

Personal Budgeting Fundamentals — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into your own working budget. Each section maps to a course module, moving from finding your real numbers, to choosing a method, to building the budget, to funding a buffer and keeping it alive. Fill in real figures rather than estimates as you go; the included spreadsheet templates handle the arithmetic so you can focus on the decisions.

Know Your Real Numbers Before You Budget

Pin down your true take-home pay, audit a real month of spending, and name which paycheck-to-paycheck traps are hitting you.

Worksheet: My Real Take-Home Pay

Pull your last two or three pay stubs, or your last twelve months of deposits if your income is irregular. Use the deposit you actually receive, never your gross salary. Combine both partners' income if you share a budget.

Net pay per paycheck (from the stub, after all deductions)

Pay frequency (weekly, biweekly, twice monthly, monthly)

Total annual net pay (sum of all paychecks for the year)

Monthly planning figure (annual net pay divided by 12)

If irregular: total deposits over the last 12 months

If irregular: trailing average monthly income (12-month total divided by 12)

Exercise: 30-Day Spending Audit

Export or scroll the last 30 to 60 days of transactions from every account and card you use. Do not judge anything; just gather evidence and total each bucket.

- What is my total for Fixed costs (rent, car, insurance, phone, internet)?

- What is my total for Variable costs (groceries, gas, restaurants, shopping)?

- Which three variable categories had the largest totals, and what surprised me?

- What periodic or annual bills do I know hit during the year that were not in this window?

Checklist: Name Your Paycheck-to-Paycheck Traps

- Identify any timing mismatch where a big bill is due before the paycheck that covers it
- Confirm whether one 600-dollar surprise would force me onto a credit card
- Check whether my last raise was absorbed by new recurring costs within a month or two
- Note whether paychecks, bills, and savings currently share one blurred account
- List the invisible annual or quarterly bills that have ambushed me before

Choose a Budgeting Method That Fits You

Test the four frameworks against your own numbers and commit to the single method you will actually run for 90 days.

Exercise: Run the 50/30/20 Diagnostic

Apply the three-slice rule to your monthly planning figure, then compare the targets to what your audit showed you actually spend. The gaps are the point.

- What are my needs (50%), wants (30%), and savings (20%) target amounts?

- Are my real needs above 50 percent, and if so, is rent the main reason?

- How far is my actual savings from the 20 percent target?

- If the ratios do not fit my city, what honest split (for example 60/25/15) would I use for now?

Worksheet: Method Fit Scorecard

Score each method 1 to 5 on how well it fits your income type, your tolerance for daily effort, and where you tend to leak money. The highest realistic score, not the most powerful method, wins.

50/30/20 — fit score and one-line reason

Zero-based budgeting — fit score and one-line reason

Envelope method (which 2 categories) — fit score and one-line reason

Pay-yourself-first automation — fit score and one-line reason

My income type (steady or irregular) and weekly minutes I can realistically spend

My final primary method, plus any automation and envelopes I will layer on

Checklist: Lock In My Method for 90 Days

- Write down my primary method in one sentence
- Decide my pay-yourself-first savings amount and the payday it transfers
- Choose the two leaky categories that will become envelopes
- Commit to running this exact setup for a full 90 days before judging it
- Set a calendar reminder at day 90 to evaluate on results, not feelings

Build Your First Working Budget

Assemble your income, fixed, variable, and periodic numbers into a zero-based monthly budget, choose a tool, and set up a tracking habit.

Worksheet: My Zero-Based Monthly Budget

Start with income at the top, subtract fixed costs first, fund savings and sinking funds next, then distribute the remainder across variable categories until the bottom line reads exactly zero.

Monthly take-home income

Total fixed costs (list each: rent, car, insurance, phone, internet)

Pay-yourself-first savings amount

Monthly sinking-fund contribution (periodic and annual bills)

Variable categories with amounts (groceries, gas, restaurants, personal, fun, buffer)

Income minus all assignments (must equal zero)

Exercise: Choose Tool and Account Structure

Decide on one tracking tool and a simple bank layout you can set up this week. Do not let tool-shopping become procrastination.

- Which tool will I use: spreadsheet, YNAB, Monarch, Rocket Money, EveryDollar, or pen and paper, and why?
 - What is my account layout (bills checking, spending checking, high-yield savings)?
 - Which high-yield savings account will hold my emergency fund and sinking funds?
 - On which payday will my automated savings transfer fire, and for how much?
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Checklist: Make the Budget Real This Week

- Cancel at least two unused subscriptions and record the dollars recovered
- Confirm the budget balances to zero before the month begins
- Set up the chosen tool and enter every category
- Open or designate the bills, spending, and savings accounts
- Schedule the automated payday transfer to savings
- Set a recurring two-minute daily check-in tied to an existing habit

Build a Buffer and Keep the Budget Alive

Stand up a starter emergency fund, set up sinking funds for irregular bills, and install the fifteen-minute monthly review that keeps everything running.

Worksheet: Emergency Fund Staging Plan

Define your two stages and the monthly amount you will move toward each. Keep the fund in a separate high-yield account so it is not casually spent.

Stage one target (1,000 dollars or one month of bills)

Monthly amount I will move until stage one is funded

My monthly essential expenses (for sizing stage two)

Stage two target (3 to 6 months of essentials)

Account where the fund will live (bank and nickname)

My written definition of what counts as a real emergency

Worksheet: Sinking Funds Menu

List every irregular bill expected over the next twelve months, then divide each by the months until due to get a monthly contribution. Add the total as a budget line.

Car maintenance/repairs — annual amount and monthly contribution

Annual insurance — amount, due month, and monthly contribution

Holidays and gifts — amount and monthly contribution

Travel — amount and monthly contribution

Medical/dental — amount and monthly contribution

Total monthly sinking-fund line to add to the budget

Exercise: Run a Practice Monthly Review

Using your first tracked weeks, simulate the fifteen-minute monthly review so the habit is ready before payday.

- Which three categories did I miss most against plan, and was the estimate wrong or the month unusual?
- Where did I underspend, and will that money go to savings, debt, or next month?
- Which category amounts should I permanently adjust rather than fight every month?
- If my income changed, how will I assign the difference before lifestyle creep absorbs it?

Checklist: Keep It Alive Routine

- [] Schedule a recurring fifteen-minute monthly review a few days before payday
- [] After any emergency-fund use, make replenishment next month's top priority
- [] Move every leftover dollar deliberately rather than leaving it vague
- [] Rebuild category amounts after any major life change (move, new dependent, job switch)
- [] Set a quarterly reminder to check whether my chosen method still fits

Your Action Plan

1. Find your single monthly take-home figure today, averaging the last twelve months if your income is irregular
2. Run a 30 to 60 day spending audit and sort every transaction into fixed, variable, and periodic buckets
3. Choose one budgeting method and commit to running it unchanged for a full 90 days
4. Cancel at least two unused subscriptions and redirect the recovered dollars to savings
5. Build a zero-based monthly budget where income minus every assigned category equals zero
6. Set up your tool and a three-account bank structure, then schedule an automated payday transfer to savings
7. Fund a 1,000-dollar starter emergency fund as fast as possible, even by pausing other goals
8. List your irregular bills and start a monthly sinking-fund contribution for each one
9. Install a two-minute daily tracking check-in tied to an existing habit so the budget stays current
10. Hold a fifteen-minute monthly review before each payday and rebuild next month's budget from what you learned

