

Module 3: Habits

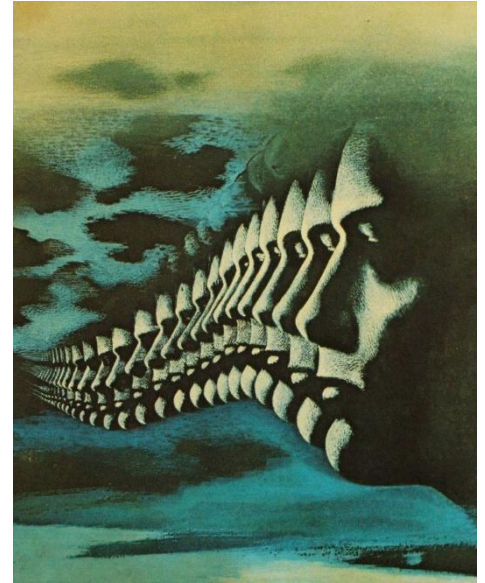




HABITS: AUTOMATING SUCCESS

What Are Habits?

- Habits are **automatic, conditioned behaviours**: Things you do in **autopilot** mode without thinking about doing them.
 - They are **recurring responses to specific environmental and mental cues**.
 - **Example:** You walk into the kitchen and immediately open the fridge when you see it—even if you're not hungry.
- **Most habits form and operate unconsciously**, through repeated reward seeking or punishment avoidance.
 - But **with conscious awareness we can make and break any habit we want**.
 - **Example:** You notice you scroll TikTok every night in bed and lose sleep, so you start plugging your phone in across the room and reading instead.



Habits are Good Servants, but Bad Masters

- **Habits take over – for better or worse**
 - They can override what we decide or plan to do in the moment
 - **Example:** You want to eat healthily, but still reach for chocolate every night out of habit
 - This means that **bad habits can derail our intentions – and good habits can keep us on track**.
- **Habits are how we make hard things easy.**
 - **Good habits stop day-to-day fluctuations in our mood and motivation from derailing us.**
 - They help us stay consistent, even when we don't feel like it.





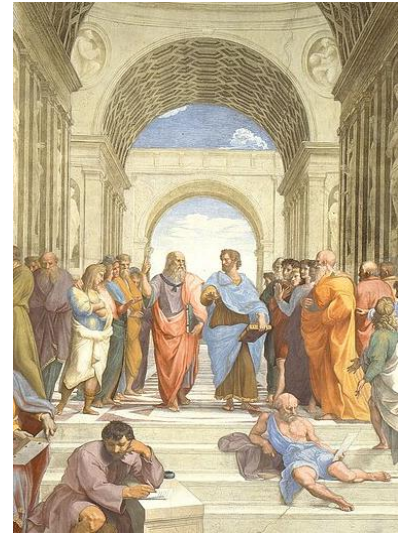
Your Habits Determine Your Life

Your character is the sum of your mental and physical habits.

And as Heraclitus said: *“Character is fate.”*

*“Sow a thought and you reap an action;
sow an act and you reap a habit;
sow a habit and you reap a character;
sow a character and you reap a destiny.”*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson



To Achieve a Goal, Forget it. Focus on Habits.

- **Goals are important to orient ourselves in the world.** Without a clear aim, we can feel lost and have no outlet for personal growth.
 - But **just setting goals doesn't help you achieve them, and can make you overly outcome-oriented.**
 - To achieve a goal, **focus on the causes which produce it → Focus on Habits**



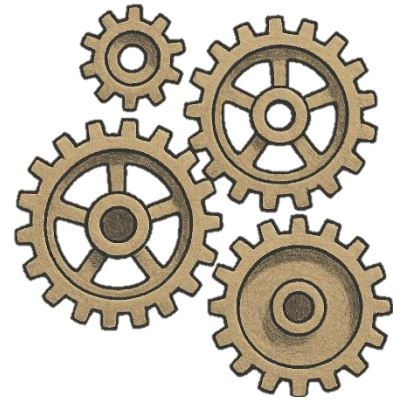
- **We don't rise to the level of our goals, we fall to the level of our habits**
 - **Our minimum standards, not our aspirations, determine what we become.**
 - Set a goal → Focus on habits → Arrive at goal → Retain healthy habits
 - **Example:** Instead of focusing on: "I want a 6 pack", do sit-ups every day.
 - **Example:** Instead of focusing on: "I want good grades", focus on daily study.



