

BROOKSBIO

FREE GUIDE AND TRACKING SHEET

Where does your scientists' time go?

A one-week automated self-audit for lab teams. Discover how much of the week is really spent on science, which admin tasks are most costly and what to fix first.

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Why run a time audit

You hired your scientists to push the technology forward or to deliver high-quality client projects. Yet, in most labs I walk into, a large part of the week is lost manually entering and analysing data, maintaining and calibrating equipment, writing and updating SOPs and COSHH assessments, reviewing batches and ordering reagents.

These manual admin tasks accumulate over time, with costs that no one owns compounding. Every moment your scientists are not at the bench slows progress and can sometimes lead to compliance issues.

This audit surfaces these invisible costs in only one week and a few minutes per person per day, with automated reminders, resulting in real data and costs instead of a hunch.

What you need

- One ordinary working week, Monday to Friday.
- The tracking sheet that comes with this guide. It works in Excel and Google Sheets.
- About five minutes per person per day.
- Thirty minutes as a team on Friday to read the results.

What you will have by Friday

- The share of the week actually spent on science.
- The two or three most costly categories.
- A rough yearly cost, in hours and pounds, of the time not spent on science.
- A short list of what to fix first.

50%

Share of the week spent on science when I first walk into a lab.

90%

Where it typically lands once the main time sinks are fixed.

Typical split reported by the teams I have worked with, before and after. Your numbers will differ; the point is to know them.

How it works

1

BEFORE MONDAY

Pick a normal week

Not a shutdown, a product launch or an audit week. Open the tracking sheet, add your team's names on the **Start here** tab and read through the ten categories. Rename, add or delete categories if your lab uses different conventions; keep the groups the same.

2

MONDAY MORNING · 5 MINUTES

Brief the team

Explain that this is to take 'non-productive' work off their plate, so honest numbers are imperative. No one is being timed or judged.

3

EVERY DAY

Log as you go

Log at three points throughout the day. The Google Sheets edition sends the check-ins for you, by email and to Slack or Teams; page 6 shows how to switch it on. Logs should be contemporaneous, so nothing is left to memory. If a task could sit in two categories, pick the one that explains *why it exists*, not what it is. Waiting counts.

4

EVERY DAY

Note the worst moments

A few words in the notes column: "waited 40 minutes for the plate reader", "no filter tips, borrowed from next door", "retyped the qPCR results into the tracker". The fixes come from these notes, not from the totals.

5

FRIDAY · 30 MINUTES

Read the results together

Open the **Summary** tab. Look at the split, then the flagged categories, then the notes. Agree the one thing you will change next week. Page 7 shows you how to read it.

Rules that keep the data accurate

- **Log contemporaneously.** Switch on the reminders (page 6); memory degrades accuracy by Friday.
- **When unsure, round admin up,** not down. Under-counting is the usual failure.
- **Include the senior people.** Their admin is the most expensive.
- **Do not change behaviour during the week.** You are measuring the lab as it is, not as it should be.
- **Keep it to one week.** An audit longer than a week is too burdensome and can get abandoned.

Working remotely or in shifts?

Each person logs their own rows under their own name. The sheet adds everything up by category and by person, so shift patterns and part-time hours do not matter.

The categories

Every hour goes into one of ten categories. Each category belongs to a group: ● **Science**, the reason the team exists; ● **Admin & ops**, necessary work that can mostly be systemised or automated; and ● **Lost time**, pure waste that is usually the cheapest thing to fix.

Category	Group	What counts
Bench work	● Science	Experiments, cell culture, assays, sample processing, running equipment to get a result.
Data analysis & interpretation	● Science	Analysing results, plotting, interpreting, deciding what to run next.
Planning & experimental design	● Science	Designing experiments, writing protocols for new work, reading the literature.
Data entry & transcription	● Admin & ops	Typing results into spreadsheets or a LIMS, copying between systems, reformatting data for someone else.
Documentation & quality	● Admin & ops	SOPs, batch records, deviations, COSHH and risk assessments, reviews and sign-offs.
Ordering, inventory & suppliers	● Admin & ops	Raising orders, chasing deliveries, stock checks, finding and negotiating with suppliers.
Equipment & facilities	● Admin & ops	Maintenance, calibration, booking, cleaning, fixing things, waiting for engineers.
Meetings & communication	● Admin & ops	Meetings, email, chat, updating other people.
Waiting, searching & rework	● Lost time	Waiting for kit or reagents, looking for things, repeating failed runs, borrowing from the lab next door.
Training & other	● Admin & ops	Training given or received, inductions, and anything that fits nowhere else.

"Is writing the batch record science?"

No. Running the batch is bench work; the record is documentation. That is not a criticism of the record, which you need. It is the point: the record should take minutes, not an afternoon.

