

What's the difference between the Project and Category column? How do I use the Project and Category column?

Below are some answers from people who use TimeTracker. Maybe it will give you some ideas.

SHORT VERSION:

The Project column is for listing different projects you work on or clients you work for while using TimeTracker. Category is for listing what you do while working.

LONG VERSION:

To have one timer for every project might be OK for many, but I like to have a timer for tracking multiple projects (for different clients or groups of commissions, e.g. Campaigns) So the easiest way to describe the difference between the two, is to give some examples from my everyday "real-life" use.

I am a freelance designer & commercial artist, working on several projects at the same time. I could of course have one TimeTracker document named for each project, to track that particular project. But I also want to have an overall view of how I use my time. To do this I need to have a way to differentiate and identify the projects and/or clients on the same timer.

There are several ways you can customize how you use this column. Among others:

1) AS A PERIODIC TIMER

You can use the same TimeTracker document to track "all" you do during a specific time period (i.e. a day, week- or monthly based TimeTracker document). In this case you give the TimeTracker document the (Periods) name, enter all projects you work on in the Project item list, and use Category to specify the kind of work you do on the project.

When working on a given project, you make this the Default Project for as long as you are working on it, and then change the default before starting / resuming on another project. With this "set-up", you can also evaluate your daily or weekly productivity rate for that period, by selecting the "Statistics" button in the icon Tool Bar.

2) AS A TIMER FOR GROUPS OF PROJECTS

You can use the same TimeTracker document for tracking a group of projects, either for a specific client, or a campaign - or other somewhat related projects. Call the timer by the groups (client/Campaign) name, enter the project names in the Edit Project, and use it as a "Client-based" tracker. This way you have an overall, accumulated view of that group of projects, and can group and select individual time entries on a Project- or Category related basis.

You can of course make a combination of these two settings, by having one "General" timer for tracking all activities in a given period, to get the days/weeks productivity statistic, and then sort & select (Mark special in the Edit-menu) the different projects, and copy & paste them into the "Client" tracker for accumulation (if you don't "Export" to a FileMaker or Excel file, that is).

3) OTHER WAYS TO CUSTOMIZE YOUR TimeTracker.

Even if you use the timer as a one-project-timer-only, you might find the Project column useful.

Let's say your work or "product" evolve through different phases, which in my case might be -

Initial work (research, planning/budgeting, briefings, meetings etc.) Creative activities, (Generating ideas, layout, copy, illustration etc.) Pre-press production, (DTP, proofs/corrections, revisions, control) Etc. etc. Make your own list -

The same principle as #1 and #2 apply to this set-up: It can give you more and better information on what- and how you do with your time, than without a Project column.

If you put some consideration into the way you build or name your Project and Category list (e.g. starting the name with numbers reflecting the client-list or the sequence of the project) you can sort the time entries afterwards to get a fairly good view of the progression, and the Time & Charge amount for the different groups of Projects/Categories. (Sort Special, mark, display marked). Either way, you can see that the Project column can be extremely useful.

Files could be used to represent projects and then categories as different project activities with different charging rates; in this case one will generally have several files open at the same time. On the other hand, and the way I'm currently using Time Tracker, files are simply a convenient way of subdividing the data so I use a single file to represent a single month implying that there is only ever one file open at a time. This last organization has the disadvantage of having to access the full file window to switch activities as compared to the first organization, where the switch can be done by simply activating a different file, in the collapsed window mode. On the other hand, the second organization is administrationally cleaner. The second organization also eliminates the need for a built-in "projects" concept. Categories are now really charge rates meaning that different activities (i.e. categories) within the same project may be charged at different rates. In this case, it may be better named "activity" or "task".

Projects are completely independent of categories and have no attributes other than a name, hence they are a organizational help only in grouping together a set of categories (activities). So far, so good. BUT generally the charging rate for a category will vary according to the particular project.

I'm lazy and have mostly only one file with all my time tracks. Instead of using different named files, I can use the "Project" for this. The "Categories" are the sub-tasks of a project. Works fine.

The way I use it in the architectural field is... First, name a folder the name of my client (I do freelance too). ie "ABC Assoc.". In there the TimeTracker file is named after their client's name. ie "123 Building". Then the project can be named "TownHouses" or a project number like "9414". Then last, the category is the task that is performed that day ie. "Review Dwgs.", "Const. Docs." etc...

A TimeTracker file is set up for a client. A project is any single estimated event for that client. (Programming a database, installing a network, training them to write Excel macros...) A category is a breakdown of tasks down in a project, for instance while programming a database I do user interface code, data definitions, report writing etc.) Tracking things at a category level gives me a job history so that I can be more accurate on future bids.

You might keep a file for a client. Example: File: Wired Magazine (let's be optimistic)
Project: Internet Article Category: Research Category: Writing Category;
Editing/Proofing Category: Answering pesky editor questions about facts But you would only do this if you needed to track info at this level. In actual use I reverse the use of project and category because I bill the same rate for all tasks in a project but different projects can have different rates. TimeTracker however assigns rates at the category level and a default category can be set per file. Therefore I treat the category as the project and the project as the category. Confused yet?