

# Christmas Countdown Checklist



**...your personal survival guide for this  
Christmas!**

## About this Guide...

Christmas often ends up being more of a strain than a pleasure, particularly with the pressures of writing personal Christmas letters, posting Christmas cards and hoping you haven't forgotten anyone, getting perfect gifts for your loved ones, cooking the perfect Christmas meal and keeping the family entertained - and all while trying to manage the budget!

So it's not surprising that credit card debt spirals out of control at this time of year and many people end up stressed and tired at a time when we should all be celebrating life and family values.

So to help preserve what's left of your sanity at this time of year, we've put together some tips for the festive season to help you get organised this Christmas.

Actually it's more than just a checklist - it includes a budget planner and a 'lessons learnt' evaluation for you to take action on to make next Christmas even easier! So it's more like your personal Christmas Survival Guide.

The Tool includes:

- The Christmas Budget template to help you keep your finances under control this festive season.
- Weekly Checklist and Planner – integrate your routine activities with your Christmas planning in the one organisational tool! Include Christmas parties and functions, Christmas preparation activities and other normal activities.
- Christmas preparation templates to help you get organised for Christmas gift shopping, Christmas cards and entertaining.
- Lessons Learnt evaluation template so that next year's Christmas will be better!
- Saving Plan template so that next Christmas won't dent your finances.

Just use the relevant templates and make this Christmas a success!

Of course, this guide can be used for other festive occasions such as Ramadan, Hanukah and even Thanks Giving [I hope I haven't offended anyone with the Christmas references, but that's what I know and do!] – and remember to keep it flexible, so that it can accommodate any changes to your plans.

So this year, enjoy a hassle free Christmas by getting organised with this guide!

Best wishes for the festive season...

**Sam Sander**

## Christmas Countdown Checklist - overview

This is an overview of the activities you need to do over the next 25 days leading up to Christmas. Of course, if it's already well into December then just fast-track the activities for the days you've missed!

### Week 1: 1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> December

- q Do a Christmas Budget
- q Do a general plan – What? Why? Where? When? Who? How?
- q Confirm invitations for Christmas day – when, where, who, who's bringing what? Etc.
- q Christmas shopping for decorations
- q Put up Christmas tree and do decorations

### Week 2: 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> December

- q Write your family Christmas letter
- q Write Christmas cards
- q Christmas shopping for gifts to be posted
- q Post Christmas cards, letters and gifts by the end of this week

### Week 3: 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> December

- q Prepare menu for Christmas day meal
- q Christmas shopping – remaining gifts
- q Wrap and hide gifts
- q Christmas shopping – foods that can be stored
- q Write and post Christmas cards to the people you forgot!
- q Do something charitable

### Week 4: 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> December

- q What's your Christmas tradition?
- q Pre-cook food that can be prepared ahead of time – eg cookies.
- q Prepare Santa treats and hang stockings
- q Stuff stockings
- q Christmas day – have a plan for the day.
- q Enjoy the day!

### The Aftermath...

- q Do thankyou letters for gifts received by post
- q Tidy up and recycle
- q Do a 'lessons learnt' evaluation of this Christmas –
- q Prepare a savings plan for next Christmas

## Week 1 – getting organised and into the Christmas spirit!

Well, it's the first day of December. Christmas is only 25 days away and there seems to be so much to do – on top of still trying to be effective at work, there are Christmas parties to attend, shopping to do, preparations to make – and then of course there is the big day itself!

So the most important thing – before you even *start* to feel frazzled – is to prepare a PLAN for your Christmas. That way, you'll know exactly WHAT to do, WHEN to do it – and you'll be surprised how much easier it all becomes.

So this week, it's all about getting organised and preparing your Christmas Plan. So do this by:

- Writing down the '**big-picture**' plan for the day – using the **5WH** format:
  - **What** are you doing - are you hosting the event, going away, etc.?
  - **Why** are you doing that - family tradition, want to get away, etc?
  - **Where** are you spending Christmas?
  - **When** is it all going to happen?
  - **Who** else is invited?
  - **How** is this all going to come together – who's doing what? Travel plans? What resources do you need?