The Secret of Change: Focus on Cause-and-Effect Relationships

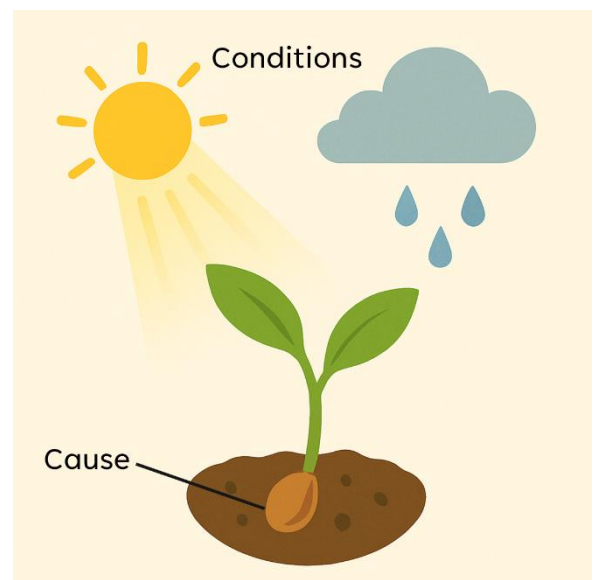
Causes and Conditions

- **A goal (and anything) is the culmination of specific *causes* and *environmental conditions***
 - **Example:** Good grades are *caused* by studying, and favourable *conditions* which cause studying are good sleep, good food, hydration and exercise
- **Goals are *caused* by habits. And habits themselves are the result of specific causes and environmental conditions**
 - Without a repetitive *cause* for a habit, there can't be a repetitive *response*, and so there can be no habit.
 - Without appropriate *environmental conditions*, good habits won't stick – and bad habits will keep recurring.



Causes and Conditions of Habits

- **The immediate *cause* of a habit is called a cue, or a trigger.**
 - **Example:** Alarm noise → get up, brush teeth
 - **Example:** Phone vibrate → reach for phone
- ***Conditions* are background causes which support or enable the habit (they can be mental or external)**
 - **Example (Positive):** A tidy desk makes it easier to study
 - **Example (Negative):** Low self-worth makes doomscrolling more likely
 - **Conditions don't directly trigger the habit, but they create the **environment** for it to thrive.**







KEY: To build or break a habit, cultivate or remove the causes and conditions for it.



The Structure of a Habit

Habits function in predictable, self-reinforcing loops.

