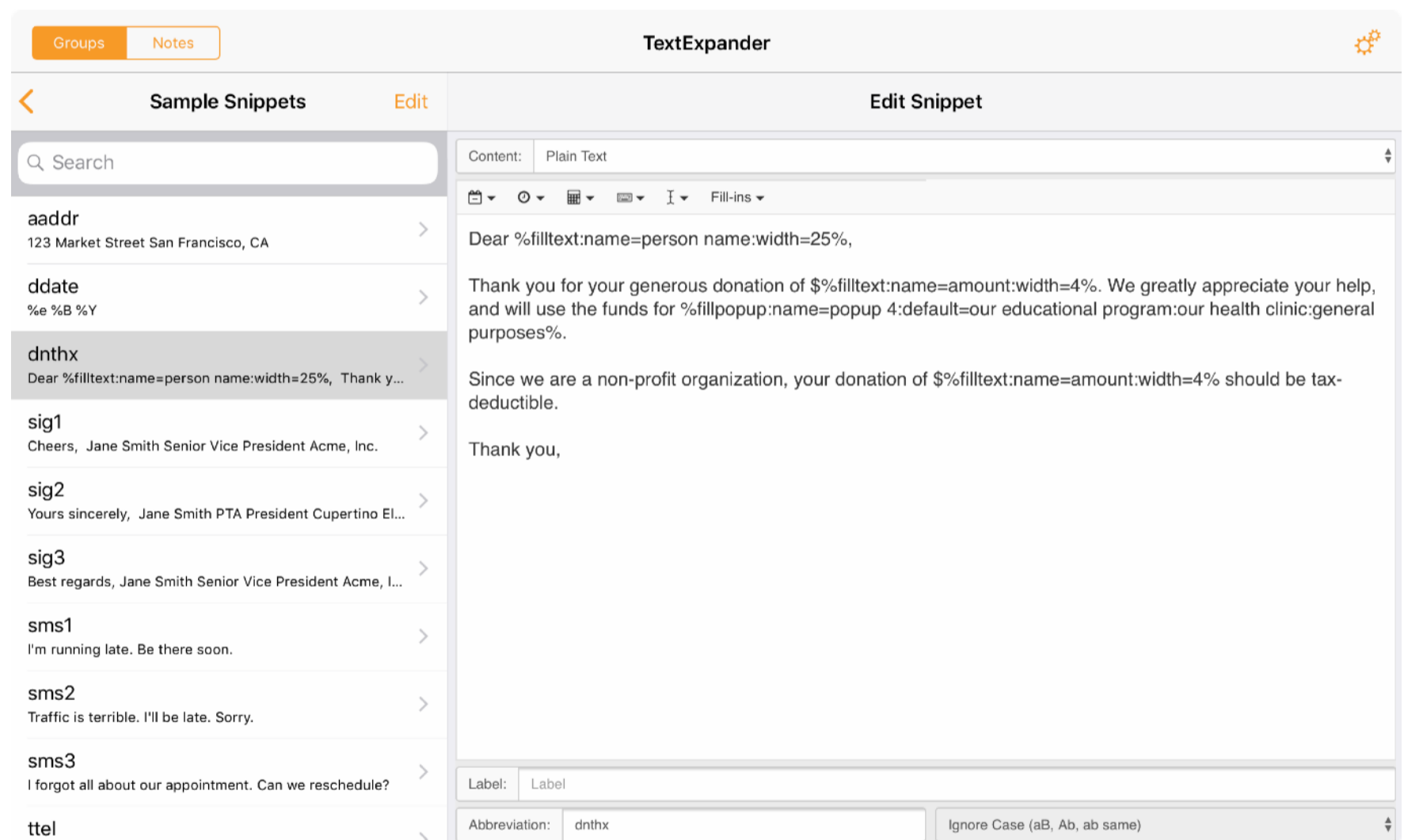


Fantastical

productivity and made it easier to manage my personal and professional life using the iPad.

