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# Ultimate Guide to Getting Unstuck

*How to overcome mental block and move on like a hero*

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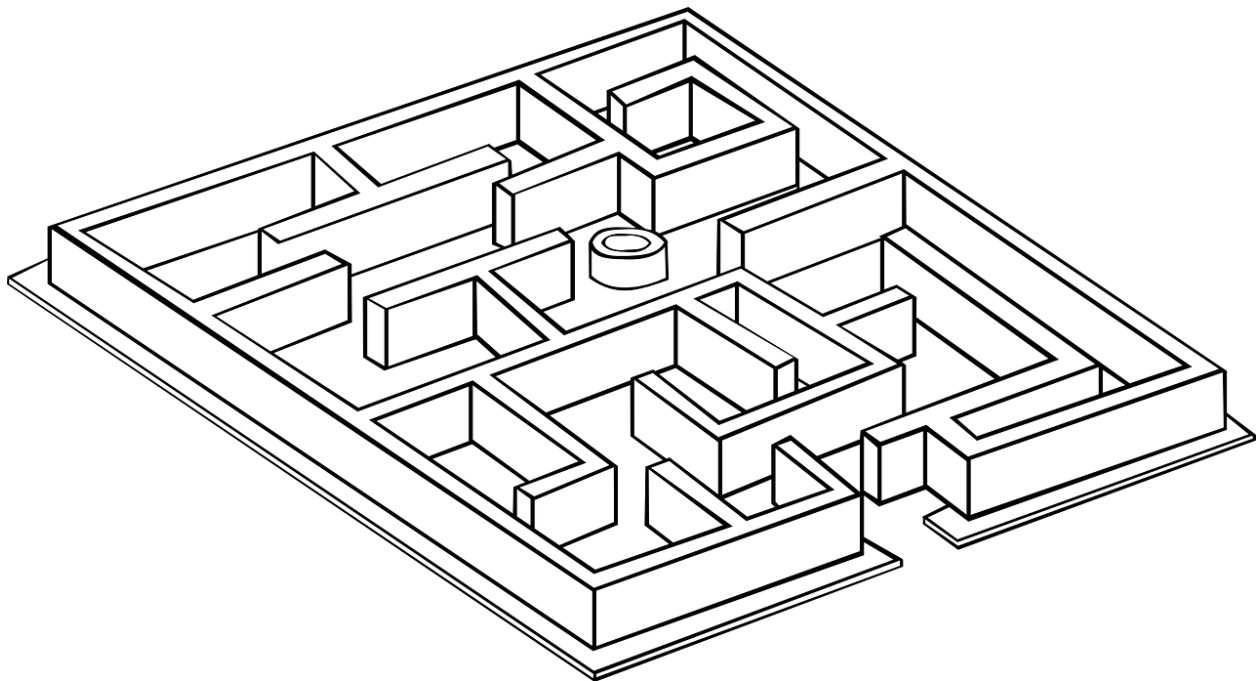


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Hey there,

We all get stuck at times – whether we are managing a project, writing our thesis for university or working on a speech.

Sometimes, all we need to get back on track is a short coffee break with our colleague. At other times though, we really run into a dead-end street where we can't see a way out. The situation feels overwhelming and we don't know what to do next.

What's interesting: the more ambitious you are, and the more you want to get out of life, the more you are going to find yourself in such situations.

Therefore, the first lesson, is: Don't regard these problems and moments of being stuck as a failure. They are part of the game for those who try hard!

With this guide I am sharing with you the methods I have developed over the years to overcome mental block. If you found them useful, I'd be very happy to hear back from you ([adrian@tacticalprojectmanager.com](mailto:adrian@tacticalprojectmanager.com)).

-Adrian



## **How do you notice you are stuck?**

- You spend a lot of time on one task or problem without producing any results.
- You just keep looking at a blank screen for hours.
- You feel the pressure to deliver rise inside you.
- You waste a lot of time doing unimportant stuff (sorting your inbox, stacking paper, watering the flowers etc.); then you feel guilty for not tackling the hard work.
- You have trouble leaving your work behind. Your mind keeps going back to the “thing” you need to solve.

*We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.*

Albert Einstein



## #1: If an endeavor feels too big, break it into pieces

**When to use it:** When you're overwhelmed by a task because it seems so big that you don't know where to start. You muddle around, start one thing and give up then try the next tactic only to give up again.

**What you have to do:** Break down the big task into small actionable pieces.

Example: Organize status meeting with management

Steps:

- Make a list of all conference rooms
- Check which room is available
- Write the invitation letter for the email
- Create a set of slides
- Send out email to managers

These seems a lot more doable, doesn't it?

What's even better: Once you define the individual steps, you can start delegating. For example, you could ask your intern to find out which meeting rooms are available.



## #2: Don't know what to focus on? Formulate a good question that defines the core problem

**When to use it:** Very useful at the start of the project when you are not sure what you should focus your attention on. Helpful also during the project when major issues arise.