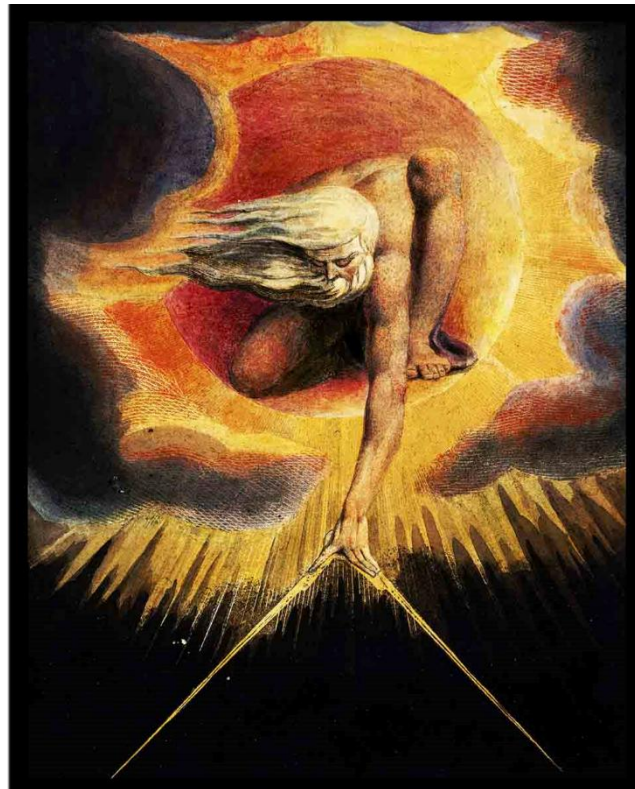


Stage	Explanation
Cue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The trigger that initiates the habit loop. ▪ It can be external (notification sound) or internal (stress). ▪ Without a trigger, a habit cannot arise. <p>Example: Hearing your phone buzz.</p>
Craving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A sensation of desire from associating the cue with past pleasure. <p>Example: The strong, physical urge to pick up your phone and check messages after the buzz.</p>
Response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The behaviour you do automatically in response to the cue. <p>Example: Picking up your phone and falling into scrolling.</p>
Reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The positive feeling you get from doing the habitual behaviour. <p>Example: The momentary stress-relief from scrolling on your phone.</p>



Hacking the Habit Loop to Build and Break Habits

Target the 4 stages of the Habit loop to effectively build and break habits.



Breaking a Habit	Building a Habit
<p>1. Remove the Cue</p> <p>Make it invisible. Reduce exposure to triggers or environments that initiate the habit.</p>	<p>1. Add a Cue</p> <p>Make it obvious. Design a clear and consistent trigger to start the habit.</p>
<p>2. Melt the Craving with Mindfulness</p> <p>Notice the urge without acting on it, feel it flow in your body for 90 seconds. It will pass.</p>	<p>2. Strengthen the Craving</p> <p>Make it attractive. Focus your mind on why you're doing it and what the benefit will be</p>
<p>3. Block and Change the Response</p> <p>Make it hard to do the negative habit, and easy to do a positive replacement habit</p>	<p>3. Ensure the Response</p> <p>Make it easy to do the positive habit by starting small and changing your environment</p>
<p>4. Replace the Reward</p> <p>Mentally celebrate the win, <i>reward yourself – warm tea, take a sun break, light a candle</i></p>	<p>4. Add the Reward</p> <p>Recognise and feel your win. Do something nice – <i>warm shower, music, small snack</i></p>



Building Habits

Habits start manually, then become automatic

- **In the beginning, when a behaviour is not habitual, you have to consciously make yourself do it.** It takes a bit of intentionality and effort.
 - If you do it enough, **the brain slowly adapts, and the behaviour becomes more and more automatic**



Three pillars of habit-formation

- **Repetition:** The more a behaviour is repeated, especially in a consistent context, the more entrenched the habit becomes.
- **Rewards:** Receiving a reward immediately after a particular behaviour makes the brain release dopamine, which reinforces the behaviour.
 - Over time, just the anticipation of the reward (upon seeing the cue) can lead to a dopamine release, further cementing the habit.
- **Consistency:** Habits form faster and stronger when the cue and context remain consistent. Same trigger, same time, same place.





Building Habits (1/4)

If we want to *build* a habit, we need to *create* a cue, *strengthen the craving*, *ensure* a response and *ensure* a reward.

KEY PRINCIPLE: MAKE IT EASY

1. Create a Cue to trigger your habit:

Use cues which are consistently present to reliably trigger habits.

- **Example:** “Every time I open the door to my room, I take a deep breath”
- If the cue is only present *some* of the time, you'll only do the habit *sometimes*

TOOL – Habit Stacking

Do the new habit right after an existing habit. Then you can hijack existing cues to make you do new habits.

- **Example:** After I brush my teeth, I do my 5 push-ups
- **Example:** After I make my morning coffee, I review my to-do list.

Make the cues of your desired habits more visible and obvious to you.

- **Example:** Place your running shoes by the door to remind you to go jogging.
- **Example:** Leave your textbook and notebook open on your desk to prompt you to study when you sit down.





Building Habits (2/4)

2. Strengthen the *Craving*

Use temptation bundling: pair an action you *want* to do with one you *need* to do.

- **Example:** Listen to your favourite podcast only when you're on a walk
- **Example:** Hang out with friends only after you've gone to the gym

Create a motivation ritual: do something you enjoy immediately before a difficult habit to kick start the process.

