

Things you're allowed to do

M https://milan.cvitkovic.net/writing/things_youre_allowed_to_do/

None

Mon Jan, 04 04:20

This is a list of things you're allowed to do that you thought you couldn't, or didn't even know you could.

I haven't tried everything on this list, mainly due to cost. But you'd be surprised how cheap most of the things on this list are (especially the free ones).

Note that you can replace “hire” or “buy” with “barter for” or “find a DIY guide to” nearly everywhere below. E.g. you can clean the bathroom in exchange for your housemate doing a couple hours research for you.

Learning and decision making

- Hire a researcher or expert consultant
 - I hired a researcher ([Elizabeth Van Nostrand](#), whom you can and should [hire](#) too) to help write this very post, which is largely about how to hire people to do things!
 - They can:
 - Help validate whether a crazy idea is possible
 - Do [epistemic spot checks](#) of your work
 - Map the landscape of opinions on a topic
 - Write literature surveys
 - Find people worth talking to about a potential topic and writing briefs about them
 - Opposition or market research
 - Find options for big purchases like houses or insurance
 - Compile datasets
 - Find un-Googleable things
 - To find one:
 - Look for books or scholarly articles on the topic, and email the author
 - Graduate students are especially good, and often know more than the “experts”
 - If you find someone genuinely interested in what you're working on, you might be able to collaborate and not pay
 - Look for interested individuals in the long tail of blogs
 - E.g. by Google searching with `'site: medium.com'` and finding the authors
 - Use a matchmaking service (see [Appendix](#))

- Search through professional organizations directories (e.g. Bar Association, American Academy of Pediatrics)
 - Google the topic +
 - “blog”
 - “podcast”
 - “expert witness”
 - “book”
 - “consultant”
 - “reddit”
 - What do I pay them?
 - Some post their prices online
 - If you’re hiring a grad student you can pay them at or above their school’s graduate student stipend, which you can Google.
 - [Make sure they get something out of the project](#) (and other tips)
- Ask questions online
 - You know those answers you enjoy reading on Stack Exchange, Reddit, Quora, etc.? Someone had to ask those questions. It can be you.
 - If you’re embarrassed by the question, it’s easy to be anonymous
- Run surveys
 - Twitter
 - Or ask someone with a larger following to do it
 - Google Surveys
 - Amazon Mechanical Turk
- Run [genuine randomized control trials on yourself](#)
- Buy research
 - See [Appendix](#), [here](#), or [here](#)
 - Or find it on [SciHub](#) or [Libgen](#)
- Hire someone to pentest/doxx you
 - Or put out a bounty for it, like [Gwern used to](#)
- Hire a graphic designer to turn your appalling sketches into beautiful diagrams or slides
- Host small gatherings or conferences on topics you care about
 - These are much easier to set up than you’d think, especially in the age of Zoom
 - If you can use the gathering to bootstrap a group chat or community, so much the better!
- Hire a tutor
 - [Language tutors](#) are surprisingly cheap and better than any app
 - [Wyzant](#) and many other sites exist for general tutoring

- For niche tutoring you can try general freelance sites like [Fiverr](#) or [Upwork](#)
- Services like [Sharpest Minds](#) exist for professional training
- Hire someone just as an excuse to make yourself complete a project
 - Sure you could proofread your own document. But if you hire a proofreader, you have to actually deliver them something at some point.

Interpersonal

- [Cold contact people](#)
 - Yes, even famous people. Just make sure you have something to say.
- [Follow up many times](#)
 - You won't make people mad if you're polite.
- Just ask for things
 - Free upgrades
 - Coupons
 - At checkout you can just ask "Do you have any coupons I can apply to this?"
 - Raises
 - Better terms in a job offer
 - Easier than asking for a raise - you have more leverage
 - Waiving admission or graduation requirements
 - It's okay if the things are crazy. You can always mollify afterward by saying "I know that's a crazy thing to ask for, but I have a rule that I always ask."
- [Ask obvious questions](#)
- Buy goods/services from your friends
 - It's not weird unless you make it weird
 - Everyone knows some starving artists and needs to buy holiday gifts
 - Doesn't apply to every service obviously: don't take out loans from your friends
- Not tell white lies
 - You can be nice and tell the truth at the same time.
 - Especially to children when they annoy you.
- Say "I don't know" or "I don't have an opinion" when you don't
- Ask people out on dates
 - This one might just be directed at young me...
- Don't drink, even when you're expected to
 - Don't drink alcohol, I mean.
 - Actually heck, don't drink water either if you don't want.
- Travel to friends just to visit them
- Move close to friends

- Live in multiple places with multiple people
 - Rent spare rooms or couches part-time in multiple homes
 - Arrange your own timeshare system with friends
- Be a nomad
- Romance
 - Hire a matchmaker
 - Buy premium versions of dating apps
 - Get couples therapy
- Give to charity
 - You really can, to the best of our knowledge, [save someone's \(statistical\) life](#) with not that much money. Let that idea really, fully osmose through your brain before you pass it over.