Make sure you confirm arrangements with all concerned – send out formal invitations if you like – just to make sure everyone turns up in the right place at the right time with the right stuff!

There's a 'Big Picture Plan' template following the Week 1 Action Plan template, that you can use to document your general plan for Christmas. The purpose of this plan is to keep you focused on the important parts of the plan....

- Do a **budget** for Christmas Day – estimate what expenses you're likely to incur over the Christmas period, for you to achieve your 'Big Picture' plan. Also include other routine expenditure for the same period [eg. Utility bills, living expenses, rent, etc] so you don't unexpectedly go over your total budget allowance for the month.

Is the total amount too much? Adjust your budget by cutting out expenses for items that aren't a high priority – do you really need a new Christmas Tree? Can last years decorations do the rounds again?

Once you have your budget – stick to it! Well, as best you can anyway. And keep a record of what things really cost, so you have a better idea at budgeting for next Christmas.

There's a 'Christmas Budget' template following the Week 1 Action Plan template, that you can use to prepare your budget for Christmas.

- Prepare your **Christmas gift register**.
  - Who's getting what?
  - Where can you get these gifts?
  - Do you have an alternative if you can't find your first choice?
  - Do you need to order some gifts – how long will this take?
  - Do you need to post some gifts?
  - Any other requirements – do you need batteries?
  - Do you need any spares for unexpected bearers of gifts? Perhaps keep some generic gifts such as confectionary handy!

Remember that it REALLY is the thought that counts – you don't need to buy expensive presents to impress people. Christmas is about celebrating life and family values, not who can buy the most expensive present!

And kids will be happier with a few well-thought out gifts, than lots of toys that they never play with.

Also think about making gifts for special family and friends – home made Christmas cookies, confectionary, crafts and beauty products all make wonderful gifts – and the recipient will appreciate the effort and love you've put in to their gift.

- Prepare your **Christmas Card List**.
  - Who do you want to send Christmas cards to?
  - Do you want to do a Christmas letter and if so, who gets a copy?

There are Christmas Gift and Card templates following the Week 1 Action Plan template you can use to list these details....

The first week of December is also a good time to get into the Christmas spirit by putting up the Christmas tree and decorating your house – it's a great way to boost your mood and gets you focused on the big event.

There is a **Christmas Decoration** checklist following the Week 1 Action Plan template that you can use to plan your Christmas decorations – are last year's decorations up to the task? Do you want a particular 'theme' this year? Do you want to do a Christmas light display [mind you, these can take a lot of time to establish – so don't be too ambitious if you haven't done this already? What new decorations – if any – do you need to obtain?

Once you know what you want to do for decorations – get decorating! Get your kids to help with the decorations – they may even want to make some personalised Christmas decorations.

Use the "Week 1 Action Plan" on the next page to plan your week.

And add any other tasks or functions you need to do or attend, so you have one planner for the week – that way, nothing will be forgotten!

# Week 1 – Action Plan

Daily Planner
<b>December 1</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 2</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 3</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 4</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 5</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 6</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 7</b>
am:
pm:

To Do List
<b>Planning:</b>
q Prepare your big-picture plan for Christmas using the 5WH format – you can use the following template to help.
q Prepare your Christmas Budget using the following template – and stick to it!
q Prepare your gift register
q Prepare your Christmas card list
q Use these plans and lists to keep your focus on the right things...
<b>Get into the Christmas Spirit</b>
q Define your decoration theme
q Go shopping for decorations
q Put up the Christmas Tree and decorations
<b>Other things to do this week...</b>
q

## The Big Picture Plan for Christmas

<b>Prompt</b>	<b>"The Plan"</b>
<b>What</b> is the general plan?	
<b>Why</b> is this the plan?	
<b>Where</b> are you spending Christmas?	
<b>When</b> are you having Christmas festivities? What is the program?	
<b>Who</b> are you spending Christmas with?  Prepare a guest list if you are hosting.	
<b>How</b> is this Christmas Plan going to happen?  List resources and helpers...	