- **Example:** listen to your favourite song, watch your favourite movie clip, read your favourite quote right before doing the habit



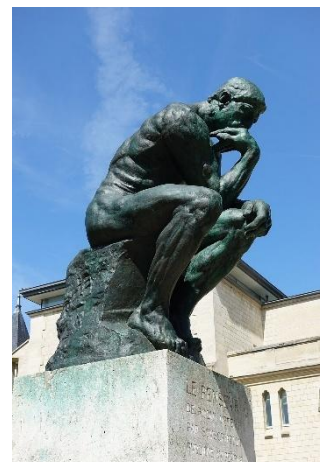
Use Social pressure: join or create a culture where your desired behaviour is the normal behaviour"

- **Example:** To study more consistently, start going to the library with classmates who study there regularly—being around them makes focused work feel normal.
- **TOOL: Friend Accountability**
 - **Kick start habit by doing it with a friend**, and also by telling friends about it to build accountability



Remember your reason why

- Go back to your **value-driven motivation, vision, reason why**
 - Connecting with why something is important *to you* makes effort worth it, and the whole thing more enjoyable.
- **TOOL: Build Identity Based Habits**
 - “I’m trying to study more” → “I study every day”
 - “I’m trying to quit porn” → “I don’t watch porn”





Building Habits (3/4)

3. Ensure a Response

MAKE IT EASY.

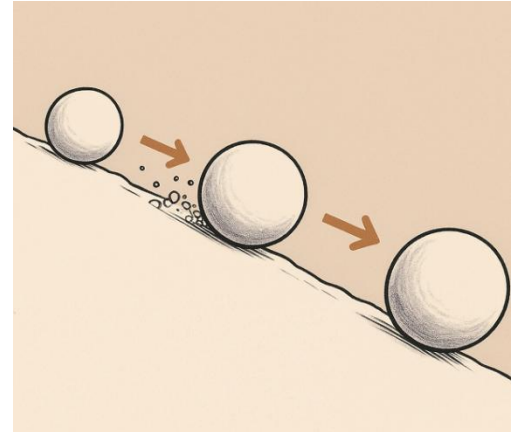
- **Start with small, manageable habits, and grow them over time**

- **Example:** You skip workouts because it feels overwhelming, so shrink the habit to just 5 minutes daily—making it easy to start and stick to.

- First **focus on consistency—then gradually build up the habit** once it sticks. **Just start.**

- **The Power of Compounding!**

- Getting **1% better** at something every day will make you 38x as good at it after a year. Don't be afraid to start small.



TOOL: Say When:

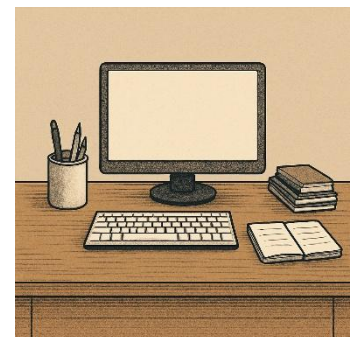
Write down: "I will do [HABIT] at [TIME] in [LOCATION]" and schedule it in.

- **Make your environment conducive to doing the habit**

Focus on Environmental Design, Not Willpower.

- Instead of relying on willpower and self-control, **change your surroundings to make good choices easier.**
 - **Example:** If you want to study, make sure your desk is clean, your laptop is charged, your notifications are off.
 - If your desk is messy, you can't find key resources, and your pens are all out of ink, you make it harder to start

KEY: Make your environment conducive to doing the habit



"Environment Shapes Willpower"

— James Clear



Building Habits (4/4)

4. Ensure a Reward

- **Utilise immediate rewards** to make your habits instantly gratifying.
 - The brain learns best when the reward comes right after the behaviour
 - **Example:** Hang out with a friend after a workout.
 - **Don't Overindulge:** Keeping rewards scarce makes you crave them.
- **Recognise your wins**
 - Acknowledge when you do the habit – let yourself feel good about it
 - **Track and celebrate streaks**
- **Intrinsic reward of the activity**
 - The greatest reward eventually becomes **the habit itself** – the activity itself and the **beneficial effects it has on your life.**
 - **Examples:** the clarity after journaling; exercising becoming its own motivation; the feeling of excellence and competence from studying hard.