## TextExpander

I'd used TextExpander on macOS, but the utility is even more useful on iOS, where the clumsy virtual keyboard is often required. TextExpander lets users generate large amounts of text from snippets, which serve as in-text shortcuts for things you have to type again and again, like addresses or stock email responses. You can insert snippets using the third-party TextExpander keyboard, which is functional, reliable, and can work alongside Apple's Smart Keyboard devices for iPad.

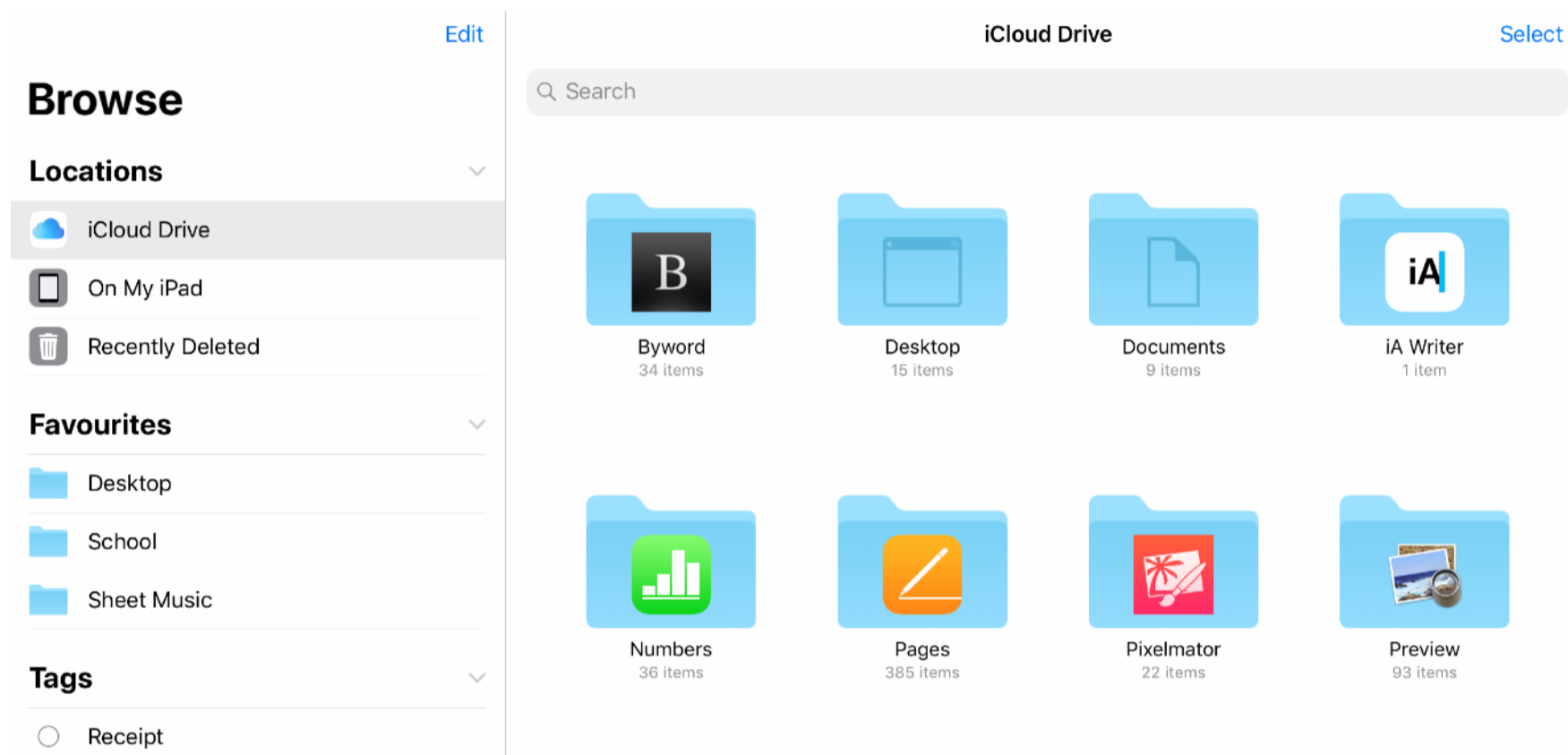


## TextExpander

But there's more. TextExpander can also call on elements like the contents of your clipboard, or the current time, and insert these as part of your snippet. The app even supports shared snippets, and many companies have created huge repositories of work-based TextExpander shortcuts for employees to use. You can find out more at Smile Software's website.