## Christmas Budget

Item	Purchase from...	Priority	Requirements (eg. Need to buy 'fresh')	Budget	Actual Cost	Tips
Gifts						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using your Big-Picture plan, work out what you need and how much it costs and put this amount in the "budget" column.</li> <li>Use a separate piece of paper to detail everything you need, and just put the totals in this sheet.</li> <li>Can you afford this first cut of the budget?</li> <li>If not, what can you cut back on – cut back on low priority items first – leaving only the 'must-do' items for a really tight budget.</li> <li>Include any special requirements such as 'order-in' time.</li> <li>Include 'normal' expenses for the month – utilities, etc. Life goes on, even though it's Christmas!</li> <li>Also keep track of actual costs to help you budget for next year.</li> </ul>
Wrapping paper, tags and bling						
Postage						
Christmas cards						
Printing of Christmas letter						
Postage						
Travel						
Accommodation costs						
Christmas day meal						
Christmas day Entertainment						
Drinks						
Christmas decorations						
Other						
<b>TOTALs</b>						

## Christmas Gift List

Who	Ideal Gift (and alternative)	Where can you get it from?	Requirements? (eg need to order in, need batteries, etc.)	Budget	Actual Cost of Gift	Tips
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It really is the thought that counts – hand made gifts (confectionary, baked goods, crafted gifts, soaps, etc) are great gifts for adults</li> <li>• Even Children will appreciate one or two well thought out gifts, rather than many 'un-personal' ones.</li> <li>• Do you REALLY need to get a gift for everyone on your list? Rationalise where you can...</li> <li>• Do you have an alternative if you can't find your first choice?</li> <li>• Do you need to order some gifts – how long will this take?</li> <li>• Do you need to post some gifts – keep these small, light and robust.</li> <li>• Any other requirements – do you need batteries?</li> <li>• Do you need any spares for unexpected bearers of gifts? Perhaps keep some generic gifts such as confectionary handy!</li> </ul>
Wrapping paper/ gift tags.						

# Christmas Post List

Who	Do they get Christmas letter?	Delivery Method	Date Delivered	Card Received?	Tips
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Record whether the person is to receive a personal letter or just a card – you can then use this as a checklist to make sure the right person gets the right Christmas greeting.</li> <li>Plan the delivery method – post, by hand, deliver at work. Hand delivered cards have an added 'personal' feel to them.</li> <li>Record when you delivered or posted the card so you know its done, and record of you've received one from that person.</li> <li>If you receive a card from a personal not on your list, add them to the bottom and send them a card in response.</li> </ul>

# Christmas Decoration Plan

Your Theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Are last year's decorations OK to reuse?

YES/ NO

What are you doing?	Preparations or Resources needed – what do you need?	Who is Responsible
<p><b>Christmas Tree:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Tree</li> <li>• Tree Decorations</li> </ul>		
<p><b>House Decorations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mood music and lighting/ candles</li> <li>• Wall/ door hangings</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Christmas Lights:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Spare light bulbs?</i></li> </ul>		
<p><b>Table Decorations:</b></p>		

## Week 2 – get writing!

OK. So now you're in the Christmas spirit and better still – you have a PLAN, it's time to start implementing that plan. So bit-by-bit you can achieve your ideal Christmas, without all that frantic running around on Christmas Eve – well, less of it anyway.

The focus for this week is on getting everything in the post – Christmas cards, family letters and gifts for family and friends who live away. Some tips for this week:

### **Christmas Letter:**

- Why do a Christmas letter? Well of course you don't have to, but it's a great way of personalising Christmas Cards and keeping your friends and family up to date on the activities of your family.
- Don't address the letter to anyone specifically – that way you can print multiple copies of the same letter and insert them into the Christmas card. You can hand-write a special personalised note on the end of the letter if you like.
- Get input from your family – if your kids are old enough, ask them to write a section on what they have achieved during the year.
- Got writer's block? Just pretend you've run into your best friend in the street and you're giving them an up-date of the highlights and low-lights of the year. Write as you would talk to them – that way you keep it personal and it sounds like 'you'.
- Try to keep the letter to less than 2 pages – easier to write and read!
- You can add images if you like, but keep in mind printing cost and time.
- For a more special look – get the letter professionally printed. But at the end of the day, running the letter off on your own home printer is just as good – your family and friends will just love reading what you've written!
- Use the 'Christmas Post List' template you prepared in Week 1 to give you an idea of how many letters to print and to make sure a copy goes to everyone important.

