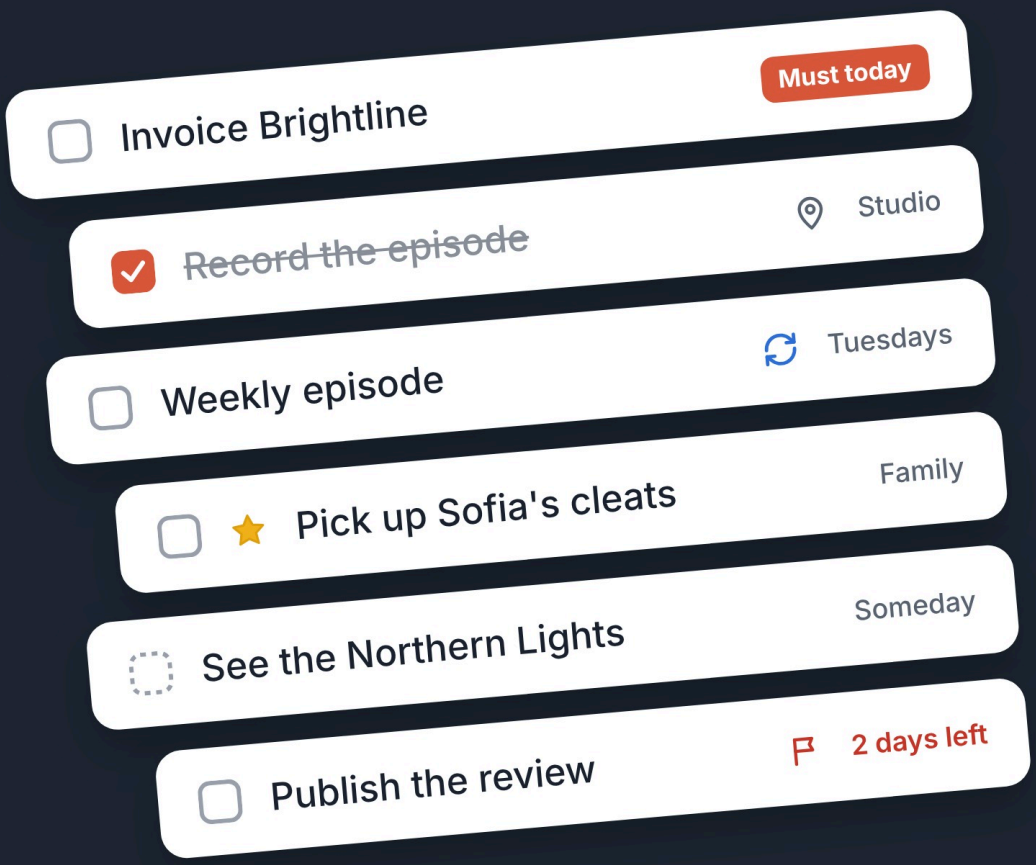
My Tasks, Your Way

Organizing work and life
with one simple app



Michael Lines

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Screenshots show My Tasks with fictional sample data. The MIT License covers the My Tasks software only, not this book.

For everyone juggling more than they can handle.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

— Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken” (1916)

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How to use this book

This isn't a manual. It's a week in the life of one busy person, and how he keeps it all from falling apart.

You'll meet Marcus Reyes in the first chapter. He runs a small business, works with a small team, and has a family that needs him at least as much as his work does. Each chapter picks up a moment from his week, something you'll probably recognize, and shows how he handles it with My Tasks. Then it steps back to look at why it works, and asks a few questions to help you shape the same idea to your own life.

You can read it from start to finish, following Marcus from Monday's flood of email to Friday's quiet review. Or you can jump straight to the chapter that matches what's bothering you most: too many things in your head, a deadline that keeps sneaking up, a team that's always waiting on you, a routine you keep having to rebuild.

This edition reflects My Tasks as of version 1.10.5. You can see which version you're using at the bottom of the sidebar in the app. My Tasks keeps improving, and this book will be updated to match as features are added or changed. If your version is newer than this edition's and something looks different, pick up the latest copy. It's free, and you'll always find the current edition at mytasks.fyi/book, as well as at major online book outlets.

You won't find step-by-step instructions here. Whenever you want to know exactly how to do something, each chapter points you to the right part of the Guide at mytasks.fyi/guide, which is kept up to date as My Tasks changes.

Marcus isn't you, and his setup won't be yours. That's the point. He uses the same features you have, in his own way, with his own

words for what matters. By the end, you'll have a good sense of how to do the same.

1. Meet Marcus

It's 6:40 on a Monday morning in Boulder, Colorado, and Marcus Reyes has already been awake for an hour.

He isn't up early by choice. Elena, his wife, left for a twelve-hour shift at the hospital at 6:15, and the house is quiet in the way that means the kids will be up any minute. Sofia, who's twelve, needs to be at school early for a soccer team photo. Leo, who's eight, has piano after school and hasn't practised since Thursday. Biscuit, their dog, is standing by the back door with the patience of someone who knows breakfast is late.

Marcus is standing at the kitchen counter with his phone, looking at his email. Three things have arrived overnight. The company sending him a new phone to review wants to know if he can publish a day earlier than planned. A sponsor has sent a contract that needs his signature by Friday. And Priya, who edits his show, has sent a rough cut of last week's episode and is waiting on his notes before she can finish it.

None of it is hard. All of it matters. And he hasn't had coffee yet.

Who Marcus is

Marcus is forty-one. For the last six years he's made a living reviewing new technology on *The Gadget Ledger*, a weekly podcast and video show he started in a spare bedroom and now runs as a small business. Every week there's one main review episode, plus a short one called *Quick Takes* for the things that don't need half an hour.

He doesn't do it alone. Three people work with him, all of them freelancers who also work for others:

- **Priya Shah** produces and edits the show. She's meticulous, works mostly from her home in Denver, and needs his raw recordings on time to keep her week on track.
- **Jordan Kim** handles social media, thumbnails and the short clips that bring new listeners in. Jordan needs to know what's coming before it comes.
- **Dana Okafor** sells the sponsorships that pay for everything, and handles the contracts that come with them.

At home, Marcus is a husband and a father first. Elena's shifts change from week to week, so the family's schedule changes with them. Some weeks Marcus does every school run; other weeks they trade off day by day. Sofia's club soccer means two practices a week and a game most Saturdays. Leo's piano lessons are on Mondays, and his first recital is coming up. And there's always something in the house that needs fixing.

Years of trying

Marcus has tried a lot of ways to keep it all straight.

When the show started, a paper notebook was enough. He'd write a list each morning and cross things off. That stopped working the week the show took off and the list ran to three pages.

After that came a string of apps, each one a little better at something and a little worse at something else. A simple to-do app kept his work tidy, but there was nowhere sensible for Sofia's soccer schedule, so family things went in a separate app he forgot to check. A project tool that Priya liked was great for the show's production, but it buried him in boards and notifications, and he never felt sure what he was supposed to do next. A popular list app let him add anything in seconds, but it never told him which of the hundred things on the list mattered today.

Each one fixed one problem and quietly created another. By the time Priya, Jordan and Dana were all regularly waiting on him, things had started to slip: a late cut, a missed sponsor read, a school form signed in the car outside the school.

Finding My Tasks

Marcus found My Tasks the way a lot of people find tools they end up loving: he was looking for something else.

What won him over wasn't one feature. It was that everything finally lived in one place, and that place worked the way he does. His show and his family sat side by side, but he could look at just one when he needed to. He could describe what mattered in his own words rather than someone else's. The routines he repeated every week could set themselves up. Projects that had to happen in order could move one step at a time. And every morning, he could open one list and see just what mattered today, with his calendar right above it.

It's free, it runs on his Mac and his iPhone, and his tasks stay in his own account, encrypted with a passphrase he chose.

What he wants

If you asked Marcus what he wants from all of this, he wouldn't say "productivity". He'd say something like this: "I want to stop carrying it all around in my head. I want to trust that nothing's falling through the cracks, so I can actually be present, whether I'm in the studio or at Sofia's game."

That's what the rest of this book is about. Not a system to follow, but one person's way of using a simple tool to keep a full life in order, and how you can borrow the parts that fit yours.

Your turn

- Where does your work live today, and where does the rest of your life live? Are they in the same place?
- What are the things you're carrying around in your head right now?
- When something slips, what's usually the reason: you forgot, you didn't know it was urgent, or someone was waiting on you without you realizing?

To get started with My Tasks, see Before you start *and* Install My Tasks *in the Guide.*

2. One place for everything

Back at the kitchen counter, Marcus does something he's learned to do without thinking. Before he answers anything, before he decides anything, he gets it out of his head.

The phone company's question goes into My Tasks: *Reply to Halcyon PR about the publish date.* The contract: *Sign the Nimbus contract.* Priya's rough cut: *Notes on last week's cut for Priya.* While he's at it, he adds the thing Sofia told him at dinner last night, *Sign Leo's field trip form*, and the noise the car's been making when it turns left.

It takes about a minute. He doesn't sort anything or pick dates. He just types each one and moves on. Then he puts the phone down, makes coffee and starts on breakfast.

The Inbox

Everything Marcus captures lands in one place, the Inbox. It's not a to-do list; it's a holding tray. Things sit there until he's decided what they are, where they belong and when he'll deal with them.

This turns out to be the single most useful habit he has. Before, every new thing arrived with a decision attached: is this urgent, which list does it go on, when will I do it? Making that decision at 6:40 in the morning, with a dog at the back door, meant he usually made it badly or not at all. Now capture and decision are two different moments. He captures as things happen and decides later, when he's sitting down with a clear head.

Capture from anywhere

Marcus captures in different ways depending on where he is.

