

Outcomes and Next Steps

Consider those items you have captured that will require several steps to complete. We will call them projects. A 'next step' in GTD is any action that will take you no more than 20 minutes.

When you think about it, there are very few things that can be completed and ticked off completely within 20 minutes. The implication then is that most of us have several personal projects in progress at any given time.

There are two aspects to these projects that are crucial in GTD, and which you need to define:

1. The **Outcome of the project**. An 'outcome' is any change in the world as a result of your project. An outcome is often considered in terms of an adjustment or change in human behaviour. By thinking about the outcome, you are thinking beyond your project to the beneficial difference it will make.

It helps you think about what "success" means for your project. Ask yourself, "How will things be better when this project is completed?" In doing so, you motivate yourself towards it, and prevent yourself from being absorbed in pure busyness.

For example, if my project is "To build a garden shed", then the outcome might be "I will be able to store my garden tools and equipment in a safe and dry place, where I can find them easily." However, if you can't think of a positive outcome for your project, this also might be helpful: it could cause you to question why are you doing the project in the first place! If you come to the conclusion it has little or no value, you could stop it and move onto something more worthwhile.

Try to keep your outcome to one simple sentence.

2. The **Next Step**, is the next action you must take to move you towards that outcome, that will take you no more than 20 minutes.

This creates a practicable momentum in the project. With GTD, you don't need to plan all the steps, just the next one. Why 20 minutes? Allen believes for most people, anything longer than this could be broken down into two or more steps, and the longer period might not be so feasible. So for the garden shed project, my next step, might be measure the available space for the shed, or search garden shed website for budgeting.

By focusing on the Next Step, it helps you generate a very productive forward momentum.



Exercise: Your Projects List

What about work that takes you more than 20 minutes?

1. Describe **five** of your project **outcomes** in the dotted boxes on the right.
2. Write for each a 'Next Step'. In the dotted boxes on the left. Remember, each 'Next Step' should take you no more than 20 minutes complete.

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