# Files

It's impossible not to mention the Files app when it comes the "iPad as a computer" debate. Files is an app you should *definitely* be using: it integrates with iCloud Drive, Dropbox, and a number of other cloud services to provide file access on iOS.



## Files

It's the closest thing to a file system on iPad, and with support for folder creation, tags, and offline downloads, it works well. Files is an app I use every day to seamlessly organize and back up my documents. It's also something Apple expanded quite a bit with iOS 13.

# Dual Displays

## Link your Mac and iPad with 'Sidecar'

One of the best features Apple released in the last couple years is Sidecar, a way to connect your iPad to your Mac for use as a secondary display.

It even works in conjunction with other monitors – if your Mac is powerful enough, that means you can have multiple extra displays in action to really dial up your productivity levels.

You can mirror your computer's screen to the iPad, use it to display a completely different set of software, and even utilize the iPad's touchscreen to control macOS apps.



If you have an Apple Pencil, that quickly turns powerful desktop software like Adobe Photoshop into something you can manipulate with a stylus – without the need for an expensive graphics tablet.



Photoshop on macOS with Apple Pencil

## Compatibility

To use Sidecar, you'll need to have a relatively modern iPad and Mac. If you're not sure, you can find a full list of compatible devices [here](#).

Next, you'll need to ensure you have the necessary software on both devices.

For iPad, head to Settings > General > Software Update. You'll need iPadOS 13.0 or higher.

For Mac, press the Apple button to the far left of the status bar and choose About This Mac. Then, click Software Update from the Overview tab. Make sure you have macOS Catalina (10.5) or higher.

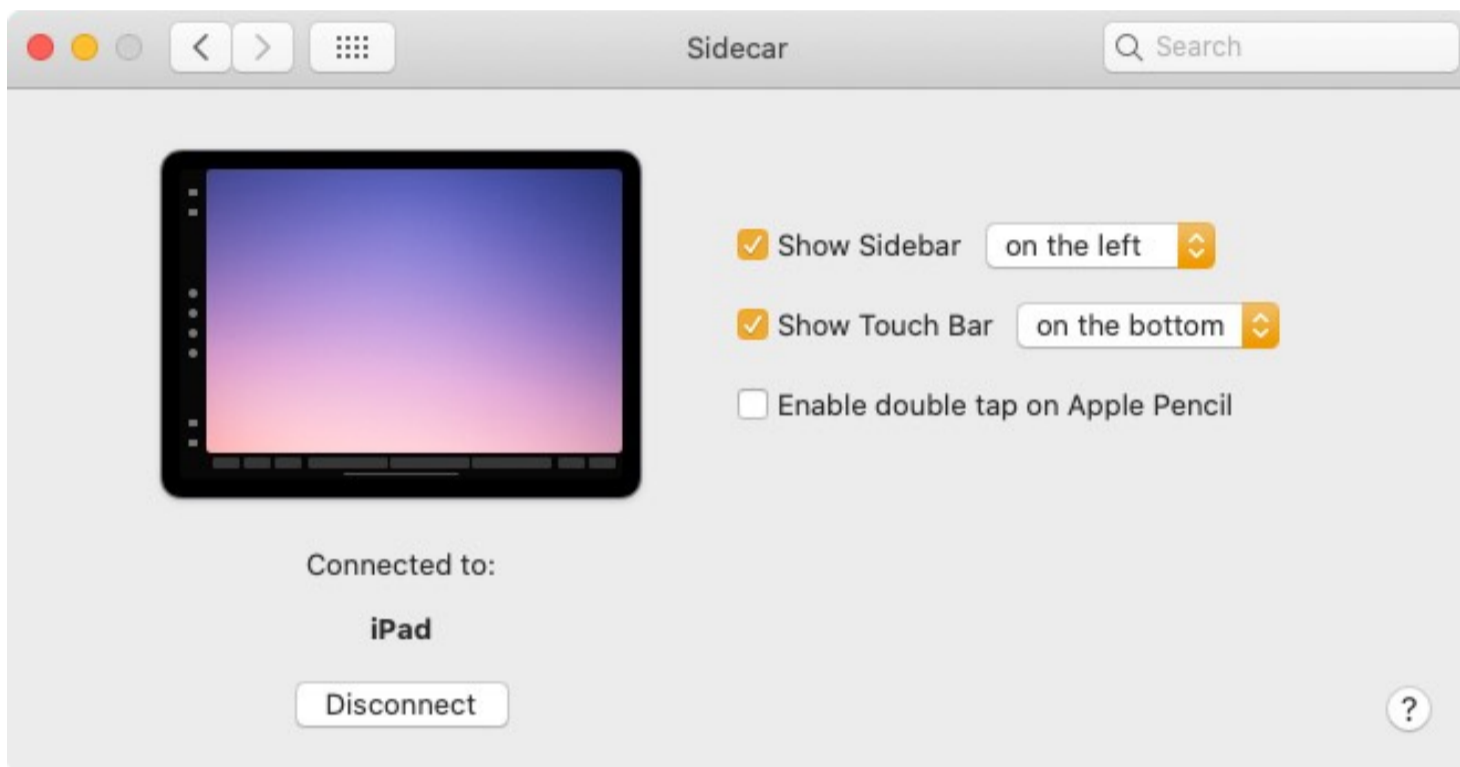
You'll also need to ensure both devices are logged in using the same Apple ID. This allows them to sync wirelessly, so long as they're nearby one another.



