

75 SIMPLE WAYS TO SIMPLIFY

INSPIRATION TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE AND LIFESTYLE



Oh, how easy it would be if all you had to do to simplify your life was eliminate, toss out, and throw away the stuff you didn't want or need and keep the rest.

Essentially, that's one way to simplicity. But simplifying also means reducing the complexity of life by rejecting, on some level, the busy, materialistic, super-sized culture we are all caught up in.

Simplicity . . . simplicity . . . simplicity!

I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand.

Instead of a million, count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail.

—Henry David Thoreau

So, how can you simplify in this age of excess and want?

Here is a somewhat comprehensive list, covering just about every situation that might offer inspiration to help you find your way. The list is long. If you find it overwhelming, read a little at a time. Be kind to yourself. Highlight the most doable items that pertain to you and your goals. Taking small steps will get you where you want to be.

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1. **Make a short list.** List the 4-6 most important things in your life. What do you love and value most? What is essential in your life? What do you love to do? My list is simple:

family and pets
my work
home and garden
traveling
eating well
watching movies
reading

There are other things I could list, but those on my short list encompass just about everyone and everything I love in one way or another. Your list will be different. Simplifying starts with determining what your priorities are so you can make room in your life for those important things.

2. **Create a simplicity statement.** What would be the perfect simple life for you? Write it out. Evaluate what you've written to see how the priorities on your short list fit into the simple life you envision for yourself.
3. **Evaluate your time.** How do you spend your day? What do you do from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep? Make a list of the things you do and evaluate whether these things are in line with your priorities. If not, eliminate the things that aren't and focus on what's important. Redesign your day, if necessary.
4. **Evaluate your commitments.** Look at everything you do. Everything—from home to work to civic duties to activities to hobbies to side businesses to other projects. List which 4-5 commitments are most important to you. Is there something you dread doing . . . something you do every day, week, or month that you don't really want to do . . . something that takes up time, but doesn't give you much value? Weed it out. Drop the commitment. Call or send an email and tell the appropriate person or people that you just don't have the time.
5. **Tackle your To Do list.** Everyone has a list of things they need or want to do. Take a look at your list. If it's more than ten items long, decide which items can be eliminated, delegated, automated, outsourced, or ignored. Shorten the list. Then start scratching items off as you do them. Try doing one thing a day or week.

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6. **Single-task.** Multi-tasking is complicated, stressful, and generally less productive. Instead of multi-tasking, do one thing at a time. Remove all distractions and resist any urge to switch tasks while you're in the middle of doing something. Stick to the one task at hand until you're finished with it. Take one task at a time . . . finish the task . . . and move on to the next.
7. **Simplify tasks.** When days are made up of an endless stream of tasks, focus on those that are essential and eliminate the rest—either automate, delegate, outsource, or hire help.
8. **Adopt changes gradually.** If you adopt one small change at a time, you can make major changes over the long-term without the changes seeming difficult at all. Make one small change, and soon it becomes the norm for you. Then make another, and that becomes the norm. Each step seems small, but they can add up to real progress over the months.
9. **Establish routines.** Create morning and evening rituals. Delegate certain days for certain chores. Choose an order to do tasks—for example, check email, Facebook, and Twitter, in that order twice a day—and stick to the routine. Routines keep things simple.
10. **Start your day with peace.** When you first rise, do something that is calming and peaceful. It might be having a quiet cup of coffee, watching the sunrise, meditating, yoga, running or walking, reading your email, or whatever works well for you. It can be 10 minutes or an hour, but find some peace in the morning and use it to begin your entire day.
11. **Give yourself space.** Leave space around things in your day. Whether they are appointments or tasks you need to do, do not stack things back-to-back. Leave a little space in between. It will help make your day much more relaxed.
12. **Learn to say no.** This is key to simplifying. If you can't say no, you will always take on too much.
13. **Deflect all requests for a week.** If you are feeling overwhelmed, make the decision that you will not say “yes” to any new requests this week. If you get a new request, politely decline. If it's a request you can't decline, tell them you'll get to it next week because you have some projects you need to finish this week. Then, the next week, take on the new requests in the order in which they were received.