Sustainable Reward Examples:

Mental Satisfaction

- **Take a moment to appreciate** that you are doing something which helps you grow
- **Check off a streak tracker** (e.g. in a habit app or journal / X-Effect streak)

Physical Comfort

- A **walk, stretch, or meditation/listening** break
- **Warm tea or favourite healthy snack** after a focus session
- Take a **sun break** or go in **nature**

Digital or Gamified

- Unlock a **fun activity** only after the habit (e.g., 20 mins of a show, music, or game)

Sensory or Aesthetic

- Light a **candle** or incense, take a few **deep, relaxing breaths**
- Change your environment slightly (e.g., **open a window**, adjust **lighting**, go for a **swim**)

Milestone-Based

- After **X repetitions**, give yourself a bigger reward:
 - Buy a new book or tool that supports your growth
 - Go on a fun adventure alone or with your friends



Breaking Habits (1/3)

If we want to *break* a habit, we need to *disrupt* cues, *disrupt* cravings, *disrupt* the response and *disrupt* the rewards of the habit we wish to remove.

KEY PRINCIPLE: DISRUPT YOURSELF

It starts and ends with awareness

- To change a habit, you need to become **aware** of it.
 - You need to **start paying attention** and figuring out *what* the habit is, what its *cue* is, and what *conditions* support its existence
 - **Simply notice** and feel how stimuli create cravings in you, and how you act impulsively on these cravings – **habits are like addictions.**

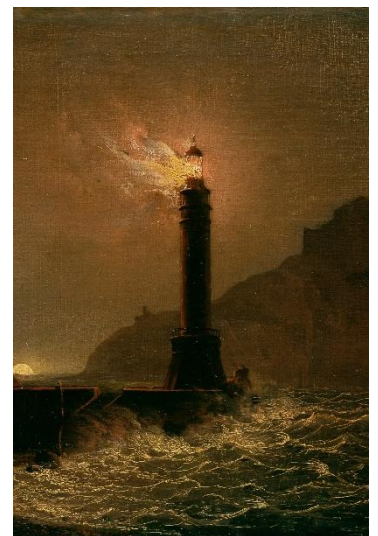


Change the conditions, change the outcome.

- If you **remove conditions for cues and cravings of unwanted habits**, you can start catching yourself out and not fall into unconscious loops.
 - **Change the variables** so you don't fall prey to the same patterns
 - Rearrange your room, study in different places, move apps on your phone
-

1. Disrupt The Cue

- **Remove, Replace or Repurpose Cues for Bad Habits:** If you have a bad habit, it has one or many cues which trigger it.
 - **Change your environment or repurpose the cue causing the unwanted habit.**
 - **Example:** Covering the bed with books in the morning to make it unusable, and keeping your desk and chair clear. This removes the cue to lie down and creates a cue to sit and study.
 - **Example:** You can keep a cue — like opening the fridge when you walk in the kitchen — but use it for a new habit. Instead of grabbing a soft drink, you grab some water. Same cue, different routine.

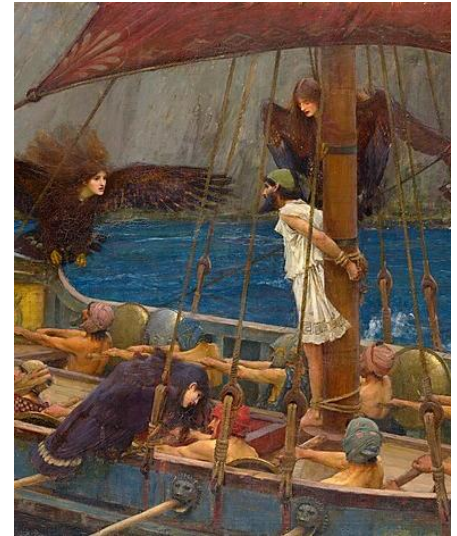




Breaking Habits (2/3)