At his desk, he uses Quick Entry, a small window he can bring up with a keystroke from anywhere in My Tasks. He types the thing, presses Return and he's back to what he was doing, often in the middle of a sentence. In the studio, between takes, he does the same on his phone. In the car, waiting outside the school, he types a quick line before he forgets.

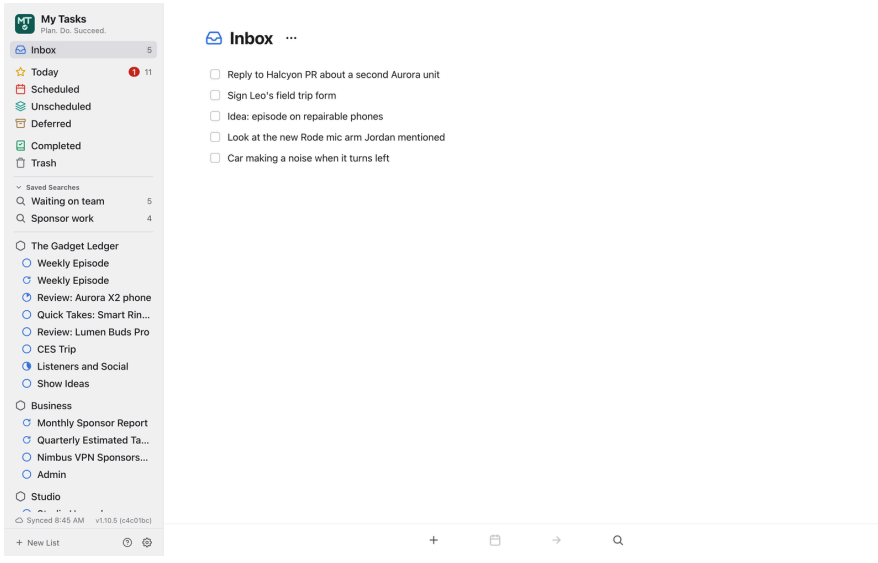
The rule he follows is simple: if it's going to take more than two minutes, or he can't do it right now, it goes in the Inbox. If it takes less than two minutes and he can do it now, he just does it.

Emptying the Inbox

Around 9:30, once the kids are at school and the dog's been walked, Marcus sits down at his desk with his second coffee and goes through the Inbox.

He takes each item in turn and asks himself a couple of questions. What is it, really? Where does it belong? Is there a date it has to happen by, or a day he wants to start it? The Halcyon reply goes into the Aurora X2 review project, for today. The Nimbus contract goes to the sponsorship project, with Friday as its deadline. Leo's form goes into Family, for this evening. The car goes into The Car, an ongoing project under Home, with no date until he can find a minute to call the garage. The idea for an episode about repairable phones goes into Show Ideas, set aside for some day when he's planning ahead.

It takes ten minutes, sometimes less. When he's done, the Inbox is empty, and everything that was rattling around his head this morning now has a home and, where it matters, a date.



Marcus's Inbox on a Monday morning.

Why it works

Capturing everything in one trusted place does two things. It frees Marcus from the low-level worry of trying to remember, which turns out to be exhausting even when he doesn't notice it. And it means that when he does sit down to decide, he's deciding about everything at once, not just the loudest thing.

The Inbox isn't meant to be a place things live. It's a doorway. Marcus empties it at least once a day, and he never lets it get so full that he stops trusting it.

Your turn

- Where do new things land for you today? Is there one place, or several?
- When something comes up at a bad moment, can you capture it in seconds and get back to what you were doing?
- How often would you realistically empty an Inbox: once a day, twice?

How to add tasks and use Quick Entry: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

3. Building his world

When Marcus first set up My Tasks, he made a mistake almost everyone makes. He started with a list.

Within a week it was eighty items long, and the sponsor contract sat between "buy dog food" and "rewire the studio lights". Everything was in one place, which was good. But it was one place with no shape, so every glance at it meant reading all eighty lines to find the five that mattered.

What fixed it was stepping back and asking a different question: not "what do I have to do?" but "what are the parts of my life?"

Areas: the parts of his life

Marcus settled on six areas, three for work and three for home:

- **The Gadget Ledger**: the show itself. Episodes, reviews, guests, the things that get made.
- **Business**: everything that keeps the lights on. Sponsors, invoices, taxes, paying Priya and Jordan.
- **Studio**: the gear and the room. New microphones, broken lights, backups.
- **Family**: Elena, Sofia, Leo and Biscuit. School, soccer, piano, birthdays, date nights.
- **Home**: the house. Bills, repairs, the basement he's been meaning to finish for two years.
- **Health and Fitness**: running, the dentist, the stretching he keeps promising himself he'll do.

An area never finishes. There's no day when "Family" is done. It's a part of his life he looks after, and it gives every task a sensible place to live.

Projects: some finish, some never do

Inside each area, Marcus keeps projects, and they come in two kinds.

Some have a finish line. *Review: Aurora X2 phone* is done when the review is published. *CES Trip* is done when he's back from Las Vegas with enough material for an episode. *Basement Office Remodel* is done when the studio has moved downstairs and recording no longer wakes Leo. These often have dates, and when the last task is ticked, the project is complete.

Others never finish, and that's fine. A project can just as easily be a lasting home for a stream of related things. *Show Ideas* is where every half-formed episode idea goes. *Admin*, under Business, holds the bank calls, renewals and paperwork that never stop coming. *The Car*, under Home, collects tire changes, oil changes and that noise it makes turning left. And the family's *Bucket List* holds the things the Reyes family want to do one day: see the Northern Lights, take Leo to hear a real orchestra, drive the Pacific Coast Highway with the windows down. Nobody expects those projects to be "done". They just need a place to live.

That's the real job projects do for Marcus: they keep his areas tidy. He tries not to leave loose tasks sitting straight in an area, because an area with forty loose tasks is just the old eighty-line list again. Almost everything belongs to a project, either one that finishes or one that collects. Open the Home area and he sees a handful of projects, each with a clear purpose, not a wall of tasks. He names the finishing kind for the outcome ("Studio Upgrade", not "studio stuff") and the ongoing kind for what it holds.

Headings: stages within a project

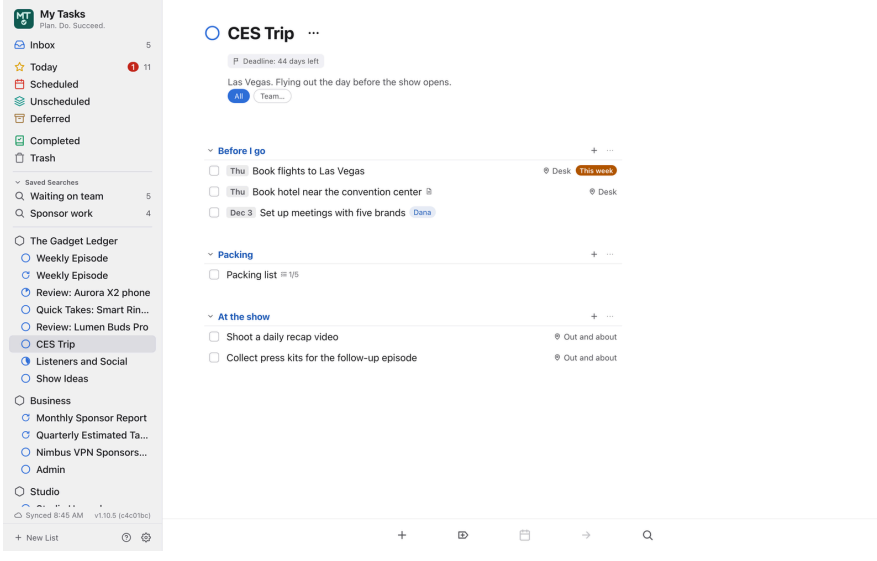
Some projects have natural stages. The CES trip is a good example: there's the planning he has to do weeks ahead, the packing the night before, and the work he does while he's at the show. Marcus splits the project into three headings: *Before I go*, *Packing* and *At the show*. Each task sits under the stage it belongs to.

It's a small thing, but it means that when he opens the project in December he sees the bookings he still has to make, not a jumble of flights, chargers and booth visits.

Checklists: the small steps inside a task

The packing list is one task, with a checklist inside it: laptop and both chargers, camera with two batteries and spare SD cards, the wireless mics and their windscreens, his press badge printout, and comfortable shoes. That last one he learned the hard way.

A checklist is for the little steps that don't deserve tasks of their own. It keeps the project tidy, and on the night before he flies, he can tick his way through the list as things go into the bag.

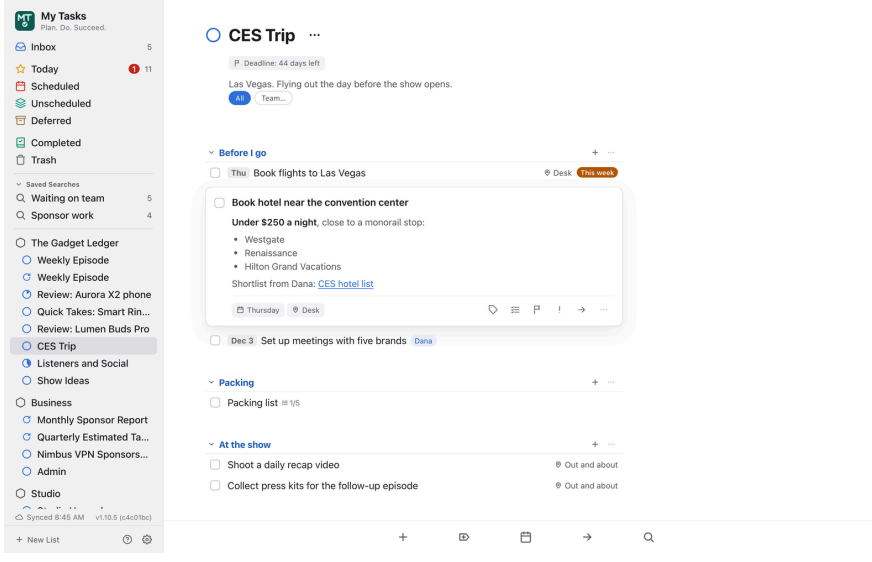


The sidebar with Marcus's six areas, and the CES Trip project with its headings and packing checklist.

