

## Productivity & Planning

Analyze repetitive tasks for automation potential — including specific tools, breakeven calculations, and low-tech alternatives for workflows that don't justify full automation.

Difficulty: Intermediate → Advanced

Model: GPT-4 / Claude / Gemini

Use Case: Workflow Automation, Process Improvement, Time Savings

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Why This Prompt Exists

Most automation attempts fail because they automate the wrong thing.

You get:

- fancy automations for tasks you do once a month
- complex Zapier setups that break and no one fixes
- automation that saves 5 minutes but took 3 hours to build
- no breakeven analysis before investing time
- high-tech solutions for problems that need a checklist

But automation is not about technology.

It is about return on time invested.

- $\text{Frequency} \times \text{duration} = \text{total time spent}$
- $\text{Setup time} \div \text{weekly savings} = \text{breakeven weeks}$
- Low-tech alternatives often win for low-frequency tasks
- IF-THEN logic is the atomic unit of automation

Without ROI discipline, you become a hobbyist automator, not a productive one.

This framework forces AI to be an automation economist, not a tool enthusiast.

## The Prompt

Assume the role of a workflow automation architect and time-ROI analyst.

Your task is to analyze a repetitive task and recommend automation (or not) based on actual breakeven math.

Before generating, analyze:

- how often the task occurs (frequency)
- how long it takes each time (duration)
- how much setup time automation would require
- whether the task's logic is stable or changes often
- a low-tech alternative that might be better

Then generate:

1. Simple IF-THEN logic statement:

"IF [TRIGGER], THEN [ACTION]"

2. Three specific tools or methods that could automate this (even partially)

3. Breakeven analysis:

- Current time spent per week: [frequency × duration]
- Estimated setup time: [hours]
- Breakeven point: [setup time ÷ weekly savings] weeks
- Recommendation: AUTOMATE / SEMI-AUTOMATE / ELIMINATE

4. A low-tech alternative (template, checklist, batch process)

INPUTS:

Task Description:

[WHAT ARE YOU DOING REPEATEDLY?]

Frequency:

[ONCE PER DAY / ONCE PER WEEK / ONCE PER MONTH / ONCE PER QUARTER]

Time Per Occurrence (minutes):

[INSERT MINUTES]

Technical Comfort Level:

[LOW / MEDIUM / HIGH]

Available Automation Tools (if any):

[ZAPIER / MAKE / IFTTT / NO CODE / CUSTOM CODE / NONE]

Does the logic change often?:

[YES / NO]

RULES:

- Breakeven point must be calculated explicitly
- If breakeven > 52 weeks, recommend low-tech alternative
- Low-tech alternative is not optional – always provide one
- Flag if the task could be eliminated instead of automated
- Be specific about tools, not "there are many options"

## How To Use It

- Track the task for a week before analyzing — frequency is often underestimated.
- If breakeven is more than 6 months, the low-tech alternative is probably better.
- Automations that require maintenance (changing logic) are often not worth it.
- Batch processing (doing the task 10x at once) is a low-tech automation.
- If the task takes less than 2 minutes, just do it. Automation overhead kills small tasks.

## Example Input

**Task Description:** Download daily sales report from Shopify, reformat the CSV (remove columns, rename headers), and email it to the operations team.

**Frequency:** Once per day (weekdays)

**Time Per Occurrence:** 8 minutes

**Technical Comfort Level:** Medium (can follow tutorials)

**Available Automation Tools:** Zapier, Google Sheets, basic Python

**Does the logic change often?:** No (same columns every day)

## Why It Works

Most automation fails because people automate before calculating the return.

This framework improves outcomes by forcing:

- explicit IF-THEN logic definition
- breakeven analysis before building anything
- low-tech alternatives for low-ROI tasks
- elimination as a real option
- specific tool recommendations, not vague suggestions

Great automation is not about technology — it's about the math of time.

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