

Praise for *Ticked Off*

It goes without saying that teachers are incredibly busy and, in the midst of all this activity, it's all too easy for even the most accomplished teacher to overlook vital information, misplace crucial resources and forget the very thing they have promised they will remember. Harry Fletcher-Wood's timely and useful book draws on examples from the safety-critical industries like healthcare and aviation to recommend one simple, straightforward and easy-to-implement addition to ensure the best laid plans of overworked teachers do not go awry.

Interesting, practical and accessible, this little book and its one big idea could transform the way you work. Highly recommended.

David Didau, author of *What If Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong?*

Harry has created a book for those of us who lose worksheets, misplace pens and don't have a calm, organised person upstairs. But instead of making teachers feel bad for disorganisation he offers a solution: a simple, effective, thought-provoking aid for getting through each and every situation the classroom (and its chaos) has on offer. When I was in the classroom, I constantly wondered what the best way to organise myself was. This book does the hard-work thinking for you, but still encourages you to think some more!

Laura McInerney, editor, *Schools Week*

I am admittedly a fan of checklists and I am now also a fan of *Ticked Off*. In a world stuffed full of busyness, a checklist can help bring clarity and calm. Harry Fletcher-Wood takes a systematic approach to creating usable checklists for pretty much every aspect of school life. This book is a pleasure to read and helped me think more clearly about the complexity of our daily work as teachers.

Is Harry's book on checklists immensely valuable and worth your precious time? Tick! Is it an easy read that proves practical and useful? Tick! Should busy teachers invest in this book? Tick!

**Alex Quigley, teacher, Huntington School,
author of *Teach Now! English***

Harry's book acts as an empathetic guide to support efficiency, balancing the complexities of education as a whole and the role of being a teacher. This is not necessarily a how-to style book; it shares Harry's reflections on what works for him and the understandings he has, offering measured and balanced reflections for improving as students, teachers, leaders; and within teaching itself. In sharing his perceptions of his practice, and how he has subsequently developed, the reader cannot help but consider their own practice and embark upon a journey in which their own styles are audited.

I love that this book is not written by a stereotypically organised person. For the rest of us who struggle at this, Harry isn't condescending or judgemental and has an approachable, comfortable tone; it's as if you're sat in the staffroom chatting with him!

Kieran Dhunna Halliwell (Ezzy_Moon), researcher and consultant

Ticked Off takes its approach from Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto*, which demonstrates how checklists help to improve standards and avoid errors. Following examples from the fields of science and medicine, Harry Fletcher-Wood shows how aspects of teaching and organisation can be managed more easily by using checklists.

Irrespective of the ultimate complexity of the task on hand, a checklist simplifies the task by breaking it down into manageable entities. The real beauty of this book is that the checklists are easy to use and can be adapted for all aspects of teaching and working within education, from nursery and primary school levels through to higher education. All education practitioners will find practical resources to improve their own practice, to lead and train others, to introduce and implement sustainable changes, to deal with difficult conversations, to lead meetings effectively, to gauge student voice and feedback and to involve students by making them responsible for their own learning.

Ticked Off is a great book, offering an interesting and practical approach to time management. Having read this book I am now implementing checklists in my own work. If you only have time to read one education book this year, make sure it is this one because this is a fantastic resource.

**Nicole Brown, lecturer in education and
secondary teacher education programme leader**

Anyone familiar with Harry's writing will know very well how thorough, thoughtful and subtly profound he is. He takes the ordinary and makes us look at it sideways, upside-down and inside-out. Harry challenges us to revisit the everyday to ensure that our bread and butter is the best it can be. Harry's admiration for Atul Gawande has led him to create a book about teaching and learning, and what a treasure trove it is. In *Ticked Off*, Harry approaches the oft ignored parts of our day with precision and vigour to try to help us be incrementally better through effective planning and use of the simple checklist: how can students best know if they're ready for exams, or if their essays are excellent? How might teachers help their students master vocabulary, or ensure that that poor lesson never repeats itself? What about being ready for trips, observations and giving feedback?

This is a book for everyone: student, teacher, middle leader and leader. But it's also personable, honest, thorough and important. It's Harry Fletcher-Wood all over, and every school needs a copy.

