



The NOW Year™ Method Basic Workflow

The following is a basic workflow primer that will get you going with The NOW Year™ Method. It explains the primary elements of the system in basic detail, allowing you to get started with the process and keep going with it over the long haul. *(I've also added some hyperlinks throughout this PDF to help you with some of the basic elements I've already introduced in the event this is your first introduction to The NOW Year™ Method.)*

My plan is to add more to this over time, but the greatest detail will be explored in The Productivity Diet program, which is launching on May 1, 2016. I'll be beginning the prelaunch process in mid-April and will be sure to share a sign up form to receive the email sequence (or mini-course) well in advance.

Now...let's get going!

One of the aspects of The NOW Year™ Method is that it can be approached from several vantage points.

- You can start working through the daily tasks on your list and scale up from there to theming of your weeks and months to living solely by your [Three Words](#).
- You can start from the Three Words and scale down through theming and into [The Daily MAP](#).
- You can start with the Three Words and only use The Daily MAP, skipping theming altogether.
- You can use theming as your driver for your daily tasks initially and add mode-based work as needed, along with larger theming processes such as monthly themes and the Three Words.

However, I have found that the best way to work through it is to choose one of the following starting points:

1. Start with The Daily MAP and scale up.
2. Start with My Three Words and scale down.

[The NOW Year™ Action Plan](#) demonstrates the latter, so I'll go through the former process in this workflow.

Part One: The Daily MAP

Here's how I approach The Daily Map.

- I look at my larger task list for each day and categorize the tasks by mode, action, project, and schedule. I can capture things on paper using the same approach.
- Not every task needs a project or schedule attached, but every task MUST have a mode. Think of the mode as the verb you need to complete the action.
- There are 5 categories of modes: General (Theme-Based), Resource-Based, Energy-Based, Activity-Based, and Time-Based.

If you are just starting out with The Daily MAP (MAP stands for Mode, Action, and Project) then you should make sure that you make decisions on at least ONE category of mode you want to work with initially.

The categories of modes to work with as you start the process are ranked as follows, from easiest to adopt and use to most challenging:

1. TIME-BASED MODES

This category is easiest to adopt because it is easiest to measure.

For example, if you have 30 minutes between appointments on your calendar you can determine how many 5 minute tasks you have and know you have a chance of completing 6 of them during that timeframe.

2. GENERAL (THEME-BASED) MODES

This is next on the list because you can associate tasks with the daily theme they are aligned with.

For example, if Wednesday is your Administration Day (where you put your overarching focus on administrative work) then by categorizing tasks with Administration Mode you can easily tell what tasks should be done on that day. This type of mode removes the paralysis by analysis that can come with to do lists that are complex or lengthy.

3. RESOURCE-BASED MODES

This is ranked as such because it's easy to figure out what resource you need to accomplish a task associated with it.

For example, if you use "Excel Mode" for everything you need to do while in Microsoft Excel then you'll be able to get (and stay) in a flow-like state. Resource-based mode work keeps you in one place/platform for an extended period of time while working on tasks that fall into a variety of projects.

4. ACTIVITY-BASED MODES

This one is ranked further down the list because it can cause some confusion and you need to be disciplined with how many activity-based modes you have.

For example, I don't have a "Writing Mode" alone because I have different types of writing that I do. I write blog posts, newsletters, and am working on a book and course. All of those types of writing require different approaches and mindsets, so I have several categories of writing modes.

At one point, I had too many activity-based modes so I placed the specifics in the task name itself (i.e. "Write blog post on X" with "Writing Mode" instead of Write on X with "Blogging Mode" as the associated mode). That kind of thoughtful approach to modes is important as you move down the list of mode categories.

5. ENERGY-BASED MODES

This one is the toughest because you need to be really honest with yourself when assigning energy levels to tasks. It takes the most discipline to decipher and decide what tasks take a lot of energy and which ones don't - and why that is the case. For example, a task that takes a lot of focus to complete would fall under "High Energy Mode" but so would a task that you detest doing if it took a lot of will to make it happen (i.e. "Spend 30 minutes working on 2015 taxes").

You could also argue that dealing with a lot of "Low Energy Mode" tasks would make you productive. But if you don't do any that take more focus and energy then were you really as productive as you could have been? There are a lot of variables to consider when using energy-based modes BUT when used mindfully and consistently with discipline they can be very powerful.

Sometimes it's just in the naming of the mode. I renamed my energy-based modes from "High" and "Low" to "Deep Work" and "Shallow Work" (inspired by Cal Newport's book Deep Work) and that has proven to be a better fit.

(Note: The fact each of the sections on the above rankings is longer based on how challenging it is reinforces the rankings.)

