



The TechAlchemy

“SHOULDs” AUDIT

The Great Digital Pruning

A guide to dropping the tools that cost more spoons than they save.

How to use this audit

Work through each part in order. Be honest — this is for you, not your productivity persona.

- Part 1: Build your complete tool inventory
- Part 2: Score each tool across six dimensions
- Part 3: Gut-check with one honest question
- Part 4: Read what your score means
- Part 5: Make a decision and a next action
- Part 6: Reflect on your patterns

Part 1: The Inventory

List every tool, app, platform, or subscription that matches at least one of these:

- You pay for it
- You keep meaning to use it
- You feel guilty about not using it
- You only keep it because you think you “should”

Include free tools you rely on — free doesn't mean costless if it drains your attention.

Tool / App	Monthly Cost	Main Purpose	Last Used	Score (fill later)

Part 2: The Reality Check



Score each tool from 0 to 2 for each question below. Use one row per tool.

Question	What it measures	Scoring
1. Friction	How hard is it to start using this tool?	0 = easy 1 = mildly annoying 2 = I avoid it
2. Clarity	Do I know exactly what this tool is for in my workflow?	0 = yes, clearly 1 = sort of 2 = not really
3. Usefulness	Does it actually help me finish real work?	0 = often 1 = sometimes 2 = rarely or never
4. Emotional Cost	How does this tool make me feel when I open it?	0 = supported 1 = neutral 2 = guilty/irritated
5. Financial Value	Is the cost worth what I actually get from it?	0 = absolutely 1 = maybe 2 = no
6. Replaceability	Could I replace this with something simpler or already in my stack?	0 = no 1 = maybe 2 = yes

Total each tool's score and note it in the "Score" column of your inventory table.

Tool Archetypes

Once you have scores, match each tool to its archetype for a quick pattern read:

	Cozy Assistant	Helpful, low-friction, and supportive. Worth keeping.
	Glitchy Boss	Controlling, rigid, or stressful. Questions its authority.
	Dusty Trophy	Impressive but unused. Bought for aspirational reasons.
	Energy Leak	Technically useful but too draining to open.
	Emergency Tool	Rarely needed, but worth keeping for when you do.
	Duplicate Gremlin	Overlaps with something you already pay for.

Part 3: The Gut Check

Before you look at your score, ask yourself one honest question:

If this tool disappeared tomorrow, would I feel...

Panicked? This tool is probably essential.

Relieved? This tool is probably clutter.

Unsure? Put it in "Pause for 30 days" and check back.

Note your gut reaction next to each tool's score. If your gut and score disagree, trust your gut.

Part 4: What Your Score Means

Add up the six scores for each tool. Find your range below.

Score	Verdict	What to do
0 – 3	Keep it	This tool is earning its place. No action needed beyond continued use.
4 – 7	Keep, but simplify	Use it more intentionally. Downgrade your plan, or learn only the parts you actually need.
8 – 10	Replace or pause	This tool isn't a good fit in its current form. Try a 30-day pause or a simpler alternative.
11 – 12	Cut it loose	It's costing more energy than it saves. Give yourself permission to cancel.

Part 5: Decisions and Next Actions

For each tool, choose a decision and write down one concrete next action. Finishing this step is what makes the audit real.

Decision options:

- Keep — it's working, no change needed
- Downgrade — drop to a lower tier or free plan
- Replace — swap it for something simpler or already in your stack
- Pause for 30 days — log out, don't open it, revisit at the end of the month
- Learn properly before deciding — set aside 30 minutes to actually understand it first
- Cancel — close the account, export your data, move on

Tool	Score	Decision	Next Action
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>
		<i>Keep / Downgrade / Replace / Pause / Cancel</i>	<i>e.g. cancel renewal, export data, archive account</i>

Next action examples:

Cancel renewal · Export data to local folder · Move notes to existing app · Test the free tier for two weeks · Unsubscribe and archive account · Watch one tutorial before next use

The Alchemist's Rule for New Tools

Before adding anything new to your stack, work through this checklist. If you can't answer every question clearly, wait 72 hours and try again.

Ask yourself:

- What exact problem am I trying to solve?
- What am I using now for this?
- Why is that not working?
- Do I need a new tool, or do I need a simpler process?
- Can something I already pay for do this well enough?
- Will I still want this in 3 days?

Only try a new tool if all of these are true:

- The problem is specific and real
- The need is still present after 72 hours
- This is the simplest reasonable option
- You know exactly where it fits in your workflow

Part 6: Your Digital Pruning Summary

This final section is about patterns, not just tools. The goal is insight you can carry forward.

Reflection	Your Answer
Which tools are genuinely helping me?	
Which tools are draining me most?	
Which subscriptions can I cancel this month?	
What category do I keep overbuying into?	
Do I need more: automation, simplicity, support, or clarity?	
What would free up the most energy right now?	

Permission Slips

You are allowed to cancel a tool you've barely used, even if you paid for a full year.

You are allowed to use a simpler tool than the one everyone recommends.

You are allowed to decide that fewer tools is a feature, not a limitation.

You are allowed to stop optimizing and just work.

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