2. Disrupt The Craving

- **Cravings are what fuel our deepest habits.** They are a combination of **thoughts** and powerful **sensations** in the body.
 - Cravings arise habitually, automatically, in the body – due to past association of stimuli with pleasure
 - The feeling of craving is hard to simply observe and let subside, so we rush to alleviate it by doing the habitual behaviour. This fuels addictive cycles.
- **To cut a habit absolutely, we must dissolve the cravings through **mindful awareness**.**



Mindfulness Protocol:



1. Notice the craving when it arises.

Feel it in the body. What does it feel like? Where is it? Is it moving? Flow with it.



2. Pause. take three slow, mindful breaths.

Follow your breath fully in – feel your chest rise, your stomach move, the air flow. Listen to the whole breath. You may hold it for a few seconds. And then slowly, follow your breath out, and rest. Do this three times.

3. Stay with the feeling neutrally.

Allow yourself to be present with the feeling of craving. Stop and feel it. *Be it.* Observe the feeling compassionately and neutrally. Don't judge it. It is there because of the past, not by choice. **Aim for 90 seconds.**



Don't indulge in the craving. **Don't run away** from it either. Just quietly observe it as a sensation in the body, without a storyline, moment to moment.

When we give ourselves time with feelings, breathing with them, we learn that we don't need to react to them or punish them – that we can be aware of them, and they are **impermanent** and will fade on their own.



4. Respond with positive action.

With our mindfulness, we create space in the mind to not react, and do something which waters positive seeds in our mind



Breaking Habits (3/3)

3. Disrupt The Response + 4. Disrupt the Reward

- **Make the bad habit harder and more annoying to do**
 - **Add friction through environmental design** – any extra effort can break autopilot
 - **Example:** If you're trying to stop late-night YouTube binges, you can uninstall the app from your phone, get someone to put app limits, use delaying apps like ScreenZen (Mobile), OneSec (Mobile), News Feed Eradicator (PC) – or sign out of your account so it takes longer to access.
 - **Example:** If you want to eat healthier, keep junk food out of your home rather than relying on willpower to resist it.



- **Introduce a Substitute Habit**
 - **A substitution habit makes relapse less likely**, because instead of just fighting cravings, you satisfy the missing reward your brain is seeking
 - **Repurpose the bad habit's cue to create a new habit with new rewards**
 - **Example:** If a feeling of stress triggers a habit of scrolling, every time you feel stressed go for a 5-10 minute walk with music instead. Same cue, new habit.
- **Cold Turkey vs Gradual Changes:** Sometimes the easiest way to eliminate a habit is to completely quit it cold turkey.
 - When that's too difficult, **making small, incremental reductions in an unwanted bad habit is effective**. 1% improvements create a snowball effect.
 - **Example:** A smoker smoking LESS cigarettes per day until they get to 0. Moving from 20 to 19, to 18, 15, to 10, to 5, to 0.



Keystone Habits

- **Keystone/Cornerstone Habits**

- Keystone habits are **base habits which underpin other positive or negative habits**. They trigger a **chain reaction** of behaviours.
 - **A keystone habit is the foundation for everything. Like the stone which the whole wall depends on.**
 - **Positive Example:** you start going to the gym, this makes you start eating better, sleeping better, drinking more water, stretching, meditating.
- **Disrupting a negative keystone habit will lead to a whole collection of bad habits falling apart.**
 - **Negative Example:** You go on your phone at night before bed → ruins your sleep → makes you too tired to do your homework in the evenings → makes you anxious → makes you eat too much junk food and procrastinate on your assignments.