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14. **Go schedule-less.** If you've been over-stuffing your schedule, try setting a new policy where you don't schedule any appointments at all. This will not work for people who have mandatory meetings; but if you control your schedule, you can tell people, "I'm sorry, I don't make appointments anymore. Call me on that day, and we'll see how things are going." Leave your days wide open.
15. **Limit your communications.** Our lives these days are filled with a vast overflow of communications—email, IM, cell phones, snail mail, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, forums, and more. It can take up your whole day if you let it. Instead, put a limit on your communications. For instance, only do email at certain times during the day for a certain number of minutes. Only do IM once a day for a limited amount of time. Limit phone calls, too, and any other communications. Set up a schedule (or routine) and stick to it.
16. **Create a no-distractions zone.** We all need a quiet place to work where we can work undisturbed. You could also schedule a time for this distraction-free zone, for example, when others in the house are sleeping.
17. **Clear your desk.** It's such a simple thing to do. Your desk should have your computer, an inbox, a notepad, maybe a family photo, and not much more. Put everything you receive in your inbox and, at least once a day, process the paperwork. Process papers from top to bottom, one item at a time. Do not defer decisions on anything; deal with them immediately and quickly. Toss out or shred any papers you don't need.
18. **Clear out your email inbox.** This has the same psychological effect as a clear desk. you have 50 or fewer emails in your inbox, you can process them all in one day. If you have hundreds, you should put them in a temporary folder and do 20-50 per day. Process email top to bottom, one at a time, deciding and disposing of each one immediately. Your choices are to respond, delete, archive, or file in the temporary folder for processing later. Process each email until your inbox is empty. Then to maintain a clear email inbox, each time you check your email, process it to empty.
19. **Limit your email.** Send only five emails a day. Prioritize and pick the five most important emails and respond to them. That's it. Delay or delete the rest. While some people will not get an immediate response, you will come to realize that you don't have to respond to every email—people will make do and understand. Also, limit each of your emails to five sentences or fewer. This forces you to keep your

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- emails brief and to the point. It limits the amount of time you spend doing email and forces you to decide what's important in each email.
20. **Simplify your computing life.** Take a day to clean up your hard drive. If you are a digital packrat, declutter and organize your folders and files. If you have too many files and too much disorganization, consider online computing.
 21. **Simplify your online life.** Set limits on how much time you spend online. If you are active on Facebook, Twitter, or other social groups, you may be experiencing a lot of stress trying to keep up with them all. Establish a routine and limit the time you spend on each social site. If you're not enjoying yourself, drop the sites like a bad habit.
 22. **Create a simple filing system.** Stacking papers on your desk just doesn't work. Your filing system doesn't have to be complicated to be useful. Keeping things in order will make paying bills and other tasks easier.
 23. **Limit your media consumption.** TV, radio, Internet, magazines, and other media can come to consume our lives. Don't let it. Simplify your life and your information consumption by limiting the amount of time you spend on it.
 24. **Go media free.** If you feel your life is filled with an information overload, and you find little time to do the things you love to do, try a media fast. Consider eliminating all media from your life, at least temporarily. This includes cable TV, DVDs, newspapers and magazines, Internet news and the like. Don't eliminate the things you love—for example, I would never eliminate watching movies—but eliminate everything else. You can go media free for a week to see if it improves your life. If it does, consider extending it for longer.
 25. **Limit your information flow.** If you currently have tons of emails coming in, find ways to reduce the influx—unsubscribe to mailing lists, ask people to stop sending joke or chain emails (or block them from your inbox), automatically filter things you don't really need to read. Do you read a lot of blog feeds? Unsubscribe to those that don't give you value. Do you read a lot of news? Pick one news source instead of five.
 26. **Reduce your consumption of advertising.** Advertising is designed to make us want things, and it works. Find ways to reduce your exposure of advertising, whether it's in print, online, broadcast, or elsewhere. Avoid magazines that contain

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heavy ad content. Leave the room or turn down the volume when a commercial comes on the television. Subject yourself to less advertising—you'll want less.

27. **Limit your buying habits.** If you are a slave to materialism and consumerism, escape it. Buy less. Buying less will mean less spending, less debt, less stuff, less clutter. If you want to buy something, add it to a list and mark the date it was added. After 30 days, if you still want it, buy it. This doesn't apply to necessities like groceries; but the 30-day rule will help you distinguish between needs and wants, a great skill for simplifying.
28. **Go for quality, not quantity.** Instead of having a ton of stuff in your life, try for fewer, fabulous possessions. Make them things you really love that will last for a long time.
29. **One in, two out.** When you bring something into your house, get rid of two things.
30. **Learn to live frugally.** Buy less, want less, and leave less of a footprint on the earth. This is directly related to simplicity.
31. **Learn what "enough" is.** Our materialistic society today is about getting more and more with no end in sight. Sure, you can get the latest gadget, more clothes and shoes, more stuff. But when will you have enough? Most people don't know, and thus they keep buying more. It's a never-ending cycle. Get off the cycle by figuring out how much is enough. And then stop when you get there.
32. **Declutter before organizing.** Many people make the mistake of trying to organize a cluttered desk, filing cabinet, closet, or drawer. It's not only hard to do, it keeps things complicated. Simplify the process by getting rid of as much stuff as possible before trying to organize. If you declutter enough, you won't need to organize at all.
33. **Three-box decluttering.** If you're trying to declutter, use three boxes to quickly sort through everything. Go through each shelf, drawer, or flat surface at once, putting things into separate boxes: Trash, Donate, Maybe. The first two boxes are obvious. The Maybe box is for stuff you're not too sure whether you want to keep or not. You can store this box for a few months and decide later what to do. Put everything else—the stuff you love, want, need, and use—back neatly.