Notes: the details that go with a task

Some tasks need more than a title. Booking the hotel comes with a shortlist from Dana, so Marcus keeps the details in the task's note: his budget in bold, the three hotels near a monorail stop as a list, and a link to Dana's hotel list that opens with a tap.

Notes take simple formatting: bold, italics, lists and links. It's enough to make a note easy to read at a glance, without turning a task into a document.



The hotel task's note, with bold text, a list and a link.

Why it works

Areas answer "where does this belong?" so quickly that emptying the Inbox becomes almost automatic. Projects, whether they finish or simply collect, keep each area down to a handful of lines and give every task an obvious home. Headings and checklists keep big projects readable without breaking them into dozens of tiny tasks.

Most importantly, the shape is his. Someone else might have one area called "Work" and five for home, or areas for each client, or for each course they're taking. There's no right answer, only the one that matches how you think about your own life.

Your turn

- What are the four to eight parts of your life that never really finish?
- What outcomes are you working towards right now, and what ongoing collections (ideas, admin, the car, a bucket list) deserve a

project of their own?

- Is there a project that has clear stages, or a list of small steps you repeat?

How to create areas, projects, headings, checklists and notes: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

4. Dates that tell the truth

The Aurora X2 arrived in a plain box with a one-page letter on top. The letter mattered more than the phone. It said the review could not be published before 7 a.m. Mountain time on a particular Tuesday, nine days away, and not a minute earlier. In Marcus's world that's called an embargo, and breaking one is the quickest way to stop getting review units.

It also meant something else: he couldn't start writing the review until he'd lived with the phone for a week. So the review had two dates that mattered, and they meant completely different things.

Two kinds of date

For years, Marcus gave everything a single date, usually a hopeful one. "Do by Thursday" could mean "Thursday is when I'll get to it" or "Thursday is when it's too late", and he rarely knew which when he looked at it again on Wednesday.

My Tasks keeps the two apart.

A **start date** is when he plans to begin, or the earliest day it makes sense to think about it. Until that day comes, the task waits out of sight. When the day arrives, it moves into Today on its own.

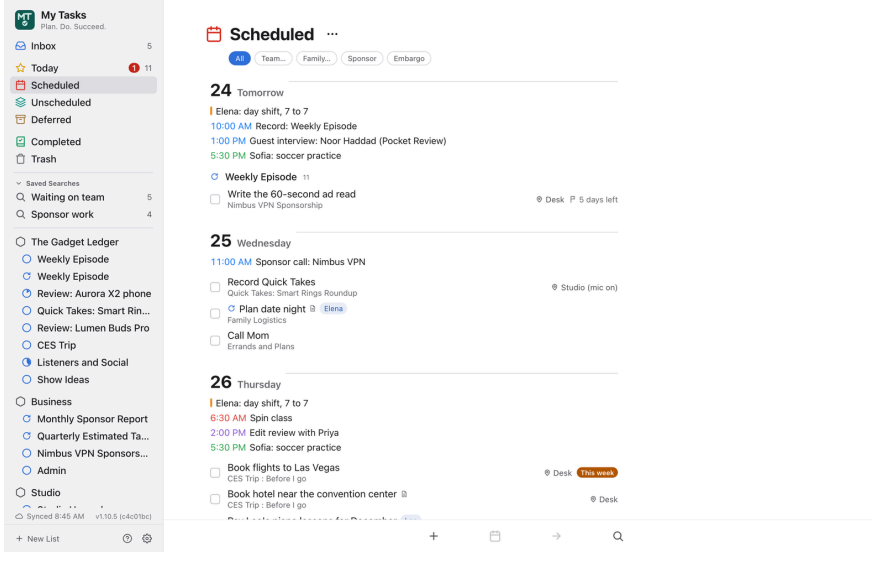
A **deadline** is when it really has to be done. It shows how many days are left, quietly at first and then in red when the day arrives. On the deadline day, if the task isn't already in Today, it moves there.

The Aurora review got the embargo as its deadline. The first task, using the phone as his only phone for seven days, started today. The script would start next week, once he'd lived with it. He didn't have to remember any of that; the dates did.

Four places a task can wait

Once Marcus started using both kinds of date honestly, he found his tasks sorted themselves into four lists, each with a clear meaning.

- **Today** is what he's actually doing today. Not what he'd like to do, and not everything that's due this month: today.
- **Scheduled** is everything with a start date in the future. It's the calendar of his tasks: the Nimbus ad read that starts tomorrow, the CES bookings on Monday, the oil change in a few weeks.
- **Unscheduled** is everything open that has no date. These are tasks he could do any time, and they wait there until he chooses them.
- **Deferred** is for things he's not going to think about for now: "Start a newsletter", "Learn colour grading", the family's Bucket List. They're not forgotten, just set aside, so they don't crowd the lists he looks at every day.



Scheduled for the coming week, with tasks and calendar events by day.

Keeping Today honest

The hardest habit for Marcus to learn was leaving things out of Today. Early on, every task felt urgent, so everything got today's date, and Today became the same eighty-line list he'd escaped from.

Now he asks one question when he's emptying the Inbox: *will I really do this today*? If not, he gives it the day he will start it, or no date at all. A task he doesn't finish rolls over into tomorrow's Today by itself, so nothing is lost. But a Today list he can actually finish is worth more to him than one that looks impressive at 9 a.m. and depressing at 6 p.m.

Dates in plain words

One small thing made dates much less of a chore: he can just type them. "Tom" for tomorrow, "fri" for the coming Friday, "in 2 weeks", "jan 6". The Nimbus ad read gets "tom" as its start and "wed" as its deadline, in about three seconds.

Why it works

Two dates that mean two different things let a task appear when it's useful and warn him before it's too late, without him holding either in his head. And four lists, each with one clear meaning, mean he always knows where to look: Today for now, Scheduled for later, Unscheduled for any time, Deferred for some day.

Your turn

- Think of three things on your mind right now. For each, is there a day you'd start it, a day it must be done, both, or neither?
- What's one thing you could set aside as Deferred and stop worrying about this week?
- How many things can you really do in a day? What would your Today look like if it held only those?

How start dates, deadlines and typed dates work: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

5. Priorities in his own words

By 10 a.m. on Monday, Marcus has eleven things in Today. That's a normal day. The question isn't how to fit them all in; it's which ones can't wait.

The Brightline invoice is due today, and if it goes out late, so does the payment. The Aurora phone test has to happen today or the review slips past the embargo. Calling the bank matters this week, but not this morning. The listener mailbag can be done whenever he's got twenty minutes and not much energy. And Priya's rough cut isn't really his task at all; he's waiting on her.

Five levels, his own words

My Tasks gives every task an optional priority from P1 to P5. On their own, "P1" and "P3" don't mean much, so Marcus renamed them to say exactly what they mean to him:

Level	Marcus calls it	What it means
P1	Must today	If this doesn't happen today, something breaks.
P2	This week	Important, and it needs to be done in the next few days.
P3	Soon	Worth doing, no real pressure yet.
P4	Nice to have	If there's time.
P5	Waiting on someone	Not his move. Someone else has it.

That last one surprised people when he showed them. Most priority systems run from most to least important. But Marcus found the most useful thing a priority could tell him, after "must today", was "this one isn't yours right now". Seeing it labelled stops him from picking it up and staring at it.

Someone else would choose completely different words. A manager might use “Me”, “Team”, “Boss”, “Client”, “Later”. A student might use “Due tomorrow”, “This week”, “Exam”, “Reading”, “Optional”. That’s the point: the labels describe your work, not someone else’s theory of it.

A little help from the app

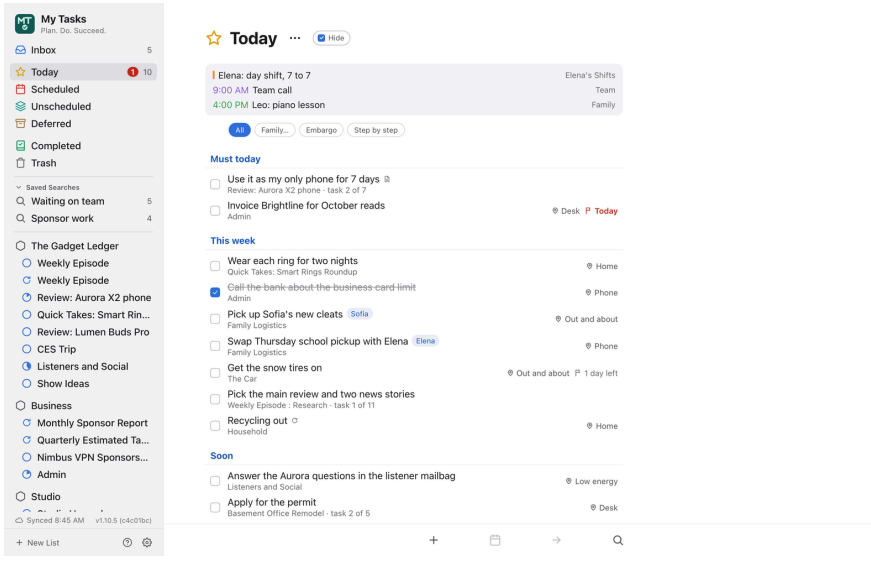
Two small rules do some of the sorting for him.