Toby French (@MrHistoire), history teacher



Practical ✓
Useful ✓
Transformational ✓

Ticked off

CHECKLISTS for
Teachers ✓
Students ✓
School leaders ✓

Harry Fletcher-Wood



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Foreword by Sir Tim Brighouse

Like the author, I am not a natural fan of checklists.

The roots of my dislike can probably be traced to having an excellent memory when I was young and being a bit over-pleased with myself for that good fortune, which for a long time I assumed was connected with our view at that time about what it was to be intelligent. My attitude is best illustrated by anecdote. As a very young deputy at Chepstow Community College in the mid-1960s I worked with a head towards the end of his career whose working practice included summoning me each morning for a briefing. I recall thinking him rather pathetic for having a 'list' in his hand as he ran through what needed to be done that day and I remember his puzzlement that I didn't take any notes of the many tasks he required of me. I had no difficulty in recall. Now of course, I not only need lists but often find I can't remember where I have put them!

But my prejudice against lists had two further aspects. First, I thought checklists the enemy of creativity, especially in teaching, which I saw as more of an art than a science, and therefore 'lists' were to be avoided at all costs. Second, when I later deployed weekly 'to do' lists drawn up on a Sunday evening for the following week, I became depressed at my inability to tick any of them off as the crises of the days that followed displaced them and the urgent overtook the important. I even considered the temptation recounted to me by a Scottish educator of adding things on a Friday that had already been done simply to gain the pleasure of ticking them off.

So like Harry Fletcher-Wood, I approached Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto* with some scepticism. But like all good books it caused me to think. Of course I had long realised that good management and administration is about 'doing things right' to complement the strategic imperative of doing the 'right things'. For schools, this was best expressed by the Victorian Head of Uppingham who once said, 'I take my stand on detail'. So I accepted, in the administration and management of schools, checklists had their place. Of course this book will show you how the

checklist has an essential role in good and effective lessons and learning. Perhaps the primary practitioner has always known that: certainly the widespread practice of giving pupils regular tasks – the classroom monitor syndrome – relies on the checklist approach. This book takes our thinking so much further with an abundance of practical examples.

As schools wrestle with the conundrum of what are the ‘non-negotiables’ in their teaching and learning policy and practice, and as they seek to strike a balance between ‘singing from the same song sheet’, yet not doing so to the extent that they hem the individual teacher in with so many ‘must dos’ that they stifle creativity, they’ll find this book more than useful – in practice an invaluable aid to discussion in whole school, departmental and phase meetings.

In a primary classroom the other day, I had a glimpse of practice which I thought reflected the surgical practice outlined in *The Checklist Manifesto* where Gawande explains how consultants were initially resistant to the checklist approach and were only won over by the nurse taking the role of running through the checklist in the operating theatre since for the consultant to do so was an affront to dignity. In the classroom I caught sight of two year 6 pupils at the start of the session who were running through the requirements of the teacher’s lesson plan as she smilingly looked on, nodding as it came to issues affecting her; the rest of the class also checked as it came to issues that would involve them playing their part in what was to unfold.

So I commend this book as a stimulus to improving practice in schools and classrooms across the country. It will lead to better learning for pupils and, as I saw the other day, perhaps their involvement in the checklist process.

**Sir Tim Brighouse, former London Schools Commissioner and Chief
Education Officer for Birmingham and Oxfordshire**

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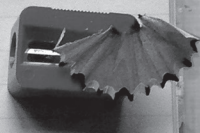
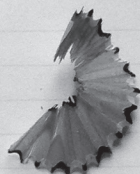
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Section i

Checklists for students

4. I'm stuck - now what?

- * Relax: Now you can learn something.
- * Check the model answer: Have you included every step?
- * Check your working: Is each step correct?
- * Check a previous example that you've completed correctly: What is different between your previous answer and this one?
- * Check teacher feedback: Are there any errors you've made recently that you might have repeated?
- * Ask your peers: Can they spot your error?
- * Ask the teacher.



As teachers, we hope that when students get stuck, they will keep trying, explore a range of ways to solve their problem and persevere to success. Too often, however, we stumble upon students sitting doing nothing because they say they are stuck and are unsure what to do. This checklist is designed to try to nudge students onto the right track without the teacher's help. Even while waiting, they are learning – reviewing model answers and their own work and trying different ways to solve their problems.

Pause point

Check/do – when students feel they are stuck.

