HABITS & BEHAVIOR CHANGE · WORKSHEET

Building Habits Worksheet

Design a new habit the way it actually forms: a clear cue, a small routine, and a reward, then make it so easy and obvious that it sticks.

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What this tool does

Habits run on a loop: a cue triggers a routine, which delivers a reward, and over time that loop runs on autopilot. Understanding this loop is the key to building a new habit on purpose. Most habit attempts fail not from lack of willpower but from poor design, the cue is unclear, the routine is too big, or there is no reward to make the brain want to repeat it. This worksheet walks you through designing each piece so the habit has a real chance of taking hold.

Research on habit formation by Wendy Wood and others shows that habits are built far more by context and repetition than by motivation, which naturally rises and falls. Anchoring a new habit to an existing routine, often called habit stacking, gives it a reliable cue, for example doing two minutes of stretching right after you brush your teeth. Wood's work also highlights that reducing friction matters enormously: people repeat behaviors that are easy and convenient, and abandon ones that take effort to start.

The single most powerful move is to make the habit small. James Clear calls this starting with a behavior that takes two minutes or less, because a habit you can do on your worst day is one that survives. You can always grow it later, but consistency in the early weeks is what wires the behavior in. Once the habit is automatic, the size takes care of itself. Until then, easy and repeated beats ambitious and occasional every time.

How to use it

1. **Name one small habit and why it matters,** keeping it specific enough that you can picture yourself doing it.
2. **Anchor it to a cue,** ideally an existing routine: after I pour my morning coffee, I will...
3. **Shrink the routine to its two-minute version,** the size you could manage even on a bad day.
4. **Attach an immediate reward,** and clear the friction: lay things out, remove a barrier, put the cue in plain sight.
5. **Write your plan for a missed day,** never miss twice, then rate your confidence 0 to 10. Below 7, shrink the habit further.

A COMPLETED EXAMPLE

The habit I want to build: *Read before bed instead of scrolling*

Why it matters to me: *I fall asleep faster and feel less wired at night.*

My cue (when and where): *After I brush my teeth, I get into bed with the book already waiting on my pillow.*

The smallest version: *One page. More is a bonus.*

My reward: *Crossing the day off on a little calendar taped inside the book cover.*

My plan if I miss a day: *No make-up reading, just back to one page the next night.*

How confident am I? (0-10): *8*

1 The habit

Name the small habit you want to build.

The habit I want to build

Why it matters to me

2 The cue

What will reliably remind you to do it? Anchoring it to an existing routine works best.

My cue (when and where)

3 The routine

Make the action as small as you can to start.

The smallest version of the habit

4 The reward

How will you make it feel good, so your brain wants to repeat it?

My reward

5 Make it easy and obvious

Reduce friction and put the cue in plain sight.

How I will make it easier to start

How I will make the cue obvious

6 Plan for slips

My plan if I miss a day

How confident am I that I can start this? (0-10)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Circle one.

Looking back

Which part of the loop failed on your missed days: the cue never fired, the routine felt too big, or the reward fell flat?

Has the two-minute version grown on its own yet? Growth you didn't force is the sign the habit is taking root.

What did making it easy actually look like in practice, and what one further piece of friction could you still remove?

Sources

- Wood W. Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes That Stick. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2019.
- Clear J. Atomic Habits. Avery; 2018.

Want help making a change that lasts?

A therapist can help you understand what keeps getting in the way. Free to search our directory. Start at psychology.com/therapist.

This worksheet is an educational self-help tool, not therapy or a diagnosis. If a habit you are trying to build or break is tied to your mental health, consider working with a licensed professional. In an emergency, call your local emergency number or, in the US, call or text 988.

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