Part Two: Theming

Now let's dive a bit into the idea of theming, which actually is much bigger than what I mention in The NOW Year™ Action Plan when you really get down to it.

First off, theming begins with the Three Words that you choose for your year – no matter when you start it. The way I select my words for the year isn't just based on making sure they all start with the same letter (and start with the letter following the one used the year beforehand) but they start from thinking deeply about what matters to me the most in both my personal and professional life.

Here's a three year history of my words:

- 2014: Focus, Forward, Family
- 2015: Gratitude, Generosity, Growth
- 2016: Health, Helpfulness, Harmony

All of these words can easily be applied to both aspects of my life: personal and professional. By creating the constraints of using the same letter for each word, I actually force myself to think more about the words I choose. I go a step further by incrementally ascending the letter every year (meaning next year's letter will be "I"), but I've been doing this for a while and don't recommend it when you first begin this practice...if ever.

Take the word "Harmony" as an example. I am not a fan of the term "work-life balance" and yet I recognize the need to be able to integrate work and home life in today's world in a way that works for both aspects of my life. So I started to think and read. During that process the word "harmony" came to mind. And it clicked. It made total sense and embodied what I aspired to make happen this year: to achieve a harmonious coexistence between my personal and professional life. So I made it one of my words.

This is something you'll want to do as well. Think long and hard about these words because they need to last your for the year (and even beyond). They shouldn't be temporary or altered like monthly, weekly, and daily themes can. They need to be set in stone and you need to use them as the guiding principles of what you are willing and unwilling to do in the months ahead.

When you get to the process of theming your months, you need to make sure that every themed month aligns with your Three Words as much as possible. A good rule of thumb is to ensure they align with two of the three at minimum. If a theme doesn't then it should not get your overarching focus for an entire month.

*Keep in mind that you can choose projects that align with just one word but don't make them your overarching focal points for a month. They can fit in the weekly themes instead because they are short-lived and you don't want them to steal focus from those things you want to do more than anything else – the things you DO attach to months as themes.

All but two of my months in 2016 have themes. Only July and August do not because I'm home with the kids during that time and they become my focus. You could argue that "fatherhood" is my theme for those months, but I'd retort that fatherhood is much more than that.

The easiest way to theme your months is to associate them with specific projects. That way you can attach deadlines to them and see measurable results and outcomes in a shorter timespan. For example, my April theme is my talk at NAPO 2016 (National Association of Professional Organizers 2016). My talk for the event is in May so I want to make sure I give it my primary focus in the weeks leading up to it. April was the ideal spot for that and because it's a critical event for me I chose to make it my monthly theme. (I'm also working on The Productivity Diet during that month and training for the Times Colonist 10K run, but those projects either already received a month of focus - The Productivity Diet was chosen as my March theme - or can be worked on as a project in April without requiring my overarching focus.)

So, the first thing you want to do is choose your Three Words for the year and then choose up to 10 themes for your months.

Theming your weeks is also an option, and I tend to do this when I want to give a week of focus to one small project. Weekly themes tend to outshine the monthly theme for a short stint, so be sure not to do this too often or the efforts on your monthly theme will suffer. For example, I used a weekly theme for this coming week to prepare three weeks' worth of content for the blog, podcast, and newsletter so I could give even more undivided attention to The Productivity Diet for the several weeks to follow. That means my work on The Productivity Diet will be lower during the next few days but will resume with heightened focus in the weeks ahead.

Daily Themes are used to give you an overarching focus for each day. The key to daily themes is that you give each day a theme no matter what. Saturday becomes Family Day. Monday becomes Writing Day. Wednesday becomes Administrative Day. Sunday becomes Leisure day. The names of the days cannot be left unaltered for daily theming to work effectively because your brain doesn't know what those names mean so it has nothing to focus on. But I know every Saturday my focus is family - and family-centric tasks get done as a result. I know that every Wednesday is Audio/Video Day so all of my podcast work and video work gets done on that day - and can wait until that day every week because of my consistency.

Even if you think you can't theme your days, you can. Say you work a 9-5 job. You may not think you can theme the days you work but when you look at the hours before and after work you have plenty of unallocated time where intentions can receive their needed attention. Instead of coming home and having no plan of what tomorrow do, you'll have a sense of what needs your focus if Monday is Reading Day. You won't hop on Netflix; you'll read.

Theming is one of the best ways to give your mind certainty in a world where uncertainty can pull you away from your needs and wants. Theming helps you make better decisions with those "ought to do" tasks that can either be converted into needs or wants or be eliminated altogether.

But you need to trust and adhere to your themes once you put them in place. You need to be disciplined. It's simple to set up this framework, but it won't always be easy to live through it.

