

How to Balance Creative Work vs. Inspiration: Jim Collins's Simple Life Tracking Spreadsheet

Last year, I started tracking my creative hours with the help of [Jim Collins's](#) simple life tracking spreadsheet:

- How many hours spent doing creative work
- A quality score for the day (+2, +1, 0, -1, -2)
- A note of what happened that day

Here's how my sheet looks like:

| | A | B | C | D | E |
|----|------------------|----------------|---------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Date | Creative Hours | Feeling | Day Recap | Day Count |
| 2 | 2021-01-06 | 0 | -1 | Rest day, exhausted | 1 |
| 3 | 2021-01-05 | 10 | 1 | YouTube video | 1 |
| 4 | 2021-01-04 | 2 | 1 | TSLA Twitter | 1 |
| 5 | 2021-01-03 | 8 | 2 | YouTube video | 1 |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | | 20 | 0.75 | | 4 |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | Creative per day | 5.00 | | | |
| 10 | | | | | |

[Download Excel Template](#)

Number of Creative Hours

“Only what gets measured, gets managed.”

— Peter Drucker

Collins makes sure he works 1,000 creative hours in every 365 day window, no matter where you slice it, no matter if he's sick, busy or on vacation.

Which translates to about 4 to 5 hours of creative time per day if you remove weekends, sick days and vacations.

I think that's a great goal to aspire to.

Progress vs. Maintenance

When explaining this concept to a friend recently, I mentioned that my goal was to "maximize the number of creative hours per day." He then pointed out that if you end up doing creative work only, it will bring your life out of balance. He's right.

I now see with my new [YouTube project](#), how demanding this can be. After a 12 hour video creation day, I am completely drained, and need a day off. So my goal is obviously not "maximizing", but rather "strive for 4 to 5 hours per day", which is much more specific. It's what I've been doing intuitively, but it's important to put it into words.

My ideal day would be to have 4 to 5 hours of creative work, plus 1 to 2 hours of maintenance. Or if I happen to have a 8 to 12 hour creative day, taking the next day off and doing some maintenance.

This idea was explained in more detail in the [Game Day Concept](#):

[The Game Day Concept](#)

Creative Work vs. Inspiration

It's all about a balance between creative work (output) and inspiration (input).

If you have too much input, your head will explode, because you have no outlet for it.

And if you have too much output, you have no energy left for input, which will make you less creative.

I think it's healthy to strive for about 2 hours of input each day. Be it reading a book, listening to a podcast, or having a stimulating conversation.

Definitions

Here is how I define the mentioned concepts:

- Creative hours: Focused on creation, which mostly means writing, summarizing, deep work, ideally something for public consumption. I don't count consuming, reading, admin, maintenance. There are a lot of things in between, where I simply count part of it as creative work.
- Progress: Everything that is related to progress, be it working on a project or a goal
- Maintenance: Admin stuff, paper work, email, cleaning my desk, decluttering things, updating my computer, doing backups, running errands, this kind of stuff

Implementation

- Use a Google Sheet and install the Sheets app on your phone
- Set up a daily reminder for 9 pm

Summary

To summarize, my goal is to achieve 4 to 5 hours of creative work per day, and to help me track that I use a simple life tracking spreadsheet that I fill out daily.

I have now been doing this for 256 days and logged 336 hours of creative work (1.31 per day, including weekends and vacations). This time period included [my recent separation](#), so I am confident that I will do better this year :)