## Setting up Sidecar

To connect your devices together, open System Preferences on the Mac and click Sidecar. You should see a drop-down list beneath the words Connect to. Choose your iPad from the list, and wait a few moments while the devices sync up.

Once connected, you can play with the settings here to customize a few things. Tickboxes allow you to switch both the Sidebar and Touch Bar on and off, with choices for exactly where on the iPad each one will appear.



The Sidebar comprises a series of shortcuts for common actions, and includes key modifiers like the shift and command buttons for easy access. The Touch Bar replicates the strip display above the keyboard on certain Macbook models, enabling extra commands depending on which app you have open.

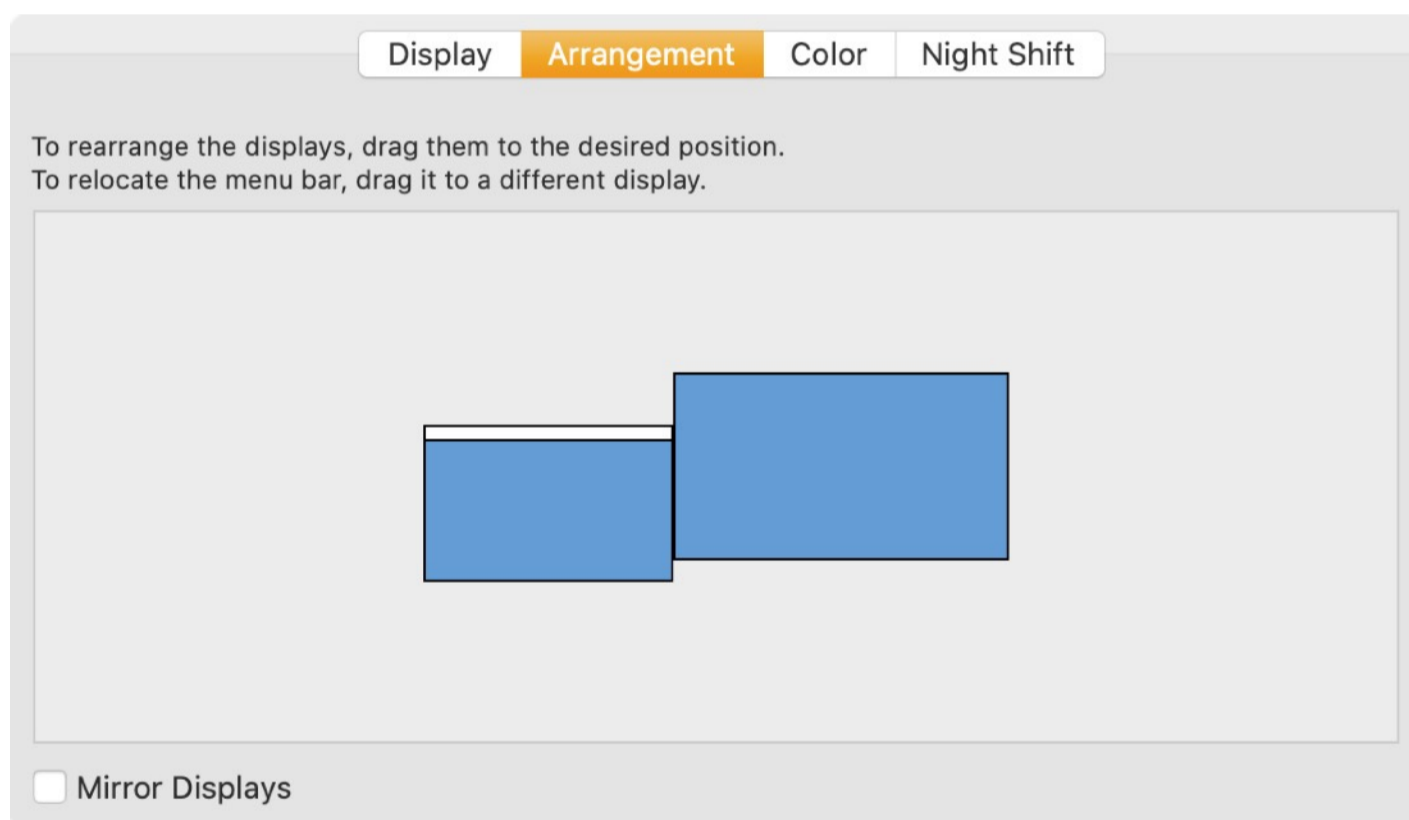
Meanwhile, toggling on Enable double tap allows you to switch drawing tools in compatible macOS apps using a double-tap on a second-generation Apple Pencil.

## Position your displays

Your cursor will move between the two devices, but the default positioning of the displays probably won't match up to reality. This can be a bit disorienting as you try to figure out how to move the cursor from one display to another.

(One quick trick to find it is to shake your mouse really fast – this causes the cursor to temporarily increase in size so you can find it easily.)