"Is running the plate reader bench work?"

Yes, right up to the moment the result exists. Typing that result into a spreadsheet is data entry. Where exactly that line falls in your lab is one of the most useful things this audit will show you.

The tracking sheet

Start here

Your team's names, the ten categories with their flag thresholds, and three assumptions used to turn lost hours into a yearly figure: working weeks per year, hours in a full week and the loaded cost of a scientist per hour. Anything with a pale blue fill is yours to edit.

Daily log

One row per block of time: name, day, category, hours and an optional note. Name and category are dropdowns, so the totals always add up. There is room for 400 rows, which is comfortably a week for a team of ten.

Summary

Calculated from the log. Hours and share by category, a **Look here** flag against anything over its threshold, the science / admin / lost-time split beside the typical before-and-after figures, the yearly cost, and a breakdown by person.

Using Google Sheets? Upload the file to Drive and open it with Sheets. The formulas and dropdowns carry across.

Start here | Daily log | **Summary**

Category	Hours	Share	Flag
Bench work	118.5	39%	
Data analysis & interpretation	31.0	10%	
Planning & experimental design	12.5	4%	
Data entry & transcription	36.0	12%	Look here
Documentation & quality	28.5	9%	
Ordering, inventory & suppliers	26.0	9%	Look here
Equipment & facilities	14.0	5%	
Meetings & communication	21.5	7%	
Waiting, searching & rework	13.0	4%	
Training & other	3.0	1%	
Total hours logged	**304.0**	**100%**	

Group	Hours	Share	Typical before	Typical after
Science	162.0	**53%**	50%	90%
Admin & ops	129.0	**42%**	40%	8%
Lost time	13.0	**4%**	10%	2%

What the admin and lost time add up to	Value
Hours per week not on science	142.0
Hours per year not on science	6,532
Equivalent full-time scientists	3.8
Approximate cost per year	£261,280

Illustrative figures for a team of eight logging 304 hours, using the default assumptions: 46 weeks, 37.5 hours and £40 per hour.

Switching on the reminders

The Google Sheets edition of the tracker runs the week for you: three short check-ins a day to everyone, a twenty-second form to log each one, and the summary to you on Friday. It runs inside your own Google account. Nothing is installed and nothing is sent to anyone else, including me.

1

BEFORE MONDAY · 2 MINUTES

Copy the sheet

Open the Google Sheets link from the download page and click **Make a copy**. The copy is yours. Signed in to more than one Google account? Use a private window with only your work account.

2

ONCE

Open the Brooks Bio menu

Choose **Brooks Bio › Set up the audit**. The first time, Google asks you to authorise your copy to send email and create a form: **Review permissions › Advanced › Go to Lab Time Audit › Allow**. The warning appears because it is your own spreadsheet, not a published app.

3

ONCE

Fill in the panel, click Start

Team names and work emails, the Monday you start, your time zone, the check-in times (late morning, mid-afternoon, before leaving). **Send me a test check-in** shows what the team will get.

4

EVERY DAY, THEN FRIDAY

Let it run

Each person gets an email with one button. It opens a form with their name filled in: category, hours, a note if something went wrong; more than one thing, add each one. Every entry lands in the Daily log. On Friday you get the split, the flags and the yearly cost, with a link to the Summary tab. **Brooks Bio › Stop the reminders** switches it off and keeps your data.

Slack or Teams as well

Paste a webhook address into the panel and the check-ins land in a channel too. A channel member can usually make one without an administrator.

- **Slack:** Tools › Workflow Builder › New workflow › **From a webhook**. Add a variable called **text**, add a step **Send a message to a channel** using it, publish, copy the URL.
- **Teams:** channel › ··· › **Workflows** › **Post to a channel when a webhook request is received**. Copy the URL.

On Excel, or no Google account?

Excel cannot send reminders. Either run the week in Sheets (upload the file to Drive, open with Sheets), or paste these into Slack, one at a time, and a Friday one for the review:

```
/remind #lab-time-audit "Late morning.
What has the morning gone on? Log it."
at 11:30 every weekday
/remind #lab-time-audit "Mid-afternoon.
What has the time gone on since?" at
15:00 every weekday
/remind #lab-time-audit "Before you go.
Log the rest of the day." at 17:00
every weekday
```

In Teams, a scheduled Power Automate flow posting the same lines does the job.

What the flags usually mean.

The thresholds below are rules of thumb from the labs I have worked in, as a share of all hours logged. They are editable on the Start here tab. A flag is not a verdict; it tells you where to look first.