I first saw this idea in the classroom of my former colleague, Katy Sillem, during her NQT year. She developed it to help her deal with the problem of reaching every student, even though their needs were so diverse, to ensure they were all still learning and thinking while they waited for help.

How else could this be used?

This checklist could be amended to fit any other subject. For example, in English, we could offer a list of steps to get back on track if students lose the thread of their writing: write three possible next sentences on a mini-whiteboard, choose the best; return to the model paragraph and your plan, what have you not yet managed?

Section ii

Checklists for teaching

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13. Am I ready to start the lesson?

- * What resources (textbooks, worksheets, information sheets, etc.) do I need?
- * What classroom supplies (paper, glue, scissors, etc.) do I need?
- * Do I have student work to return?
- * Are the computer and projector working?
- * Have I got my lollipop sticks?
- * Is there anything special to remember? Who do I need to keep an eye on? Who has been away and will need help catching up? Who struggled last lesson?

The start of the lesson has always seemed the most tense moment to me: if there is any doubt about students' mood or focus, any worries they've brought with them or any major flaw in my preparation, it is most likely to be exposed at the outset. A smooth beginning sets the tone for a solid lesson, so it makes sense to allow yourself to concentrate on students and their needs rather than whether or not you've remembered all your equipment. This is a simple, effective way to allow teachers to focus on the things that matter most.

Pause point

Do/check – a few moments before the lesson begins.

We are three minutes into the lesson and things have started well. While students write their thoughts about the hook, I start passing out the sheets they will need next. After the first five, I realised I haven't printed enough and that the rest of the stack is with my resources for the next lesson. Cue wasted time at the laptop printing more worksheets, asking a student to fetch them and filling time while I wait for their return.

How else could this be used?

Similar checklists could be developed for the beginning of any task you regularly perform, such as assemblies, experiments and specific lessons.

Section iii

Checklists for teachers

22. What should I achieve this week?

- * What are the three most important non-urgent actions I can complete in each of my roles this week?
- * What one unimportant but unavoidable action will I complete this week?
- * When will I fit in each action?
- * What other pressures might I need to plan around this week?
- * Saying no: To whom and how?
- * Sense check: Is this feasible?

How can we possibly do all the things we want to do as teachers? I base my answer on Stephen Covey's work on time management.* He invites us to divide our tasks up into the following four categories (I have given examples for each category):

i. Urgent and important Fight in the corridor Planning your lesson for period 2 Answering your head teacher's angry email	ii. Not urgent and important Planning next term's unit Getting to know your form better Identifying strategies to improve as a teacher
iii. Urgent and unimportant Some emails and requests Some conversations Some administrative tasks	iv. Not urgent and unimportant Complaining! Some emails Some administrative tasks

In schools, I would add a fifth category: unimportant and unavoidable – for example, some data analysis, Ofsted readiness and internal accountability tasks.

Covey argues that the most successful people spend most of their time working on things found in quadrant ii. Given the examples I've used above this makes sense: if you have planned and resourced a unit in advance, individual lessons are less of a challenge. Taking time to build relationships with students makes it more likely that you can identify and prevent incipient trouble. Ensuring that documents are up to date, obligations are fulfilled and communication with the head is good makes it less likely that she will walk into a classroom or meeting and be surprised (and unhappy) with what she sees. In short, the more time spent in quadrant ii, working on long-term issues which build towards success, the less it is necessary to firefight unexpected problems and crises.

Covey advocates setting out to complete three tasks in each of our professional roles each week. These roles might include: teacher, form tutor,

* Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 151.

head of department, newly qualified teacher, Key Stage 3 coordinator and so on. This checklist is designed to help make that process routine.

Pause point

Check/do – on Friday afternoon or Monday morning, as you work out what the week will look like. Then do/check with the list you create during the working week.

There are numerous tips out there on saving time as a teacher, but tactics like clever folders don't address the need to juggle a raft of lesson preparation, teaching duties, Ofsted readiness activities, preparing for trips, leading continuing professional development and getting ready for an external departmental review. Fundamentally, we have to limit and focus our efforts.

How else could this be used?

A similar planning checklist could apply to the term or the year.