I will say that if you put some focused attention behind your intentions, then it'll pay off in a big way. So give it a try. I've seen it work with numerous Productivityist Coaching clients and workshop attendees. I know it can work for you too.

Part Three: Reviewing

"Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful." - Margaret J. Wheatley

The idea of reflecting and reviewing is something that we all struggle with from time to time. We all want to keep moving things forward and checking items off of our respective to-do lists. But the problem is if we don't look back to see what we've already done and if those things were the right courses of action then we will wind up veering off course and doing less of what we need to be doing and - worse still - what we ultimately want to be doing.

That's why reviewing regularly is key.

I recognize the resistance to making the review process onerous. I used to do a review every week that would take me hours to complete. Eventually I did this regular review haphazardly. Then I just stopped doing it as frequently. Finally I stopped doing it at all.

And my productivity and achievements suffered.

When I was developing The NOW Year™ Method I knew that there was going to be a need for regular reflection and reviewing of tasks but I wanted to remove as much of the friction from the process as possible.

That's when I came up with the idea of journaling and The RAPID Review.

Journaling

Keeping a daily journal (or Daily Log) is one of the most important aspects of The NOW Year™ Method. Why? Because the daily practice of recording your daily "stuff" allows you to stay on course with your bigger needs and wants over the long haul.

While some people journal in the morning when they wake, I prefer to journal at the close of the day. And not just when work is done, but when the day is done. Doing this allows me to chronicle the entire day instead of merely the "workday" and get a grander picture of where I was at when the day began professionally and personally and where I've wound up by day's end.

I don't formalize the structure of the journal entries myself, but it can be helpful to do this when you're first starting out. If you want to do this, here's what I suggest you put in your entries:

1. What three things worked for you today?
2. What three things worked against you today?
3. How can you prevent those things that worked against you from challenging you in the future?
4. What are your 3 Absolutes for tomorrow?

You can add more to the mix if you want, but those are the basic questions that can act as a springboard for further introspection.

The last question about your Absolutes then feed into how you'll signify what you need and want to accomplish the next day. You can either flag these tasks as red (as I do in Todoist), or use another means to make them stand out on your to do list. I go one step further and write them down on my "Titanium Board" that is visible as soon as I walk into my office. (It's a whiteboard but is metal in colour/shade.)

Writing in your journal is just the first step. I read my entries every time I do a RAPID Review, once per quarter, and at the start of annual planning process. These daily logs fuel my progress for the months and years ahead, keeping me on track with my long term aspirations.

The RAPID Review

The RAPID Review is another critical component of The NOW Year™ Method. I've broken down the basics of it below:

1. Read Your Daily Log

In this phase you will read the entires you've placed in your Daily Log (or journal) since the last RAPID Review. This will allow you to reconnect with what really matters and allow you to course correct going forward. It would be wise to quickly capture anything that stands out to you in your task management app/system during this phase, but don't overanalyze it. (That happens in the fourth step.)

2. Assess Your Schedule

Now you should look ahead at your schedule/calendar, preferably over the next two weeks. Make sure that your workload is aligned with your Daily Themes and get a sense of what days will be "off limits" for any additional tasks or focused work that you need or want to do. Don't look in your task app for daily tasks at this juncture; that happens in the fourth step.

3. Process Your Inboxes

Now it's time to process all of your inboxes. Email, Evernote, task app, Drafts, physical inboxes, and so on. Move the things that have been dwelling in there into the appropriate modes, projects, and priority levels (if applicable). By the time this stage is done, you should have clear inboxes and be "back to one."

4. Identify Roadblocks

This will be the most critical part of the review because you need to look at why certain things aren't moving forward and be honest about it. You'll need to see if your Monthly Theme is working, your Daily Themes, your modes, and more. This won't be a "rapid" process at first, but by spending time in your task app figuring out what

hasn't been done and then course correcting for the way forward, you'll be able to complete this far more efficiently and effectively the next time around and beyond.

5. Decide Your Next Actions

This final phase goes hand in hand with identifying your roadblocks. You almost do these in tandem, but only after you ask yourself why the roadblock exists in the first place. Then you decide what your next action on it will be: deal with it sooner rather than later because it is a 'need', eliminate it or delegate it because it is an "ought", or increase its level of import because it is very much a "want". Recalibrate your task app and then proceed with moving things forward!

Conclusion

There you have it! The basic workflow of The NOW Year™ Method. I'm working on creating a flow chart of sorts to create a visual of the process, but this 3000+ word guide should get you started.

If you have any questions or feedback, make sure to let me know via email at nowyear@productivityist.com.

Now take what I've delivered here so you can stop guessing...and start going!