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34. **Purge your stuff.** There is tons of clutter in our lives. Pick out only the most important things, the stuff you use and love. Get rid of the rest. Right now. Trash it, or get boxes for the stuff you want to donate. Devote a weekend to purging. You will feel terrific. If you start with big items, you'll simplify your life quickly and in a big way.
35. **Edit your rooms.** Do one room at a time. Go around the room and eliminate the unnecessary. Act like a newspaper editor—try to leave only the most-important minimum and delete everything else. Once you've gone through the main parts of your rooms, tackle the closets and drawers. Do one drawer or shelf at a time. Put the stuff you love and use back in a neat and orderly manner.
36. **Have a place for everything.** Age-old advice, but it's the best advice on keeping things organized after you declutter.
37. **Limit storage space.** Are you a packrat? Do you tend to save everything? Do you have tons of stuff in storage, in closets, the attic, garage, or cabinets? The less storage you have, the less stuff you'll save. Having less will save you the stress of having to go through all that storage to find stuff, to organize stuff, to maintain stuff, to get rid of old stuff. Try using a table, with no drawers, as a desk in your office. It forces you to keep things simple.
38. **Simplify your wardrobe.** Is your closet bursting full? Are your dresser drawers so stuffed they won't close? Simplify your wardrobe by getting rid of anything you don't actually wear. Try creating a minimal wardrobe by focusing on simple styles and a few solid colors that all complement each other.
39. **Only wear a few colors.** This will simplify your wardrobe. Matching clothes will be easy, and you won't need a lot of clothes. Accent pieces, like scarves and ties, can pick up other colors you like.
40. **Free up time.** Eliminate stuff you don't like to do. Cut back on things that waste your time. Find ways to do tasks efficiently. You can free up time by waking up earlier, watching less TV, eating lunch at your desk, disconnecting from the Internet, doing email only once today, or shutting off your phones.
41. **Do what you love.** Once you've freed up some time, be sure to spend that extra time doing things you love. Go back to your short list of 4-5 important things. Do those things, and nothing else.

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42. **Spend time with the people you love.** Again, the short list of 4-5 important things probably includes the people you love (if not, you may want to re-evaluate). Whether those people are a spouse, a partner, children, parents, other family, best friends, or whoever, find time to do things with them, talk to them, and connect with them.
43. **Spend time alone.** Free up time for yourself. Being alone is good for you. It might take practice getting used to the quiet and listening to your inner voice; but this quiet time is necessary for self-discovering and finding out what's important to you.
44. **Find inner simplicity.** Spending a little time with your spiritual self creates a peaceful simplicity. This could be time spent praying or communing with God . . . or time spent meditating, writing in your journal, walking through the woods. However you do it, working on your inner self is worth the time.
45. **Learn to decompress from stress.** No matter how much you simplify your life, you'll still have stress. Find ways to decompress it. Take a long, leisurely bath. Have a glass of wine. Read a book. Watch a movie. Whatever takes the edge off the day, do.
46. **Develop equanimity.** If every little thing that happens to you sends you into anger or stress, your life might never be simple. Learn to detach yourself, accept what is calmly, and be more at peace.
47. **Carry less stuff.** Are your pockets bulging? Is your purse loaded with stuff? Consider carrying only the essentials.
48. **Create a simple system for housework.** Delegate certain days to do certain chores . . . or establish a clean-as-you-go routine.
49. **Create a simple weekly dinner menu.** Decide a week's worth of easy-to-make dinners, set a specific dinner for each night of the week, and go grocery shopping for the ingredients. No need for complicated meals with a lot of ingredients—find recipes that can be prepared in 10-15 minutes (or less).
50. **Eat healthy.** It might not be obvious how eating healthy relates to simplicity, but think about the opposite: If you eat fatty, greasy, salty, sugary, fried foods all the time, you are sure to have higher medical needs over the long term. Imagine frequent doctor visits, hospitalization, going to the pharmacist, daily meds, getting

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therapy, having surgery, taking insulin shots . . . you get the picture. Being unhealthy is complicated. Eating healthy simplifies everything over the long term.