Category	Flag above	What it usually means	What usually fixes it
Data entry & transcription	10%	Two systems that do not talk to each other, so a person is the integration. Instrument files that get retyped.	A LIMS or a simple data pipeline. A direct instrument export is often enough to start.
Documentation & quality	15%	No templates, documents written from scratch, reviews that wait for one person, or paper in a digital lab.	Templates with a change log, an electronic QMS and a fixed review cadence.
Ordering, inventory & suppliers	8%	Nobody knows what is in stock, so ordering is reactive and urgent. Every scientist is a part-time buyer.	Reorder points, automated ordering and an approved supplier list. The free Lab Inventory Tracker (brooksbio.co.uk) does the first two.
Equipment & facilities	10%	Maintenance happens when something breaks. Calibration is remembered, not scheduled. No booking system.	A maintenance and calibration schedule, a shared booking calendar, service contracts for critical kit.
Meetings & communication	15%	Status is passed around in meetings and messages because there is no single place where it lives.	Fewer standing meetings and one shared place for updates, inside tools the team already uses.
Waiting, searching & rework	10%	Disorganised storage, no reorder points, failed runs repeated because the cause was never recorded.	An inventory system, labelled storage with unique locations, a short log of failed runs.

Science below 60% overall is normal for a lab that has grown faster than its systems; most teams I meet start around 50%. Begin with lost time, then the biggest flagged category. Page 8 gives you the order.

Three questions for the Friday review

1. Which tasks exist only because two systems do not talk to each other? That is data entry, and usually the biggest single prize.

2. Which happened because we ran out of something, or could not find it? That is inventory, and the cheapest to fix.

3. Which would disappear if the process were written down once, properly? That is documentation and training. It keeps auditors happy too.

Write the answers down. They are the first page of your improvement plan.

Quick wins that take a day, not a project

Work through them in this order. Lost time first, because it is cheap and the team feels it immediately. Then ordering, because it removes the fire-fighting. Then data entry, because it is usually the biggest. Documentation and equipment follow once the lab is calm enough to do them properly.

Waiting, searching & rework

- Map the freezers and shelves and give every location a unique label. Put the most-used items nearest the bench.
- One shared booking calendar for the three instruments people queue for.
- A one-line log of failed runs and the suspected cause. Patterns appear within a month.

Ordering, inventory & suppliers

- Set reorder points for the twenty items you run out of most. Start with the list from the notes column.
- One approved supplier list with agreed prices, so nobody negotiates for pipette tips.
- One channel for requests, for example a form in Slack or Teams, that feeds purchasing. Scientists stop being buyers.

Data entry & transcription

- Export straight from the instrument instead of retyping. Most instruments can; most labs do not.
- One template per assay, so results land in the same shape every time.
- Agree the single source of truth for samples and results before buying a LIMS, not after.

Documentation & quality

- An SOP template with a change log and a named owner. Nothing written from a blank page.
- A review calendar, so documents are reviewed on a date rather than when someone remembers.
- Teach the team to write a deviation in ten lines. Long deviations are late deviations.

Equipment & facilities

- A one-page maintenance and calibration calendar, on the wall and in the shared calendar.
- Service contracts for the two instruments that stop the lab when they fail.
- A simple fault log by each instrument. It tells you what to replace next year.

> **"Around three hours per scientist per week saved through automation."**
>
> An RNA drug discovery lab, after a LIMS and a Slack-to-procurement automation were put in place. Thousands of samples reconciled in two weeks.

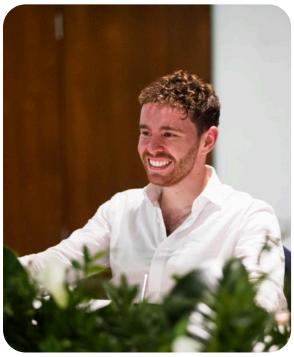
Want the proper version?

A free audit, up to half a day on site.

I walk the lab with your team, follow a sample from arrival to result, and look at how ordering, equipment, SOPs and data are actually handled day to day. If you have run this self-audit, bring the Summary tab; it gives us a head start. Within a week you get a short written report ranking the two or three operational problems costing you the most, with a recommended first fix. There is no obligation to go further.

brooksbio.co.uk

Outside the UK? The audit works as a video call too. Email louis@brooksbio.co.uk



About Louis

I am the founder and principal consultant at Brooks Bio, a lab operations and compliance consultancy. Having spent countless hours in many labs, from highly regulated cell and gene therapy manufacturing to state-of-the-art cultivated meat facilities, and having founded my own startup, I know first-hand how to get the most out of a lab.

My approach is flexible and hands-on. I integrate into your team to find the areas that are costing you the most, work to unblock the bottlenecks, and implement systems that endure after I leave: LIMS implementations, automated ordering, data pipelines and equipment automation, built around the tools your team already uses.

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