### **Christmas Cards:**

- Using the 'Christmas Post List' template from Week 1, write and post Christmas cards to the people on the list.
- You may want to consider hand-delivering cards to people you see regularly – work colleagues, neighbours, other school parents – to save one cost and add a more personal Christmas greeting.
- It always helps to keep a few cards spare for those people you inevitably leave off your list! Just write and deliver them as required.

### **Gifts to post:**

- Keep in mind the post-ability of gifts – keep them small, light and unbreakable!
- Wrap them well in Christmas paper (of course) but also in bubble wrap or brown paper to protect the gift and its wrapping.
- Send by registered post if the gift is valuable – and check that the recipient receives it (and check that they will actually be home to receive it, and not on holidays).

Use the "Week 2 Action Plan" on the next page to plan your week – when you plan to go shopping for those gifts and cards, when you are going to finalise and print out the Christmas Letter, when you plan to get to the post office, etc.

And add any other tasks or functions you need to do or attend, so you have one planner for the week – that way, nothing will be forgotten!

## Week 2 – Action Plan

Daily Planner
<b>December 8</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 9</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 10</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 11</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 12</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 13</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 14</b>
am:
pm:

To Do List
<b>Christmas Letter:</b>
q Write Christmas letter
q Get kids/ family input to Christmas Letter
q Finalise and print Christmas letter – keep a copy for yourself and a few spare
<b>Christmas cards:</b>
q Write Christmas cards
q Add Christmas letter to Christmas cards to family and good friends
q Post Christmas cards
q Hand deliver Christmas cards where possible
<b>Post Gifts:</b>
q Shop for gifts that need to be posted
q Wrap gifts for postage
q Post gifts
<b>Other things to do this week:</b>
q

## Week 3 – get shopping!

And now it's time you wished you did your **Christmas shopping** during the year, because it's now time to get that shopping done!

And because you've done a list – it *should* be as stress free as possible. Just stick to your plan and your budget.

When you've got all your gifts, wrap them up (or have them wrapped at the shop which is even easier) and either put them under the tree or hide them out of reach of little hands!

If you're hosting Christmas day, now is also a good time to **plan your menu** for the day and any other entertainment that may be required.

When you're preparing the menu and day's activities, think about:

- How many people are coming and what do they like?
- Do your guests have any special dietary requirements or allergies?
- Are you catering mostly for kids or adults?
- What's the weather going to be like?

It's best to keep the menu simple so you can enjoy the day too! And utilise recipes where you can prepare the food several days before.

There's a menu planner and shopping list following the Week 3 Action Plan to help you record your plan.

With all the frantic preparations going on, it's easy to get swept-up in all the hype and commercialism of Christmas. I always like to ground myself at this stage by thinking about the real meaning of Christmas.

Our family has started a tradition of buying a gift for someone needy and putting it anonymously on their doorstep – food hampers are great for this. And some department stores have a Christmas Tree where you can put gifts for underprivileged children.

And of course, we also discuss the importance of family and love with our children at this time of year so they understand what it's all about.

So I encourage you to also think about the real meaning of Christmas and doing **something charitable** – with your family if possible - for those less fortunate.

Use the "Week 3 Action Plan" on the next page to plan your week.

And add any other tasks or functions you need to do or attend, so you have one planner for the week – that way, nothing will be forgotten!