When a task with a deadline of today or earlier is in Today and he hasn’t given it a priority, My Tasks marks it P1, *Must today*. And when he puts a task into Today without choosing a priority, it gets P2, *This week*, as a sensible default. Either rule can be switched off, and neither ever overrides a priority he’s chosen himself.

Marcus keeps both on. Most days they mean he only has to think about priority for the handful of tasks that are truly different.

Seeing the day by priority

When the day feels crowded, Marcus groups Today by priority. Instead of one long list, he sees the *Must today* tasks first, then *This week*, *Soon*, and so on down to the things he’s waiting on. He starts at the top and works down. If he only gets through the first group, the day was still a success.



Today grouped by Marcus's priorities.

Why it works

A priority he has to translate in his head ("P2… is that urgent or important?") is a priority he'll stop using. A label in his own words reads instantly, even at a glance on his phone between soccer drop-offs. And because the app fills in the obvious cases, he only spends attention on the ones that need it.

Your turn

- If you had five words for how much things matter to you, what would they be?
- Is there a kind of task you keep looking at that isn't really yours to do right now?
- On a crowded day, what's the one group you'd want to see first?

How to set priorities, rename the levels and turn the automatic rules on or off: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

6. Contexts for how he works

At 3:20 on Monday afternoon, Marcus is parked outside Pearl Street Music. Leo's piano lesson started five minutes ago and runs for forty-five minutes. He has his phone, no laptop and no microphone.

A year ago he'd have spent those forty minutes scrolling. Now he opens Today, grouped by context, and looks at one group: *Phone*. There are two calls waiting, the bank about the business card limit, and Elena, on her break, about swapping Thursday's school pickup. Both done before Leo walks out with his music folder.

Where and how, not what

Priorities tell Marcus how much something matters. Contexts tell him where he can do it, or what he needs to do it. They're the answer to a very practical question: *given where I am and what I've got right now, what can I actually get done?*

My Tasks lets him define his own contexts, and give each task at most one. After some trial and error, Marcus settled on six:

- **Studio (mic on)**: anything that needs a microphone. Recording, ad reads, pickups for fixes.
- **Desk**: anything that needs his laptop and some focus. Scripts, invoices, show notes.
- **Phone**: calls, and the quick messages that are easier to say than to type.
- **Out and about**: errands. Snow tires, new cleats for Sofia, the hardware store.
- **Home**: things he can only do in the house. The furnace filter, recycling night.

- **Low energy**: the tasks that don't need his best brain. The listener mailbag, stretching, tidying up comments.

That last one isn't a place at all, and it's his favourite. At 4 p.m. on a Friday, after a long week, he can still clear four or five *Low energy* tasks and feel like he finished the week on his feet.

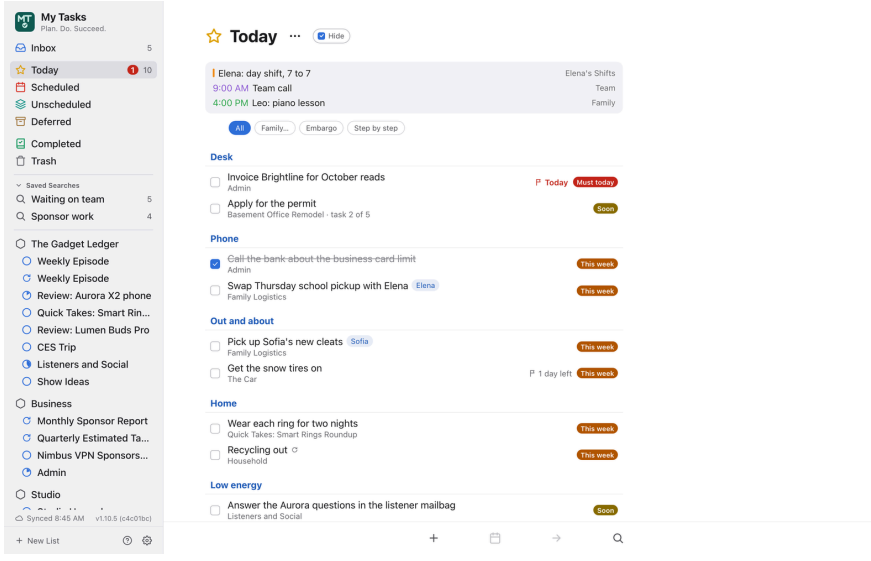
Batching

The real gain from contexts is doing similar things together. Recording is the clearest example. Setting up the studio, warming up his voice and checking levels takes fifteen minutes. So rather than recording an ad read on Monday, a pickup on Wednesday and Quick Takes on Thursday, he looks at *Studio (mic on)* once or twice a week and records everything in it in one session.

The same goes for errands. One drive past the tire shop, the sports store and the pharmacy beats three separate trips.

Seeing the day by context

Marcus groups Today by context when he's moving around: between school runs, on a day split between the studio and errands, or when the kids are home and his time comes in small pieces. Each group is a ready-made answer to "what can I do here?"



Today grouped by Marcus's contexts.

On a focused desk day, he switches back to priorities. Neither view is the right one; they're two ways of looking at the same day.

Why it works

Without contexts, a list makes you check every item against where you are. With them, that question is already answered. It turns small gaps in the day, like a piano lesson, a wait at the dentist or ten minutes before a call, into time that gets things done.

Your turn

- Where do you spend your days, and what tools do you need for different kinds of work?
- Is there a kind of task you'd be glad to batch, like calls, errands or recording?
- What would your "Low energy" list hold?

How to add contexts and group Today by them: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

7. Working with a small team

Every Monday at 9 a.m., Marcus, Priya, Jordan and Dana get on a video call for half an hour. It used to be the most stressful thirty minutes of his week.

The call would start with a round of "where are we on…", and Marcus would realize, mid-sentence, that he had no idea. Had Dana heard back from Nimbus? Was Jordan waiting on him for clip timestamps, or the other way round? He'd scroll through email trying to piece it together while three people watched him do it.

Now he spends two minutes before the call looking at one list, and the call is about what's next instead of what's missing.

People as tags

Marcus tags tasks with the people they involve. His tags are nested: under *Team* sit *Priya*, *Jordan* and *Dana*, and under *Family* sit *Elena*, *Sofia* and *Leo*. A task about Priya's cut gets *Priya*; buying Sofia's cleats gets *Sofia*.

Because the tags are nested, he can look at one person or the whole group. Filter by *Priya* and he sees everything involving her. Filter by *Team* and he sees everything involving any of them. Before the Monday call, that second view is the one he wants. Before a one-to-one with Jordan, it's the first.

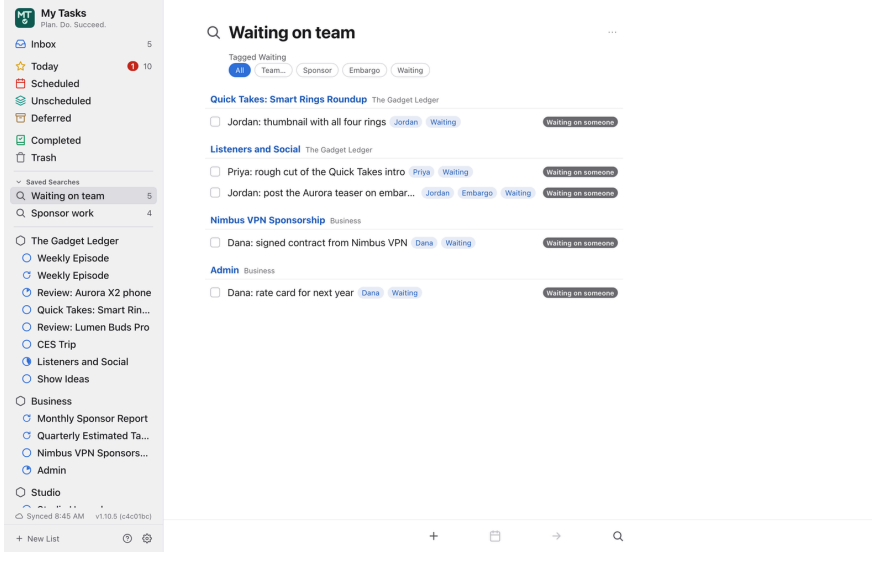
Tags work across everything. A task tagged *Priya* can live in the Weekly Episode, the Aurora review or Admin; the tag finds it wherever it is.

Waiting on someone

The tasks that used to trip Marcus up weren't his. They were things he was waiting for: Priya's rough cut, Dana's signed contract, Jordan's thumbnail. They lived in his head as a vague unease, and they surfaced only when someone asked.

Now, whenever he hands something off, he makes a task for it. He writes it with the person's name first, *Dana: signed contract from Nimbus VPN*, gives it his *Waiting on someone* priority, and adds a *Waiting* tag.

Then he made a saved search: every task tagged *Waiting*, grouped by area and project. It sits in the sidebar as *Waiting on team*, with a count beside it, so a glance tells him how many things are out with other people. That's the list he opens before the Monday call.



The Waiting on team saved search.

When something comes back, he ticks it off. When something's been sitting there too long, he knows exactly who to ask, and about what.