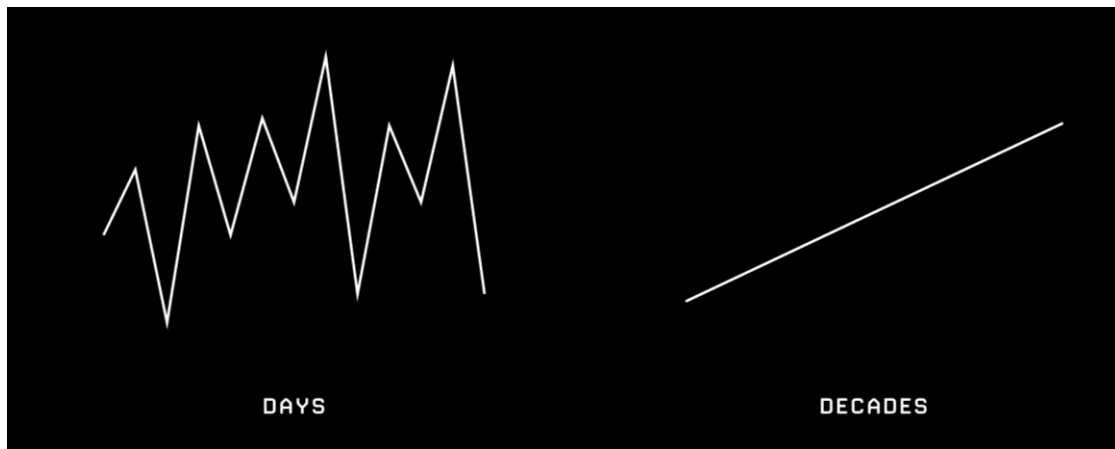
But **if you remove the one negative keystone habit** of going on your phone before bed, **all these problems fall away and disintegrate.**





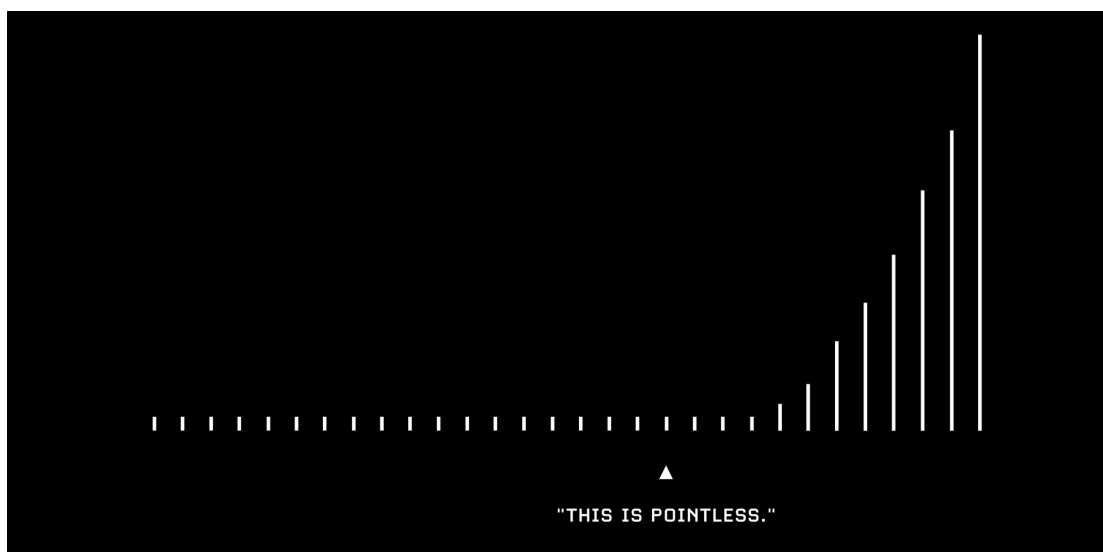
The Golden Ingredients of Mastering Habits (1/2)

1. PATIENCE & PERSISTENCE



Credit: Visualize Value

- **It takes time!** Results are not immediate, because you are changing a *long-term* behaviour.
 - **Progress is not a straight line, and it is invisible at first.** There are many ups and downs on the path to the peak of a mountain. There may be relapses to old habits, but **your overall trajectory and consistency matters more than any one day.**
- **Give it time. Have Persistence. And Be Patient.**
 - It can take a few months to form a habit – but **the results last a lifetime.**



Credit: Visualize Value



The Golden Ingredients of Mastering Habits (2/2)

2. SELF COMPASSION

- **There will be setbacks.** There will be times where you fall back into an unwanted bad habit, or miss a day or even weeks when you intended to build a new habit.