Luckily, you can tell Sidecar exactly how your devices are positioned in relation to one another. Head back to the main System Preferences menu and this time choose Displays. Click over to the Arrangement tab.



Here, you'll see a virtual recreation of your display positions. You can simply click and drag to move them around until the positioning better reflects the real world.

You can also tick the Mirror Displays box if you'd rather see exactly the same thing on both screens.

Sidecar is a flexible tool, and there are all kinds of uses for a second display – especially if you use a Mac professionally. Play around with the configuration until you're happy, and enjoy all that new digital real estate!

# App Store Cheat Sheet

Every app mentioned in this guide

## Habit trackers

Streaks

Streaks Workout

## Task managers

Agenda

Fantastical

Things

Todoist

TickTick

## Scanning apps

Adobe Scan

Handwriting to Text Recognizer

Pen to Print

## Focus timers

Bear Focus Timer

Be Focused

Forest

Focused Work

## **Focus audio**

Brain.fm

Brian Eno: Reflection

Calm

Headspace

Oak

White Noise+

## **Email clients**

Airmail

Spark

Spike

Gmail

HEY Email

## **Writing aids**

Chambers Dictionary

Chambers Thesaurus

GoodNotes

iA Writer

MindNode

Ulysses

## **Time savers**

Blinkist

Shortcuts

Soulver

TextExpander

## **Reading & News**

InstaPaper

Kindle

NetNewsWire

Pocket

## **Communication**

Slack

Zoom

## **Educational**

Codecademy Go

Duolingo

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