



A really simple tip to reduce stress

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It's highly likely, if you're reading this article when it first arrives, that you're already beginning to feel a bit anxious about all the things still left to do before end of year.

Here's a little tip that might help keep the stress at bay – get things out of your head and down on paper.

I was talking to Elaine, a busy educator, a few weeks ago.

She said: "I was feeling really overloaded by the end of last week. I'd just come back from a wonderful overseas holiday, a stack of work was piled up, and then my PA had to take bereavement leave. By Friday my head was in a spin.

"Reluctantly I decided the weekend would have to be catch-up time. Feeling a bit grumpy, I suddenly remembered your advice, Robyn, to get things out of your head and down on paper.

"I made a list – and the impact was amazing. Suddenly it didn't seem overwhelming at all – and none of it was so urgent that I needed to work on the weekend."

The key thing is – whether it's a short-term list of tasks or a long-term 'nice to remember' – that you take the load off your exhausted brain. It's tired of doing somersaults in an effort to remember a miscellany of 'stuff'.

Problem is, the brain runs around trying to accomplish everything simultaneously when all that data is rumbling around. Instead, once you've externalised the things rattling around in your necktop computer you've quantified and (usually) simplified the extent of the problem. Once the data is out you can relax with confidence. You can also be more creative.

The reason this simple technique of writing down works is because it matches how the brain functions. Our brain is very good at recognising patterns but very poor at recalling information. Human memory is much less reliable than a computer at remembering facts. Get things out of your over-loaded brain and down on paper (or into your computer) and you'll instantly feel less stressed and in control.

If you're at your desk you'll have pen and paper handy. But many teachers are moving between buildings or on duty when ideas pop into their head. So how can we make this note-taking easy, no matter where you are?

My dad, a farmer, never went out the door without a little plastic-covered notebook diary in his pocket. He was given one each year by the stock and station agents. A bit like a teacher doing play-ground duty, a farmer is always on the move.

In my small purse I always carry a tiny spiro-bound notebook as well as my small wallet-sized Daytimer diary. If it's a random note of no great long-term importance I'll use the notebook but if it's an action it goes straight into the diary on the day I need to action it.

You might be wondering why I'm not talking about digital methods. They certainly have their place, but if you're in a hurry a notebook is quicker than opening the calendar feature on a smartphone and can be used almost everywhere with no inconvenience. Then, when you've either done the task or transferred it to something more permanent (your calendar – either digital or paper, mind-map or journal)

you can rip out the page. But if you prefer going straight to your phone, that's great too. The key thing is to get the information or detail recorded in some reliable place.

Regarding smartphones, I love my Notes facility for longer-term notes or 'nice to do' items. I've got about 13 categories on my iPhone Notes. They include 'Books to Read' (recommendations by friends), 'Music to Buy' (many times this will include CDs I've heard on a plane), 'Movies to See', 'Travel Notes', 'Health' and 'Wines'.

A friend of mine has a section called 'When next in ...' (somewhere he might travel to). When he reads an article about a lovely café in Prague or a unique restaurant in Melbourne (name your own possible future destinations) he notes it. Then you've got it when you need it, for most of us have our phone always with us.

So find your preferred note-taking device and get that jumble of ideas out of your overstretched brain!

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Robyn Pearce helps exhausted overloaded teachers find more time, control their paperwork and get home earlier. www.gettingagrip.com.

She is a Certified Speaking Professional (top speaking accreditation in the profession of speaking) held by only about 800 people around the world.