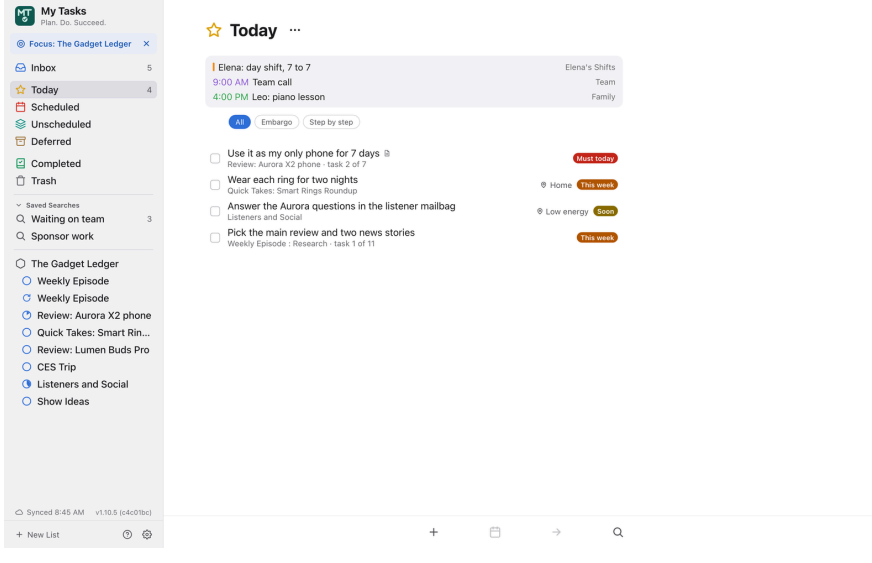
Tagging in a hurry

Marcus tags a lot of tasks, so he gave his most-used tags keyboard shortcuts. Select a few tasks and one keystroke tags them all *Priya*; another filters the list to just her. It sounds small, but it's the difference between tagging being a chore and being something he does without thinking.

One area at a time

Some mornings, Marcus needs to be all work. The kids are at school, Elena's on shift, and the studio's booked from ten. On those days he focuses on The Gadget Ledger.

While he's focused, every list, count and search in My Tasks shows only that area. Today drops from eleven tasks to four. The family's errands, the furnace filter and the snow tires don't disappear; they're just out of sight until he leaves focus. At 3 p.m., when it's time for school pickup, he leaves focus, and the whole day comes back.



Today while focused on The Gadget Ledger.

Why it works

People as tags let him see his work through each relationship, not just each project. A clear *Waiting* list turns "I think someone's waiting on something" into a list he can check in thirty seconds. And focus lets him give one part of his life his full attention without losing track of the rest.

Your turn

- Who do you work with or care for often enough that seeing "everything about them" would help?
- What are you waiting on right now that only lives in your head?
- Is there a part of your day when you'd like to see only one area of your life?

How to use nested tags, tag shortcuts, saved searches and focus: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

8. Work that has an order

The Aurora X2 review has seven steps, and they only make sense in one order. Unbox and photograph the phone. Use it as his only phone for seven days. Run the camera and battery tests. Write the script. Record. Send it to Priya to edit. Publish the moment the embargo lifts.

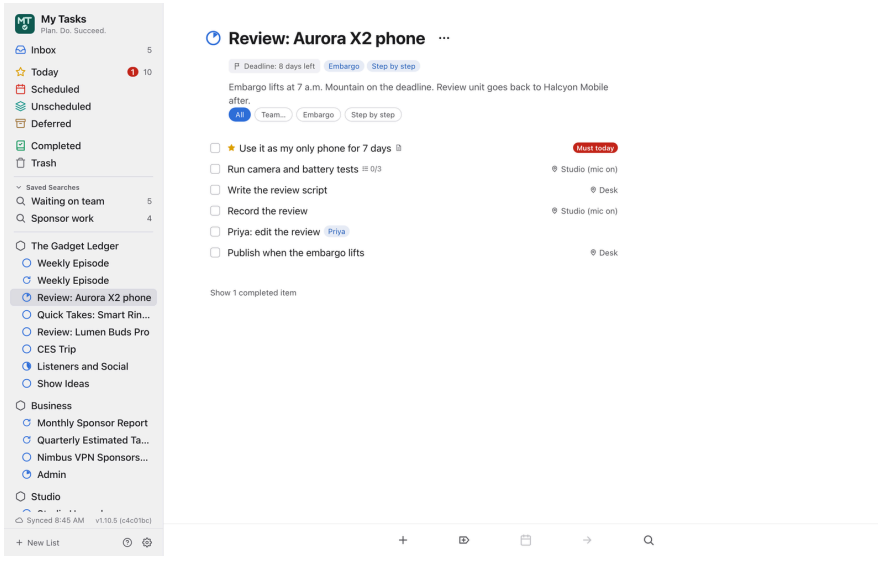
When Marcus used to put all seven in Today, the list told him to write the script on the same morning it told him to unbox the phone. It wasn't wrong, exactly; every step needed doing. It just wasn't useful. Six of the seven were things he couldn't do yet, and they crowded out the one he could.

One step at a time

Some projects are sequential: each step waits for the one before. My Tasks lets Marcus mark a project that way with a tag. He uses one called *Step by step*. Any project carrying it keeps just one task in Today: the next one.

When he unboxed the Aurora and ticked it off, the next step, *Use it as my only phone for 7 days*, moved into Today by itself. When that's done, the camera and battery tests will move in. The rest of the review waits quietly in the project, not cluttering his day.

In Today, the task shows where it sits: *Review: Aurora X2 phone · task 2 of 7*. It's a small line, but on a busy morning it tells him at a glance that the review is moving and how far there is to go.



The Aurora X2 review as a sequential project.

A priority and a context that come with it

The *Step by step* tag carries its own settings. When a step moves into Today, it can arrive with a priority and a context already set. Marcus has his tag give each step *This week*. Another person might have a tag called *Errands in order* that gives each step the *Out and about* context.

If he ever unticks a step by mistake, the step it brought into Today goes back where it was, so nothing gets out of order.

At home, too

The basement is the same story at a much slower pace. Get three quotes. Apply for the permit. Book the electrician. Drywall and paint. Move the studio downstairs. It's been "in progress" for two years, mostly because it was always one big lump of a job.

As a sequential project, it's never a lump. There's always one clear next thing in Today, right now *Apply for the permit*, and once that's done, *Book the electrician* takes its place. The project moves a little every week instead of waiting for a free weekend that never comes.

Marcus also uses the same tag on his Weekly Episode, which you'll meet in the next chapter. Each week's episode moves through research, recording, editing and publishing one step at a time.

When two steps sneak in

Occasionally two steps from the same project end up in Today, perhaps because he dated one himself. When that happens, he right-clicks the one he wants to keep and chooses *Reset Other Tasks*, and the others go back to where they were.

Why it works

A sequential project shows him only what he can actually do next. It turns a long project into a steady drip of small, doable steps, and it keeps Today free of things that can't be started yet. For projects that drag, like the basement, that single visible next step is often all it takes to get them moving.

Your turn

- Which of your projects can only be done in order?
- Is there a long-stalled project that might move if you only ever saw its next step?
- What priority or context would you want each next step to arrive with?

How to set up sequential projects: see Everyday use *in the Guide.*

9. Routines on autopilot

Every Tuesday, Marcus makes an episode. Every Tuesday, it's the same eleven steps: pick the main review and two news stories, write the outline, book studio time with Priya, record, upload the files, review her cut, record any pickups, write the show notes, schedule it for Friday, send Jordan the clip timestamps, answer listener comments.

For a long time he kept those steps in his head, which worked right up until the week Leo had the flu and he forgot to send Priya the audio. The episode went out a day late, and Priya, who had blocked out Wednesday for it, lost a day.

Now the whole episode is a project that repeats itself. On Tuesday morning a fresh copy appears, every step in place, nothing ticked. He doesn't plan the episode any more; he just makes it. The planning happened once, back when he set it up.

Repeating tasks

The simplest routines are single tasks. Marcus has a handful:

- **Recycling out**, every Thursday.
- **Pay the mortgage**, on the 1st of every month.
- **Give Biscuit his heartworm pill**, on the 5th.
- **Plan date night**, every other Wednesday, so there's time to check Elena's shifts and book a sitter.
- **Back up the studio drives**, every Sunday.
- **Run 5 miles**, Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Each one is set up once. On its day, a copy appears in Today, with a small repeat icon so he knows it's part of a routine. He ticks it off and forgets about it until next time.

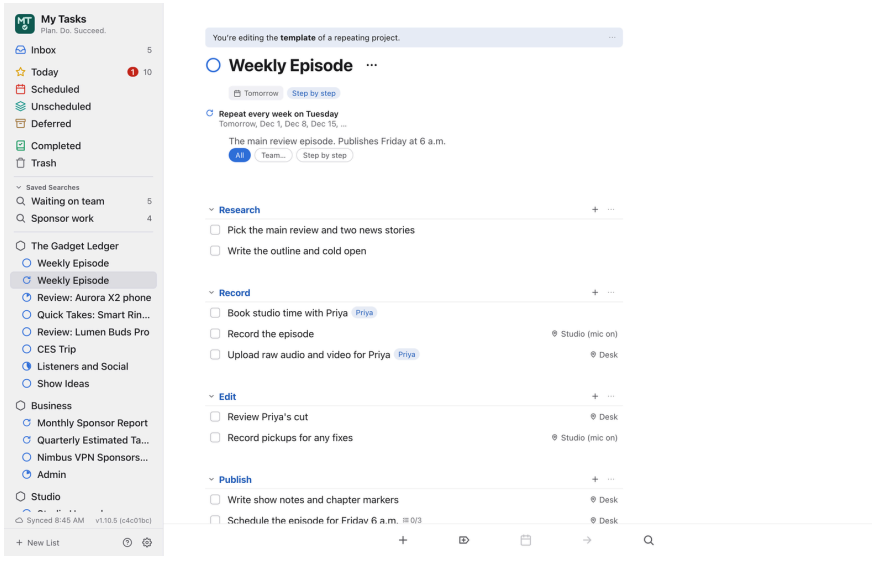
Some repeat on a fixed schedule, like the mortgage. Others repeat a set time after he last did them. The furnace filter, for example, comes back three months after he changes it, however late he was the last time.

