

PAPER : NEW STRAITS TIMES (CLASSIFIEDS)
DATE : 10 DECEMBER 2012
PAGE : 28

WRITING YOUR DAILY TO-DO LIST



LIFE is full of changes that can open sudden voids of free time in your life: retirement, career changes, having your kids leave the nest, graduating from school, or just taking time out to find yourself. Here are some ways to maximise your free time:

1 Keep a journal about your life and how you will like it to be. Be sure to describe the activities you are trying out during your free time so you can evaluate whether or not they are worth continuing to do. One way to appreciate life more is to write five things from that day which you are grateful for, before you go to sleep. It may be hard to think of five things at first, but it is OK to repeat things from previous days, and you will find yourself looking for good things throughout the day to write down at night. This will improve your outlook on life. Try it!

2 Get yourself in top physical shape. Consult with your doctor about starting an exercise programme. A good starting point would be to walk for 30 minutes each day around your neighborhood, for three days each week.

3 Join (or return to) a church or place of worship. This is a safe way to meet interesting people and get involved in your community. You don't even have to be all that religious.

4 Volunteer your time and expertise. Search the internet or Yellow Pages for volunteer organisations in your area. Anyone, however inexperienced, can contribute something useful. You can work as little or as much as you want to.

5 Take up a hobby. Remember what brought you the most fun in childhood and try acceptable variations on it. Some kids like caring for animals, some like tinkering with tools, some like playing board games. You get the idea. There's a hobby for everyone.

6 Turn off the TV and read more books. Describe in a book journal what you have read, and what your reactions were. Join a book club.

7 Get a pet from the local animal shelter. You will save a life and become the center of the little critter's world.

8 Try gardening. Cacti are amazing, grow gorgeous flowers, which are almost impossible to kill. Or you can try herbs which are easier to grow, fun to use (in cooking, or in crafts).

9 Declutter your home. This can take months, but it is essential to clear space for your new life. Get rid of anything you haven't used for more than a year: have a garage sale, donate to charity, or just recycle/pitch it.

10 Go back to school either for fun or to broaden your skill base, or both. Continuing-education courses at your local community college can be low-priced.

11 Try painting or something crafty. Some types of painting are acrylics, enamel, encaustic (wax), frescos, gouache, inks, oils, heat-set oils, water miscible oils, pastels and dry pastels, oil pastels, pastel pencils, spray paint (graffiti), tempera, watercolour and sketching.

12 Pull out a cookbook and try some new recipes. Look into your fridge and cupboards, then Google a recipe using those ingredients (for example, search for "broccoli pineapple jalapeño recipes").

13 Learn to meditate. Sit quietly for 20 minutes and breathe naturally. Count your breaths up to 10, then start over again. The idea is to have something to focus on, so that you stay present and don't drift off mentally. After several weeks, you may begin to notice positive results in your life: more calmness, better concentration, more focus, and more understanding of how negative the usual mental chatter can be.

Take your time trying out stuff. Something that initially seems hard, may grow on you. Remember it is your life, so make the most of it!