## Week 3 – Action Plan

Daily Planner
<b>December 15</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 16</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 17</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 18</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 19</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 20</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 21</b>
am:
pm:

To Do List
<b>Christmas shopping:</b>
q Plan Christmas menu and shopping list
q Shop for remaining Christmas Gifts and get them wrapped
q Shop for Food that will keep in the cupboard/ freezer until Christmas day
<b>Do something charitable:</b>
q
<b>Other things to do this week:</b>
q

# Christmas Day Menu and Entertainment Plan

What are you doing?	Pre-Christmas Preparations needed	Who is Responsible
<b>Menu:</b>		
<b>Entertainment:</b>		

## Christmas Shopping List

Item and Quantity	Item and Quantity	Item and Quantity
<i>Meat:</i>	<i>Dairy:</i>	<i>Drinks:</i>
<i>Fresh Fruit and Veges:</i>	<i>Dry goods:</i>	<i>Other:</i>

## Week 4 – final preparations!

Christmas is now only days away – so this is where things really heat up.

By now you should have done ALL of your shopping – with the exception of fresh foods that you need to buy closer to the day.

So this week is about dotting the ‘i’s’ and crossing the ‘t’s’ in terms of your preparations, and preparing Christmas day fare.

Your action items for this week (not actually a full week) really depend on your specific plans for Christmas Day – so sit down with a cup of tea, and write down a list of everything left to do, who’s going to do it and whether you need anything else.

Now use the “Week 4 Action Plan” on the next page to plan your week.

And add any other tasks or functions you need to do or attend, so you have one planner for the week – that way, nothing will be forgotten!

It’s also good to prepare a “sequence of events” for Christmas Day – this is how you foresee the day progressing – when do people arrive, when do you serve what food, when do you provide any entertainment, etc.. Of course, keep this **flexible** – people will be late, the kids will open their presents before breakfast....

You may also want to consider a Christmas tradition for your family – kids love traditions because it’s something special to look forward to every year. As kids, our tradition was leaving a snack out for Santa on Christmas Eve and hanging our Christmas stockings on the fire place – which would be full of little knick-knacks on Christmas morning.

What’s *your* family tradition?

But most importantly, don’t forget to enjoy Christmas day!

# Week 4 – Action Plan

Daily Planner	
<b>December 22</b>	
am:	
pm:	
<b>December 23</b>	
am:	
pm:	
<b>December 24</b>	
am:	
pm:	
<b>December 25</b>	
am:	
pm:	

To Do List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>q Sit down and prepare a final plan for this week.</li><li>q Do final shopping for fresh food and other things you need</li><li>q Prepare a sequence of events for Christmas day</li><li>q Prepare food ahead of the day where possible</li><li>q Consider starting a Christmas tradition (if you haven't already got one)</li><li>q Enjoy yourself!</li><li>q</li></ul>

# Christmas Program

Approximate Time	Event	Other Details (Who? Where? How?)

## The Aftermath – before you forget...

Ahhhhhh..... There's that sigh of relief – you've survived Christmas for another year, and the next one's not for another 365 days.

Yes – you deserve a well-earned rest right now, but there are a few little things worth doing now before you forget and to make next year's Christmas even easier!

### ***The Thank-you's:***

If you've received gifts in the post, prepare and send a written thank you note – it's always well received! And make sure your kids do the same...

It's also nice to thank the host of Christmas day – a small gift of appreciation is all that's needed.

### ***The Tidy up:***

What to do with all that wrapping? It's very tempting just to get a broom and sweep it all into the garbage, but please consider our planet by saving wrapping paper that is still useable [for next year] and recycle the rest. Or maybe your kids can use cards and wrapping for craft projects...

It's also worth putting some effort into packaging away Christmas lights and decorations so they don't get damaged or tangled.

### ***The After-Christmas sales:***

Shopping after Christmas is probably the furthest thing from your mind and there is certainly no panicked need to get to the shops straight away.

The only thing I'll say here is that if you're looking for some bargains on Christmas decorations, cards and wrapping paper – and maybe even some Christmas (or birthday) gifts – then the post-Christmas sales are a good way to achieve this. Imagine getting all of next year's Christmas shopping done NOW! You can also keep an eye open on sales during the year for gifts...

Of course, it's not that simple and I'd suggest that you only purchase items that you REALLY need and that will last until next year – both in terms of used by date for food and relevance of any gifts!