Repeating projects

The bigger routines are whole projects. Marcus has four:

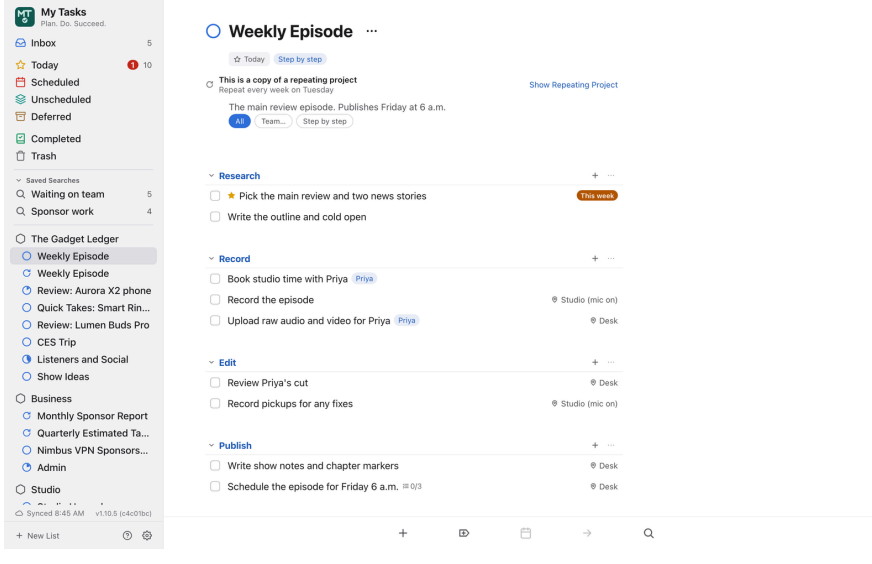
- **Weekly Episode**, every Tuesday, with its eleven steps under Research, Record, Edit, Publish and Promote.
- **Monthly Sponsor Report**, on the 1st: pull the download numbers, fill in each sponsor's report, send them to Dana.
- **Quarterly Estimated Taxes**, every three months, with a deadline built in.
- **Friday Review**, every Friday afternoon, which has a chapter of its own.

The project Marcus sets up is the template, the pattern each copy is made from. It sits in the sidebar with a repeat icon, and its page reminds him that he's editing the template, not this week's episode. The copies are ordinary projects he works through and completes. When he wants to improve the routine, say by adding a step for a new sponsor read, he changes the template once, and every copy from then on has it.



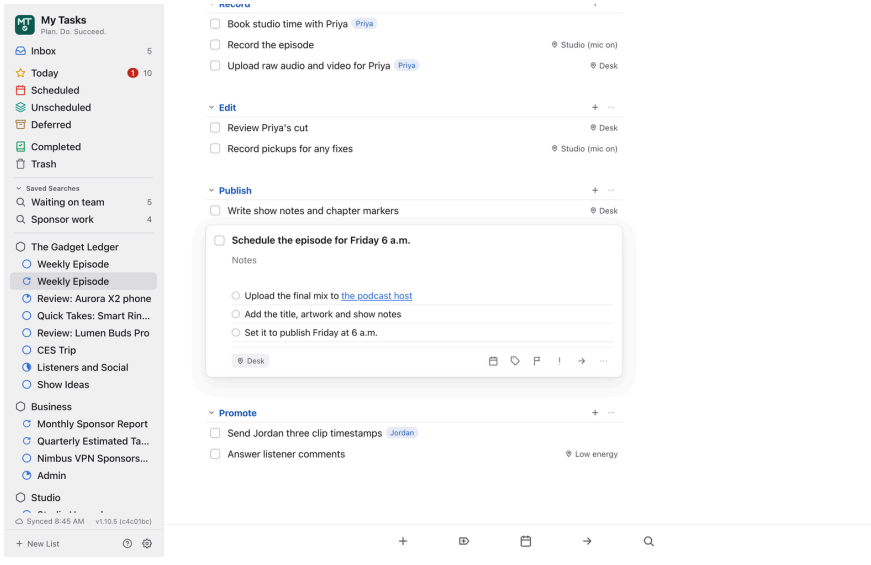
The Weekly Episode template, with its rule and next dates.

Because the Weekly Episode also carries his *Step by step* tag, each week's copy feeds him one step at a time. On Tuesday morning, *Pick the main review and two news stories* appears in Today. Nothing else from the episode does until he's done it.



This week's copy of the episode.

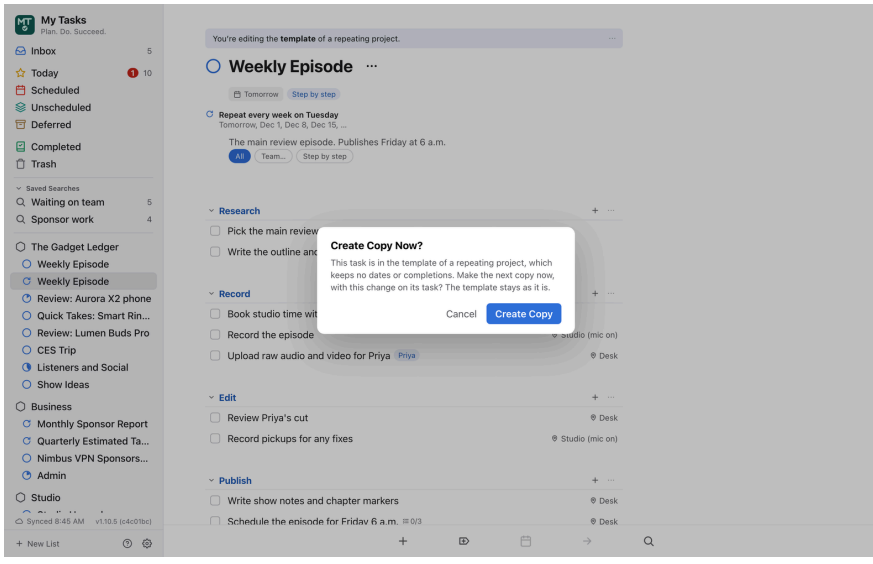
Checklist items can hold links too. The step that schedules the episode has a short checklist, and its first item, uploading the final mix, links straight to the podcast host. Every week's copy has the same checklist, link included, so getting there is one tap.



The scheduling step's checklist, with a link to the podcast host.

Getting ahead

Sometimes Marcus wants to start next week's episode early, perhaps because a big announcement lands on a Friday and he wants to grab the story while it's fresh. If he ticks a task in the template, or gives it a date, My Tasks asks whether he'd like to create the next copy now. One click, and next week's episode exists, with that step already done.



The Create Copy Now question.

When routines change

Routines change, and the Repeat menu handles it. When the family goes away for winter break, Marcus pauses the episode for two weeks and resumes it when they're back. When a sponsor deal ends, he takes that sponsor out of the report's template, and next month's copy is shorter. When the quarterly taxes move to a new date, he edits the rule. None of it means rebuilding anything.

Why it works

Routines are where mistakes hide, because they're boring. Repeating tasks and projects take the remembering out of them, so the routine runs the same way whether it's a calm week or the week Leo has the flu. And because the template holds the routine, every improvement he makes sticks.

Your turn

- What do you do on a rhythm: daily, weekly, monthly or yearly?
- Which of those routines always takes the same steps? Could it be a project that repeats?

- When did a routine last slip, and what would have caught it?

How to set up repeating tasks and projects: see Repeating tasks and projects *in the Guide.*

10. Seeing the whole week

On Sunday evening, Elena sends Marcus her shifts for the next two weeks. It's the most important message of his week, and he knows it. Whether Elena works Tuesday decides who takes Sofia to practice. Whether she works Saturday decides whether he can record a guest interview that morning or has to be at the soccer field.

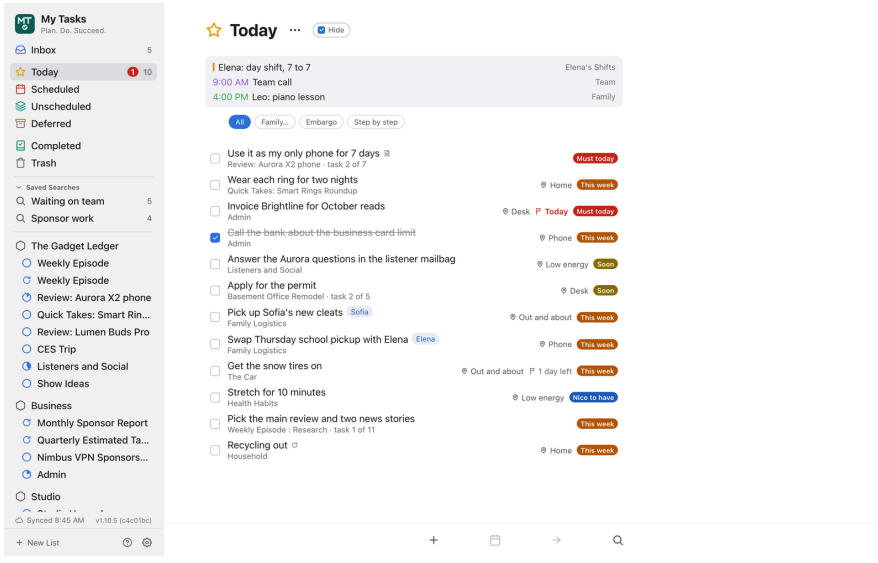
Tasks and time aren't the same thing. His task list tells him what needs doing. His calendar tells him when he's not free to do it. For years they lived in two apps, and he planned his days by flicking between them.