The point here is to define the problem precisely and turn it into a question that – once answered thoroughly – will give you a solution to your problem. It directs your attention on the one thing that really matters and gives you confidence to ignore everything else.

As it is said, to ask the right question is already half the solution of a problem.

**Your action:**

1. Take some time to define the problem very clearly.
2. Turn the problem into a question
3. Try to answer that question. Involve other people if needed.

*Example:*

Your project just went through a crisis and it's likely getting delayed.

A good question would be: What non-essential activities can we skip or postpone in order to get back in line with our time schedule?



## #3: Don't feel like doing it now? Rearrange your tasks

**When to use it:** When you have trouble completing your work because you are just not in the right mood.

For example, you want to write a nice Christmas letter to your family, but you are unable to find the right words. You would rather want to clean the house and do some physically demanding work. Well, then do it!

We all go through different mental stages as the day passes on. The key is to arrange your work in a day such that it makes best use of your mental capacity.

Personally, I have trouble with writing in the morning. So, instead of beating myself up for not producing any content, I just start the day with more mechanical work (checking email, checking Website stats etc.).

### **Your action:**

1. Create a list with all your work
2. Classify your work by type (creative, mechanical, social etc.)
3. Ask yourself what type of work you usually get stuck with
4. Reschedule your work



Try this for a few days and see if you feel more in control of things.

## **#4: If you're running out of good ideas, talk to someone else**

**When to use it:** You're in a negative spiral and only see problems. You have ran out of good ideas on how to continue with your project.

**Your action:**

1. Choose a person from your network that you really trust, ideally someone who is not in the same field of work.
2. Meet up and let the other person know what you are working on and what is it that you struggle with.

You will be surprised how much such a 1-on-1 conversation can help.

Not only will you get new ideas to solve your issues, but you'll also understand better what kind of situations lead you into deadlock. Maybe you can avoid these kind of situations next time.



## #5: For the perfectionists: Take the 2<sup>nd</sup> best option

**When to use it:** You are spending an extraordinary amount of time on one task without making any progress. Particularly when doing non-essential or administrative work (e.g. formatting your Powerpoint slides, preparing a speech).

**Your action:**

1. Instead of trying to get your “thing” perfect, ask yourself what features you can leave out and still produce a good enough result.
2. Give yourself a time limit and complete the task.

## #6: Take a walk outside if you have to make a big decision

**When to use it:** When you are stuck with demanding conceptual work (writing a thesis, developing code etc.). Many Nobel prize winners had their magic insight while taking a walk outside.

It also helps a lot when you have been confronted with a new problem which renders all your previous plans invalid.

When you have to make a major decision.





## Your action:

1. After you have spent some time thinking through a particular problem, shut off your computer and leave your desk.
2. Take a long walk outside in a quiet surrounding (along the riverside or on the beach, hike on a mountain etc.)

## **#7: If you don't know where to start: What is ONE thing you could do?**

### When to use it:

- When working on big projects.
- When you know what needs to be accomplished, but you're trying to figure out *how* to get there (choosing between alternatives): Should you create a proposal first and send it to your team, or should you ask for input by email and then create a proposal, or should you organize a common meeting or ... ?

### Your action:

1. List all possible options
2. Pick one option and go for it. If you later discover it wasn't the best choice, you can still execute option B.



## **#8: If you are overwhelmed by negative feelings: Write down all your worries**

Very often, writing down your thoughts on paper can bring more clarity.

### **When to use it:**

- When you are overwhelmed by a situation, but you are unable to name the reason for your worries.
- There is no tangible issue but still, there is this nagging feeling inside of you telling you something is not right.

### **Your action:**

1. Take a piece of paper and write down all your concerns, worries and problems.
2. Look at what you put down. Then ask yourself these questions:
  - a. Which of the problems are real and which ones are made up?
  - b. Which of the problems can you solve right away?
  - c. How could you solve the other issues? Who can help you?

### **Example:**

*Situation: You are totally stressed with your current project. You feel like the team is not marching in the same direction as you. On top of that, you are falling behind on the extra work your boss has given you. You feel like a failure.*

*Write down your thoughts:*



I feel like I am not doing my job right. (*You are feeling this. But is this a fact?*)

I feel like people think I'm not in control of things. (*Do they have valid reasons to believe so? Maybe it's just a lack of self-confidence.* )

Some people in the team are making my life very difficult. They never deliver on time. If they do, results are mostly of poor quality and need a lot of review. Actually, it's one person which is causing most issues: <NAME OF PERSON>. I'm gonna talk to his manager! (*great!*)

I am not delivering on the work to my boss as expected. Honestly, I feel most of the work is rather unimportant compared to the project I'm managing at the moment.

Maybe my boss doesn't know how much time I spend on the project (*great insight!*). I should go talk to him. He will probably understand if some work is taken off my list (*Excellent! Your boss can only help you if you let him know you're having a bit of a struggle.*)