How Often Do You Really Need to Log R&D Time?

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Ask five companies how often their engineers should log R&D time, and you may get five different answers. Some record weekly, others summarise monthly, and still others pull together estimations at year-end. Each of these approaches is defensible, and the best solution depends on company organisation and which jurisdiction's rules you're working under.

Working under a mismatched time-logging cadence can result in loss of important R&D detail and unrealistic time burdens for engineers. The optimal process should minimise redundant repetition while preserving a clear, detailed chronology.

The risk spectrum, and why it exists

At the most frequent end of the scale sits the daily work-package entry. This level of logging produces the finest detail, explicitly linking employee, date, and activity in a near contemporaneous record. However, when data entry is laborious or requires repeated entry of the same information day after day, R&D time logging can be transformed into busywork without the benefit of more granular detail.

Weekly reviews can work well when using planned time allocation and other data sources to track the week's R&D work. This workflow can be more sustainable for teams, but the evidence is less immediate. Depending on the type of work, valuable details can be forgotten by the end of the week.

Monthly or yearly tracking reduces the burden of interruption further, but increases the amount of information lost significantly. It can be suitable for consistent, long-term work supported by manager reviews, but is overall high risk. A flat allocation, such as "85% of this person's time was R&D this period", is hard to defend with suitable evidence for a claim.

Most companies sit somewhere in between these tracking frequencies, by way of habit and convenience. Instead, their cadence of R&D tracking should be a deliberate choice based on the company organisation and jurisdiction.

CADENCE	BURDEN	EVIDENCE STRENGTH	BEST FIT
Daily work-package entry	**High** if entry is laborious or repetitive. Moderate burden with more intelligent tracking systems.	**Strongest.** Links employee, date and activity in a near-contemporaneous record.	Detailed, variable R&D work where fine-grained evidence is needed and logging can be kept simple.
Weekly review	**Moderate.** More sustainable for teams, especially when supported by planned time allocations and other data sources.	**Moderate.** Less immediate, with some risk that important details are forgotten by the end of the week.	Teams seeking a practical balance between evidence quality and administrative effort.
Monthly or yearly tracking	**Low.** Causes fewer interruptions and requires less frequent input.	**Weak to high-risk.** Significant detail can be lost, and flat percentage allocations can be difficult to support.	Consistent, long-term work backed by manager reviews and other reliable evidence.

Chart comparing R&D time tracking cadences

Why the answer changes by jurisdiction

Ireland's Revenue guidance for the R&D corporation tax credit outlines an expectation of contemporaneous, reviewed records to support claims. A 2026 update introduced a simplification for certain employees whose time is overwhelmingly devoted to qualifying R&D (at least 95%), but this strict recordkeeping expectation still applies in most cases.

The UK takes a looser stance on format. HMRC has no universal timesheet requirement, instead describing records of decisions by competent professionals and project boundaries, explicitly recognising that first-time claimants may lack detailed contemporaneous records. Quarterly review meetings that document who worked on what can, in practice, be enough.

Canada's SR&ED requirements sit at the strict end. Detailed project-level records and documentation for both work and expenditure are necessary for a credible claim. The Canada Revenue Agency's review materials place weight on evidence created during the work and on records that let a reviewer clearly understand what was attempted, by whom, and when.

What this means in practice

ReaDI-Watch sees daily work-package-linked entry as optimal for the lowest-risk claims and the most successful application of R&D data, but the platform also supports retrospective estimates and proactive allocation. Ultimately, an R&D time logging cadence should be chosen based on the specific rules and situation you're claiming under, not created by neglectful habits.