His calendar beside his tasks

Marcus keeps five calendars on his Mac:

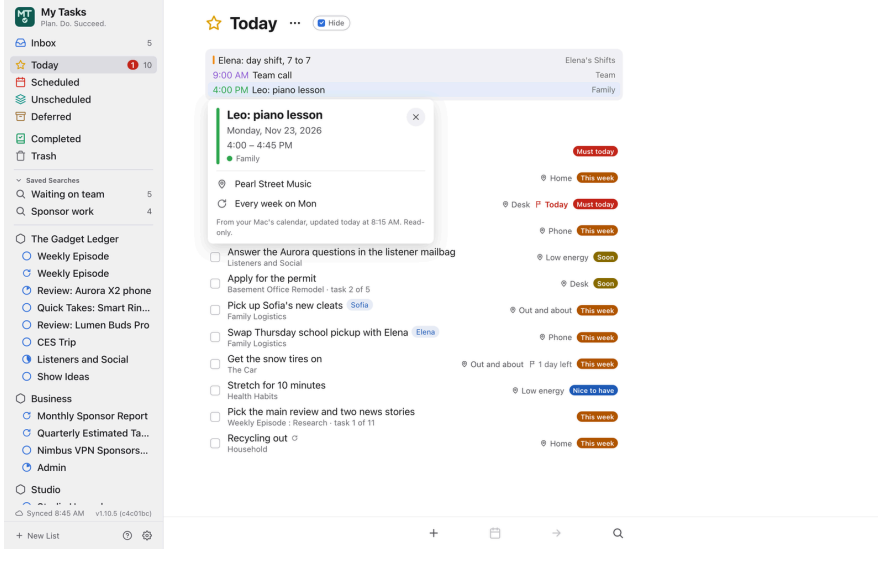
- **Gadget Ledger**: recording sessions, guest interviews, sponsor calls and the Friday morning publish time.
- **Team**: the Monday call and Thursday's edit review with Priya.
- **Family**: Sofia's practices and games, Leo's lessons and recital, school events, date night.
- **Elena's Shifts**: her twelve-hour days at the hospital, which change every week.
- **Personal**: the dentist, the gym, Biscuit's vet appointments.

A small helper on his Mac reads those calendars and passes the events to My Tasks, encrypted like his tasks. So on every device, his phone included, the day's events sit at the top of Today, each in its calendar's colour, with his tasks underneath.



Today with the day's events above the tasks.

This morning, at a glance: the episode went out at 6, and date night is at 7. Between the two there's a full working day, and he can see straight away that nothing on the task list has to happen after 6:30. If he taps an event, its details open right there in My Tasks: the time, the place, who's coming, any notes. The calendar stays his calendar; My Tasks just lets him see it where he plans.



An event's details.

The week and the month ahead

Scheduled shows the same picture further out. The next seven days each get their own group, with that day's events above the tasks starting then. After that come the rest of the month and the months beyond, with events and tasks listed by date.

On Sunday evening, with Elena's shifts in front of him, Marcus reads through the coming week in Scheduled. He sees that Tuesday's recording and Elena's shift fall on the same day, so he moves the Nimbus ad read to Wednesday. He sees Leo's recital in two and a half weeks, and adds *Buy Leo's recital outfit* for the weekend before. He sees the Aurora embargo lifting on a Tuesday that's also parent-teacher conferences, and makes a note to publish before he leaves for the school.

Five minutes, and the week has a shape.

Why it works

Seeing time and tasks together stops him from planning a day that can't happen. The calendar shows the fixed points; the tasks fill the space between them. And because the events come from his real calendars, there's nothing to copy or keep in step.

Your turn

- Whose schedule shapes yours, at work or at home?
- Which of your calendars would you want to see beside your tasks?
- When could you spend five minutes looking at the week ahead?

How to show your Mac's calendar events in My Tasks: see Calendar events *in the Guide.*

11. Marcus's Friday review

At 3:30 on Friday afternoon, the episode is out, the studio is quiet and Sofia's game isn't until tomorrow morning. Marcus makes a cup of tea, sits down, and spends twenty minutes on the most valuable thing he does all week.

He doesn't do any work in those twenty minutes. He looks at all of it.

Why a review

Everything in this book so far keeps Marcus's tasks tidy day to day. But days have a way of piling up. An Inbox gets skipped on a busy Tuesday. A project quietly stalls. Something he's waiting on goes unanswered for a fortnight. None of it is a disaster on its own, but together they're how a trusted system slowly becomes one he doesn't trust.

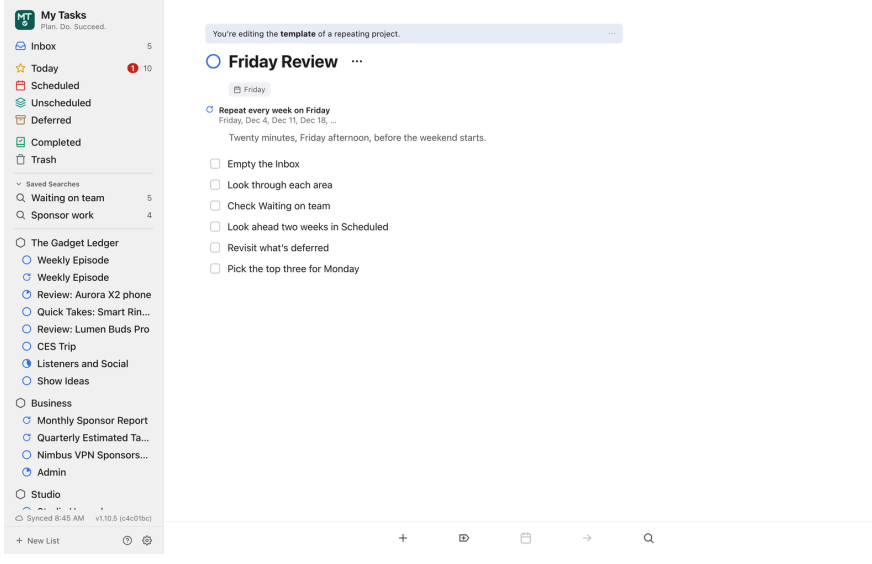
The Friday review is how he keeps that from happening. Once a week, he walks through everything, puts right what's drifted, and lets the weekend start with nothing nagging at him.

Six steps

The review is a repeating project, so every Friday the same six steps appear, unticked:

1. **Empty the Inbox.** Anything still sitting there gets a home and, where it matters, a date.
2. **Look through each area.** He opens The Gadget Ledger, Business, Studio, Family, Home, and Health and Fitness in turn. For each project he asks one question: *is it moving*? If not, what's the next step, and is it in the right place?

3. **Check Waiting on team.** Anything that's been out too long gets a nudge, usually a two-line message on Monday morning.
4. **Look ahead two weeks in Scheduled.** Events and tasks together. Anything clashing, anything he needs to prepare for, anything that should start sooner.
5. **Revisit what's deferred.** Some ideas have ripened; they move back into the active lists. Some have quietly stopped mattering; he lets them go. The Bucket List gets a look too, because one of those dreams might fit the summer.
6. **Pick the top three for Monday.** Three things that, if they happen, make next week a good one. He gives them Monday as their start date.



The Friday Review project.

Some weeks it takes fifteen minutes. After a chaotic week it can take forty. Either way, when he ticks the last step, he marks this week's copy complete, and next Friday a fresh one will be waiting.

Why it works

A review is what makes everything else trustworthy. Daily habits keep the system working; the weekly look catches whatever slipped through, while it's still small. And picking Monday's three on Friday

means he starts the week already knowing where it's going, instead of spending Monday morning working it out.

The steps are Marcus's. Someone else might review on Sunday evening, or every other week, or add a step for finances or health. What matters is having one regular moment to look at the whole, and making it a routine so it actually happens.

Your turn

- When in your week could you find twenty quiet minutes?
- Which of Marcus's six steps would matter most to you? What would you add?
- What three things would make next week a good one?

How to make a review that repeats itself: see Repeating tasks and projects *in the Guide.*

12. Keeping it light

Marcus has used My Tasks for over a year now. In that time he's ticked off thousands of tasks: fifty-odd episodes, a dozen reviews, a year of recycling nights. A system that keeps everything can quietly fill up with things that don't matter any more. This chapter is about the small habits that stop that happening.

Where finished things go

When Marcus ticks a task, it doesn't vanish straight away. It stays in its list, struck through, until the end of the day, then moves to Completed. He likes that: on a good afternoon, Today fills up with crossed-out lines, and it's satisfying to see. On the days he'd rather not, the Hide button beside Today's title tucks them away until he taps Show or next opens the app.

Other people prefer it differently, and My Tasks lets them choose: finished tasks can move to Completed straight away, at the end of each day, or only when you move them yourself.

Completed is his record of what got done. When Dana asks which sponsor reads went out in October, or Elena asks when he last changed the furnace filter, the answer is a quick search away.

Archive

Once a year, in January, Marcus archives. Everything finished more than ninety days ago is saved to a file on his Mac and then removed from My Tasks, on every device. The file is his permanent record; My Tasks stays light and quick.