### ***The Lessons Learnt:***

Whether you hosted this Christmas or not, it's worth evaluating the day – what worked, what didn't work, what could you do differently next year – and so on.

Perhaps you realise that it really is too stressful doing all your Christmas gift shopping in December, and that shopping throughout the year for gifts as the opportunity arises is the solution. Or perhaps roast turkey just isn't appropriate in tropical heat...

By doing this evaluation every year, you'll progressively develop a plan for the 'perfect' Christmas – and every year will become easier and easier!

There's a 'Lessons Learnt' template following the Aftermath Action Plan template, that you can use to do this evaluation.

***Saving up for next Christmas:***

If this Christmas was a stretch on your purse-strings, then you're not alone – Christmas is a financial drain on many people who over indulge and overspend on unnecessary presents. And even if you do stick to the basics, Christmas can still put pressure on your budget.

So NOW is the time to prepare a budget for next Christmas! You can start by looking at what you spent this year – will next Christmas be any different? Who's hosting next Christmas? Will you need to travel? And based on the Lessons Learnt, can you cut back on gifts or food?

So set your budget based on your best guess of what you're going to do - and add 10%. [you can do that easily by multiplying your budget estimate by 1.1]. You can then divide this number by the number of weeks left until December (about 48 weeks if you're doing this in early January) – that's how much money you need to save every week to pay for next Christmas.

There are some bank accounts that allow you to save this amount – and won't let you withdraw the money until December! But you can do it just as easily in any bank account.

The best thing about saving for next Christmas is that you can still have a wonderful Christmas, without the added financial burden the Christmas so often causes.

There's a 'Christmas Saving Plan' template following the Aftermath Action Plan template, that you can use to prepare your saving plan.

Use the "Aftermath Action Plan" on the next page to plan your week.

And add any other tasks or functions you need to do or attend, so you have one planner for the week – that way, nothing will be forgotten!

# The Aftermath – Action Plan

Daily Planner
<b>December 26</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 27</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 28</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 29</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 30</b>
am:
pm:
<b>December 31</b>
am:
pm:
<b>January 1</b>
am:
pm:

To Do List
<b>Thank-you's:</b>
q Thank the Christmas day host
q Thank you notes to people who posted gifts
<b>Tidy up:</b>
q Reuse and recycle where possible
q Pack away ornaments and lights carefully to avoid damage and tangles.
<b>Post Christmas Shopping:</b>
q Do a shopping list of what you really need – and stick to it!
<b>Lessons Learnt:</b>
q Do a lessons learnt evaluation.
<b>Christmas Saving Plan:</b>
q Based on this years's budget and lessons learnt, prepare a budget for next Christmas
q Prepare a savings plan based on this budget
<b>Other things to do this week:</b>
q

## Lessons Learnt Evaluation

<b>S</b> uccesses – what worked	<b>F</b> ailures – what didn't work
1. Brief description of what worked:	1. Brief description of what didn't work:
2. Why it was a success – what you did well	2. Why it was a failure – what you didn't do well
3. Warning signs – were you just lucky? What can you do better next time	3. Hopeful signs – were you just unlucky? What you would still do next time
4. What do you think are the primary reason/s for success?	4. What do you think are the primary reason/s for failure?
5. Take-away messages for next Christmas: 1.  2.  3.	5. Take-away messages for next Christmas: 1.  2.  3.

# Christmas Saving Plan

Item	Cost this year	Budget for next year
Gifts		
Wrapping paper, tags and bling		
Postage		
Christmas cards		
Printing of Christmas letter		
Postage		
Travel		
Accommodation costs		
Christmas day meal		
Christmas day Entertainment		
Drinks		
Christmas decorations		
Other (List)		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$</b>
<b>Add 10% [multiply total by 1.1]</b>		<b>\$</b>
<b>Number of weeks until 1 December</b>		
<b>Divide Budget by number of weeks</b> <b>Put this amount of money into a separate bank account every week and don't make withdrawals until next Christmas!</b>		<b>\$</b>