Section iv

Checklists for leaders

32. How can I make a meeting work?

- * Aim: What do I want to achieve through holding the meeting?
- * Attendance: Who actually needs to be present to achieve this aim?
- * Preparation: How can people arrive best prepared? How can I make it easy for them to complete this preparation?
- * Catch-ups: How will I provide colleagues with sufficient time to catch up and share recent successes and failures, without allowing this to take over the meeting?
- * Agenda: Is there a logical flow? Are we dealing with the most important and contentious issues first? How long will we spend on each item?
- * Debate: How will I encourage discussion and debate when I need to canvass a range of opinions?
- * Follow-up: Who will do what? By when?

An honest, if somewhat flippant, response to the question, 'How can I make a meeting work?' comes from Jason Fried: 'If you do have a meeting coming up, if you have the power, just cancel it. Just cancel that next meeting.'* He describes meetings and managers as the two biggest drains on productivity. If it is desirable to bring together a group of colleagues for a meeting, this checklist is designed to ensure that the experience is productive and worth your time.

Pause point

Do/check – the afternoon before the meeting.

Example

Aim: What do I want to achieve through holding the meeting?

Moderate A level coursework.

Attendance: Who actually needs to be present to achieve this aim?

All teachers who have A level coursework classes this year, our trainee who will be teaching A level classes next year and the head of department as an experienced A level marker; no one else.

Preparation: How can people arrive best prepared? How can I make it easy for them to complete this preparation?

Colleagues need to have marked at least three pieces of coursework by students who they expect to be near the top, middle and bottom of the

* Jason Fried, Why Work Doesn't Happen At Work, *TED.com* (2010). Available at: http://www.ted.com/talks/jason_fried_why_work_doesn_t_happen_at_work?language=en.

range. I sent a reminder at the start of the week and will send another one this afternoon in case anyone needs to do this at the last minute.

Catch-ups: How will I provide colleagues with sufficient time to catch up and share recent successes and failures, without allowing this to take over the meeting?

Five minutes to talk through getting the coursework in, then remind everyone what time the meeting is due to end.

Agenda: Is there a logical flow? Are we dealing with the most important and contentious issues first? How long will we spend on each item?

Start with the middle pieces as the most contentious and the area where most of the work will fall – so, twenty-five minutes for the middle, fifteen for the top and ten for the bottom.

Debate: How will I encourage discussion and debate when I need to canvass a range of opinions?

Ask everyone to read through and make notes without speaking for the first few minutes of each section. Go round and get judgements, without comment initially, then open up the debate.

Follow-up: Who will do what? By when?

All colleagues to complete marking by 31st and confirm they have done so by email. Further moderation meeting if there is serious disagreement.

How else could this be used?

This checklist could be used for planning any meeting between adults.

Section v

Checklists for living

46. How can I make this school day a good one?

- * Realistic: Is what I am setting out to do today achievable? If not, what should I cut?
- * Plans and priorities: Have I allowed time for my top priorities in school? (see also Checklist 22)
- * Time for myself: At what point today will I do something nice for myself?
- * Social time: When will I spend time with, or in contact with, friends?
- * Exercise: When will I exercise?
- * Buffering: How can I plan compensations around points of the day I know will be stressful?

This checklist is adapted from one created by Bodil Isaksen, as a way to ensure that she looked after herself during the school day. It takes the excellent principle of seeing the day as something that can be planned for, and around, so we do what we can to ensure that, whatever it throws at us, the result is a good one.

Pause point

Do/check – at the beginning of the day or the end of the previous one in preparation for the next.

As teachers, many things prevent us from achieving all that we would like to, but most come down to a single cause: while students' needs are infinite, our time and resources are not. Some teachers seem intimidatingly organised in all they do. This book is for everyone else. We manage most of the time, with occasional heart-stopping moments as we realise, or fear, that we're guilty of a massive oversight.

CHECKLISTS for Teachers, Students, School leaders

Checklists:

- * free us to devote our time, energy and attention to focusing on the tasks that matter most
- * improve communication with colleagues and students
- * remind us of the most important steps which even highly skilled professionals may miss
- * offer us reassurance that, when going home at the end of the day, we've done everything that matters and can relax
- * can make us better and happier teachers.



Ticked Off is a great book, offering an interesting and practical approach to time management.

Nicole Brown, lecturer in education and secondary teacher education programme leader

A simple, effective, thought-provoking aid for getting through each and every situation the classroom (and its chaos) has on offer.

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Toby French (@MrHistoire), history teacher

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