Backups he keeps himself

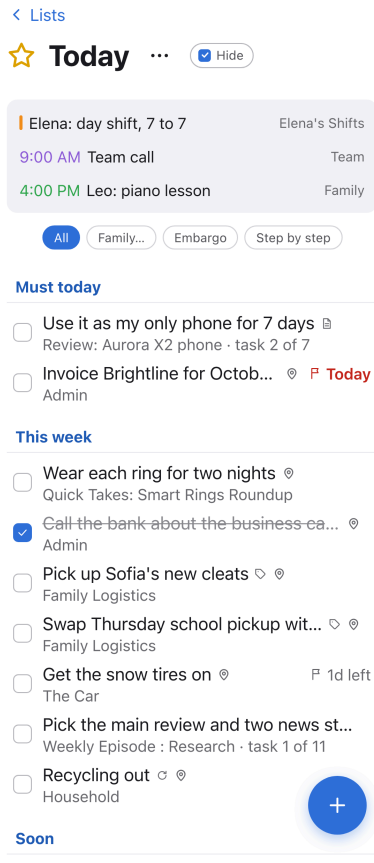
Marcus's tasks are synced between his Mac, his iPhone and his iPad through his own GitHub account. That keeps his devices in step, but it isn't a backup: a mistake he makes on one device reaches the others too. So at the start of each month, he saves a backup file and keeps it with the rest of his important files. It takes a few seconds, and he's never needed one. That's the point.

Moving in

Before My Tasks, Marcus used another popular task manager. He didn't retype two years of tasks: he exported them, imported the file into My Tasks, and everything came across seamlessly. His projects, areas, tags and repeating routines were all there, ready to go.

On the phone

Most of Marcus's planning happens at his desk, but most of his days don't. On his iPhone, My Tasks is installed like any other app. Today looks the same, with events above and tasks below, and everything he changes there is on his Mac a few seconds later.

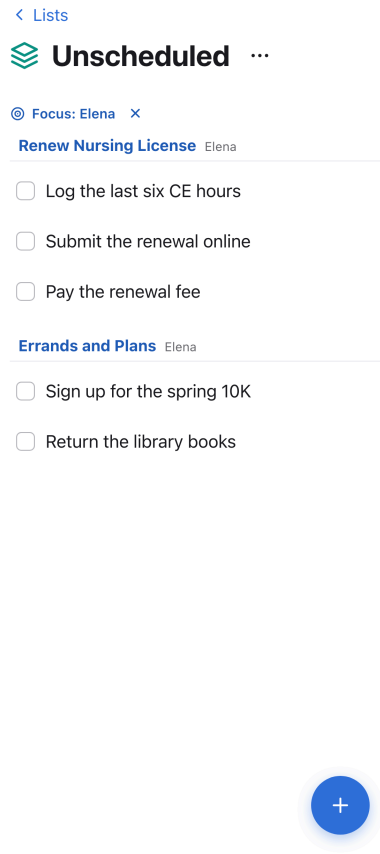


Marcus's Today on his iPhone, grouped by his priorities.

Sharing with Elena

For a long time, the family's side of My Tasks was Marcus's alone. Elena kept her own list on the fridge, and the two of them compared notes over dinner, when her shifts allowed. This year she asked to join in.

Her iPhone now connects to the same tasks as Marcus's devices, with the same GitHub token and the same passphrase. She has her own area, Elena, for her license renewal and her own errands, and she keeps the app focused on it, so most days she sees only her own things. When she leaves focus, Family is there for both of them: she swaps a school pickup on her break, and it's on Marcus's Mac a few seconds later.



Elena's iPhone, focused on her own area.

Almost all the time, they change different things. On the rare day they both change the same thing before their devices catch up, My Tasks keeps the later change and tells the one whose change was replaced, so nothing goes missing without a word.

They agreed a few things at the start. Sharing means no privacy: either of them can see everything, and focus only tidies the screen. Settings, tags and contexts are shared too, so a change one of them makes, like how Today is grouped, changes it for both. And anything that affects everything, like emptying the Trash, the January archive or restoring a backup, is Marcus's job alone.

It works because they trust each other. For two people sharing a household, that's enough; it isn't built for a team.

Why it works

A few small habits keep the system fast and trustworthy for the long run. Finished things stay visible long enough to feel good, then get out of the way. The archive keeps years of history without slowing anything down. And a backup he keeps himself means one bad day is much less likely to cost him everything. Sharing with Elena puts the family's plans in one place, without either of them giving up their own.

Your turn

- Do you like to see finished tasks for a while, or would you rather they went straight away?
- When would a yearly archive make sense for you?
- Where would you keep a monthly backup?
- Is there someone you'd share your tasks with, and what would their own area hold?

How completed items, Archive, backups and Import work: see Everyday use, Back up and restore *and* Archive *in the Guide. For sharing, see* Sharing with someone you trust *in the Guide, and* Risks and limitations *on the website for what it can't do.*

13. Make it yours

Marcus's setup works because it's built around his life: a show, a team of three, a family that runs on Elena's shifts. Yours will look different, and it should. This last chapter is about borrowing the ideas, not the details.

Here's how a few other people might shape the same features to their own lives.

A team manager

Aisha leads a team of six at a software company. Her areas are *Team*, *Projects*, *Hiring* and *Me*. Each direct report is a tag, so before a one-to-one she filters by that person and sees everything she owes them and they owe her. Each one-to-one is a repeating project with the same short agenda: wins, blockers, growth, anything from last time. Her priorities are *Today*, *This sprint*, *This quarter*, *Someday* and *Delegated*.

A freelancer

Tom is a freelance designer with four regular clients. Each client is an area, with an ongoing *Admin* project for invoices and contracts, and a project for each job. Every job follows the same order, brief, concepts, revisions, delivery, so each one is a sequential project. A monthly repeating project sends out invoices and chases late payments.

A student

Maya is in her second year of university. Each course is an area, every assignment is a project with its due date as a deadline, and readings are tasks with start dates spread through the week. Her

contexts are *Library*, *Laptop*, *Group* and *Commute*. Her priorities run from *Due this week* down to *Optional*. Her review is Sunday evening, before the week begins.

A household

Grace Okonkwo runs the household side of a busy family of five, on her phone and the kitchen iPad. Her areas are *Home*, *Money*, *Kids* and *Us*. Chores are repeating tasks, each tagged with whoever's turn it is. School terms, holidays and the car's service are ongoing projects. She reviews the week on Sunday morning, over pancakes.

Someone managing care

David looks after his own health and his mother's. Appointments and repeat prescriptions are repeating tasks, so nothing lapses. Each specialist is an ongoing project holding the questions to ask next time. His contexts include *Phone* for booking calls and *Pharmacy* for errands, and his calendar sits above Today so a new appointment doesn't land on top of another.

Choosing your own words

Whoever you are, the two choices that make My Tasks feel like yours are your priority labels and your contexts. A few questions help:

- **Priorities:** what words do you already use when you talk about urgency? Is there a level for "not my move"?
- **Contexts:** where do you spend your days, and what do different tasks need: a place, a tool, a person, a certain kind of energy?
- **Areas:** what are the parts of your life that never finish?

Starting small

The best way to start isn't to build Marcus's whole setup on day one. It's to start with three areas, an Inbox you empty once a day, and one repeating task. Use it for a week. Then add what you find

yourself wishing for: a context, a priority label, a sequential project, a Friday review.

Marcus didn't build his setup in a weekend either. He built it the way you'll build yours: one small fix at a time, each one taking something off his mind.

For everything else: the Guide at mytasks.fyi/guide.

Marcus’s setup at a glance

Everything Marcus uses, on one page, to borrow from.

	Marcus’s choices
Areas	The Gadget Ledger, Business, Studio, Family, Home, Health and Fitness
Projects that finish	Review: Aurora X2 phone, Quick Takes: Smart Rings Roundup, Review: Lumen Buds Pro, CES Trip, Nimbus VPN Sponsorship, Studio Upgrade, Basement Office Remodel, Winter Break Plans, Sofia’s 13th Birthday
Projects that never finish	Listeners and Social, Show Ideas, Admin, Studio Maintenance, Family Logistics, Bucket List, Household, The Car, Health Habits
Repeating projects	Weekly Episode (Tuesdays), Monthly Sponsor Report (1st), Quarterly Estimated Taxes (every 3 months), Friday Review (Fridays)
Repeating tasks	Recycling out, Pay the mortgage, Biscuit’s heartworm pill, Plan date night, Back up the studio drives, Run 5 miles, Change the furnace filter
Priorities	P1 Must today, P2 This week, P3 Soon, P4 Nice to have, P5 Waiting on someone
Contexts	Studio (mic on), Desk, Phone, Out and about, Home, Low energy
Tags	Team (Priya, Jordan, Dana), Family (Elena, Sofia, Leo), Sponsor, Embargo, Waiting, Step by step
Sequential projects	Tagged *Step by step*; each next step arrives as *This week*
Saved searches	Waiting on team, Sponsor work
Calendars	Gadget Ledger, Team, Family, Elena’s Shifts, Personal
Sharing	With Elena, on her iPhone: the same token and passphrase; her own area, *Elena*, and its projects, Renew Nursing License and Errands and Plans; Marcus alone empties the Trash, archives and restores
Habits	Empty the Inbox daily; Friday Review weekly; backup monthly; archive yearly

Where to learn more

- **The Guide**, mytasks.fyi/guide: how to do everything in this book, step by step, kept up to date as My Tasks changes.
- **This book**, mytasks.fyi/book: the current edition, free, updated as My Tasks changes.
- **The Roadmap**, mytasks.fyi/roadmap: what's new and what's being considered.
- **r/mytasksfyi** on Reddit: questions, ideas and news from other people using My Tasks.
- **Limitations**, mytasks.fyi/limitations: worth reading before you rely on any app with your work and your life.

About the author

Michael Lines is a retired IT developer and executive who builds the tools he wants to use. My Tasks is one of them: a free, open-source task manager he made after years of trying others. He writes about technology, work and life at michaellines.fyi.