51. **Eat only seven things.** If you're trying to eat healthy, but are having a hard time navigating complicated diets, try this hack to simplify things—limit yourself to non-packaged foods. Eat only seven things: fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean protein, lean calcium, beans, nuts, and good fats. Eat nothing from a box.
52. **Eat slowly.** If you cram your food down your throat, you are not only missing out on the great taste of the food, but you're not eating healthy. Slow down to lose weight, improve digestion, and enjoy the pleasure of a good meal.
53. **Go paperless.** If you can do it, you will save time filing, save time searching for stuff, save space, simplify your office, and save a few trees to boot. First, insist that everything be sent via email. Then create a filing system on your hard drive that works for you. For those things that can only be sent via paper, scan and toss; but try to limit the scanning by requesting that things be sent electronically.
54. **Exercise.** This goes along the same lines as eating healthy as it simplifies your life in the long run. In addition, exercise helps burn off stress as well as calories and makes you feel better.
55. **Live life more deliberately.** We rush through the day, from one task to another, from one appointment to the next, until we collapse on the couch at the end of the day, exhausted. Instead, do everything you do slowly. Eat slower, drive slower, walk slower, shower slower, work slower. Do everything with ease, paying full attention to what you're doing. This isn't something you're going to master today, but you can start practicing.
56. **Drive slower.** Most people rush through traffic. It's stressful and dangerous. Slowing down is not only safer, but it saves gasoline . . . and can be incredibly peaceful. All you need is some good music or an interesting audio book.
57. **Try living without a car.** Walk, bike, or take public transportation. It reduces expenses and gives you time to think. Owning a car is complicated. There are car payments as well as other expenses—insurance, registration, safety inspections, maintenance, repairs, gas and more.
58. **Consider a smaller car.** Smaller cars are less expensive, use less gas, are easier and less expensive to maintain, and easier to park.

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59. **Consider a smaller home.** A smaller house will not only be less expensive, but easier to maintain.
60. **Make your house more minimalistic.** A minimalist house has what is necessary and not much else. It's also extremely peaceful . . . and easier to clean.
61. **Create an easy-to-maintain yard.** Gardening can be therapeutic; but if you find weeding or lawn mowing to be chores you can live without, hire someone to do it for you or put in landscaping that will eliminate the problems altogether.
62. **Find a creative outlet for self-expression.** Whether it's writing, poetry, painting, drawing, creating movies, designing websites, dance, skateboarding, whatever, we have a need for self-expression. Finding a way to do it will make your life much more fulfilling. Allow this to replace much of the busy-work you are eliminating from your life
63. **Limit yourself to one project.** Focus on one project at a time and put less important others on the back-burner. Try to get that one project done as quickly as possible, and then move on to the next one.
64. **Simplify your goals.** Instead of having half a dozen goals or more, simplify to one goal. It will reduce stress. You'll be able to focus on that one specific goal, and give it all of your energy which gives you a much better chance for success.
65. **Simplify your financial life.** Devote 15-20 minutes a week ensuring that your finances are in order. Go over your budget. Pay your bills. Just a small amount of time each week will greatly simplify your financial life, reduce headaches, and prevent any messes from occurring later.
66. **Pay bills online.** As much as possible, pay your bills online. If you can't pay electronically, have your bank send out a check to the vendor. Make payments automatic, so you don't need to worry about them.
67. **Pay all bills at the same time.** It often just takes a quick call to get a vendor or creditor to change the due date on a bill. If you can get all your bills to be due on, let's say, the 15th of the month, you can pay all your bills and be done with it. Plan around your paycheck or on a day best for you. It's worth it.

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68. **Fewer accounts.** Some people have complicated systems set up with lots of different accounts. Simplify. Keep one checking account and one or two savings accounts. If you're into diversified funds, let a broker handle your portfolio.
69. **Dump credit cards.** Multiple credit cards are a headache. Their interest rates are high, and they can easily slip you into debt. Simplify by just having one card and save it for times when you absolutely need it—while traveling, for example, or emergency purchases. Or have no credit cards and use cash as much as possible. Using cash is the simple way to soften your spending—you either have the money or don't. If you prefer using plastic, use a debit card. It's as good as cash.
70. **Automatic savings.** Every time you get a paycheck, have a scheduled transaction transfer a set amount from checking to savings.
71. **Learn to do nothing.** Doing nothing can be an art form, and it should be a part of every life.
72. **Be present.** These two words will make a huge difference in simplifying your life. Living here and now, in the moment, keeps you aware of life, of what is going on around you and within you.
73. **Take a periodic assessment.** Step back and take a look at your life in general. Reflect on what you want your life to be like, on what kind of progress you've made, on what needs to be done.
74. **Pause for a bit and read *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau.** It's a reflection of Thoreau's simple living in the woods on Walden Pond. You can download a copy at ourempytnest.com/free-downloads/
75. **Fill your day with simple pleasures.** Make a list of your favorite simple pleasures, and sprinkle them throughout your day.