Support and accountability

- Hire a coach
 - For your professional area
 - [An Atul Gawande article on the subject](#)
 - [On clicker training](#)
 - Personal trainer
 - Nutritionist
 - Meditation guide
- Visit a therapist
- Visit a physical therapist
- Buy task-specific devices that prevent multitasking
 - Kindle
 - Freewrite Traveller
 - Dedicated music players
 - Dedicated notebooks for specific purposes (day planner, exercise log, etc.)
- Engage a human productivity monitor
 - I know two people who have hired people to sit next to them or frequently contact them to keep them on-task
 - Examples: [focusmate.com](#) and [coding-pal.com](#)

Making the most of your resources

- Grocery delivery
- Cleaning services
 - Can be regular or just when you need a big spring clean

- Don't forget carpet and vent cleaning
- Laundry service
- Nannies over daycare
- Modify your stuff
 - Tape over annoying LED lights
 - Remove logos ([example](#))
 - Write in books
 - Rip off tags
 - Rotate your monitor to portrait
- Repair your stuff, or get it repaired
 - Shoes
 - Clothes
 - Luggage and [outdoor gear](#)
 - Furniture
 - Car
 - You can buy at-home car care
- Write on a post-it note affixed to a greeting card rather than on the greeting card itself, so the recipient can throw away the post-it and reuse your card
 - Employ similar logic for any disposable/consumable item
- Treat fines like payments
 - E.g. park illegally and let yourself think of the (expected value of the) fine as a parking fee
 - Obviously don't break rules that matter like blocking a fire exit
- [Contest unjust fines](#)
- Don't pay, or renegotiate, bills
 - [Example with hospital bills](#)
- Telemedicine
- Surgery for appearance or comfort
- At-home vet care
- Enroll [yourself](#) (or [your pet](#)) in a clinical trial or research study
- Generate your own audiobooks
 - [gutenbergreloaded.com](#)
- Generate your own ebooks
 - [1dollarscan.com](#)
- Get verbal things written down
 - [transcribeme.com](#)
 - [otter.ai](#)

- Personal assistant services (or a real PA if you can afford it)
 - [Magic](#), [TaskRabbit](#), [Fancy Hands](#), and similar services can approximate many of these. There are also more serious services like [Double](#).
 - Manage email
 - Helping you move
 - Getting visas and arranging travel
 - Stand in line for you
 - Errands
 - Filing paperwork
- Hire a personal stylist
- And if you grew up in a thrifty family, like me:
 - Paying for parking in convenient location
 - Hotels where you can sleep comfortably
 - Non-public transportation, especially when traveling
 - Buying comfortable mattress, shoes, etc.
 - Buying clothes for appearance or comfort instead of just the lowest price
 - Bottled water when you're thirsty
 - And in general fulfilling any bodily need for < \$5 (restrooms, buying a hat when you forgot yours, etc.)
 - Buy your way out of advertising on e.g. Spotify or YouTube
 - Actually turn the heat/AC on
 - And in general, [being willing to spend a few minutes to fix small annoyances](#)
 - Seriously, just put WD-40 on that squeaky hinge already
- Katja Grace's [How to trade money and time](#)
- Sam Bowman's [Things I Recommend You Buy and Use](#)
- Rob Wiblin [channeling Sam](#)
- Arden Koehler [channeling Rob](#)
- Arden Koehler [channeling herself](#)
- [Estimated hourly costs of buying free time](#) (see comments)

Thanks to [Gwern](#), [Stephen Malina](#), [Alexey Guzey](#), [Elliot Jin](#), [iandanforth](#), [Joshua M. Clulow](#), [Kay zoba](#), [ryandrake](#), a guy I can't name who offers "personal assistant concierge services for high-net-worth families," and [Elizabeth Van Nostrand](#) for some of the ideas above.

Name	Type	Comments	Target Audience	URL
Expertise Finder	Academics to comment on many subjects		Journalists	link
Women's Media Center SheSource	Women only, focuses on current events and politics		Journalists	link
National Association of Personal Financial Advisors	Financial only	Seems like a low bar to entry	Journalists	link
ProfNet	Wide range of experts	Owned by PR firm, presumably works for experts more than you	Journalists	link
Coursera Expert Network	Academics from top schools only	Presumably biased towards people who have made Coursera courses	Journalists	link
ExpertFile	Curated experts from universities, institutions, think tanks, associations, companies and other sources		Journalists	link
GURU	Aimed mostly at professional expertise (Sales, Marketing, Eng, etc.)		Businesses	link
Amber Biology	Biologists only		Science projects?	link
Help a Reporter Out (HARO)		Requires affiliation with a highly ranked website	Journalists	link
Self Improvement Experts Directory			Individuals	link
JurisPro	Expert witnesses		Lawyers	link
ForensisGroup	Expert witnesses		Lawyers	link
Expert Institute	Expert witnesses		Lawyers	link

• Top choices:

- [IBIS](#)
- [Profound](#)
- [Research Monitor](#)

- [EuroMonitor](#)
- [Inside View](#)
- [US Census Data](#)
- [SBA's Office of Entrepreneurship Education Resources](#)
- [Pew Research Center](#)
- [Statista](#)
- [marketresearch.com](#)
- [Plunkett Research](#)
- [The Market Intelligence Co.](#)
- [Jinfo](#)
- [IDC](#)
- [Gartner](#)
- [Pitchbook](#)
- [Crunchbase](#)