- If you respond to setbacks with **self-punishment**, you only dig yourself deeper into feelings of **resistance and guilt**.
 - This does not help you implement the habit, which is your goal.
- Responding with **self-compassion means releasing the weight of the past, and deciding to keep moving forward.**



- **Be Gentle with Yourself**

- **Habit-formation is about being committed, not reaching a destination.**

- **Change the Self-Talk**

- **Speak to yourself how you would speak to a loved one in the same position**
- **Don't say things that make you weak.** This, too, is a habit. Don't be mean to yourself.
 - Self-cruelty produces cause-effect relationships counterproductive to your goals by putting you in conflict with yourself.



- **Self-forgiveness: Just Begin Again**

- **The past has passed. When you fall off track, get back on track quietly.**
- **The science shows missing a day doesn't get in the way of forming a habit -- it's all about the repetition over time that wires your brain to do the habit.**

“No matter how far you have gone down the wrong road, turn back.”

– Turkish Proverb



Exercise 1: Identify Your Habits

Steps

1. Reflect on how you habitually respond to different cues.

- Start paying attention to the cue → craving → response → reward loops shaping your behaviour. You can revisit and update your habit tracker over time.

2. Write your most impactful positive and negative habits in the table below.

- What cues trigger them? What responses do you default to? What rewards are keeping them alive?

HABIT TRACKER

Cue	Response (habit)	Reward
<i>Example: See empty chair in room →</i>	<i>⚠ Put clothes on chair instead of in laundry basket →</i>	<i>Saves effort in the short-term</i>
<i>Example: Get notification when studying →</i>	<i>⚠ Go on phone, get lost in it →</i>	<i>Temporary stress relief + Laughter from memes</i>
<i>Example: Finish dinner →</i>	<i>✅ Go to room and sit at desk to study →</i>	<i>Sense of accomplishment for doing homework. Lower stress and anxiety levels, more stability.</i>



Exercise 2: Build One Positive Habit

Steps

1. Set yourself the goal of building **one habit**.

Use the **habit maker worksheet** to make an action plan of what you're going to do to make the habit you want.

Repeat this process any time you want to start a habit.

Example:

Habit Maker Example: *Running in the Morning*

Create a Cue	Make Response Easier	Create Reward	Identity Proven
<p>CUE: Running shoes near the door</p>	<p>HABIT: Get changed, go for a run</p> <p>TIME: First thing in the morning</p> <p>LOCATION: To the park</p> <p>MAKING IT EASIER: Lay out socks, shorts, shoes and shirt the night before.</p> <p>Put phone on other side of the room so you have to get up to turn off the alarm.</p> <p>Commit with a friend that we're both going to be ready at the same time.</p>	<p>REWARD:</p> <p>Endorphins from exercise</p> <p>Reflecting and being proud of yourself for pushing your comfort zone and getting fitter</p> <p>Warm shower / music / favourite snack after run</p>	<p>IDENTITY REWARD:</p> <p>I am someone who lives an active life</p> <p>I am someone who takes care of myself</p> <p>I am someone who is disciplined</p>



Habit Maker (Your turn):

Create a Cue	Make Response Easier	Create Reward	Identity Proven
CUE:	HABIT: TIME: LOCATION: MAKING IT EASIER:	REWARD:	IDENTITY REWARD:



Exercise 3: Breaking One Negative Habit

Steps

1. Set yourself the goal of breaking **one habit**.

Use the **habit breaker worksheet** to make an action plan of what you're going to do to make the habit you want.

Repeat this process any time you want to stop a habit.

Example:

Habit Breaker Example: *Compulsively Checking Socials*

Disrupt the Cue	Disrupt the Craving	Make Response Harder	Repurpose the cue + Replace the reward
<p>OLD HABIT: Checking social media constantly</p> <p>CUE: Phone notification sounds</p> <p>CUE DISRUPTION: Turn off social media notifications</p>	<p>MINDFULNESS COMMITMENT:</p> <p>When I notice a craving, I won't react – I'll sit with it for 90 seconds and breathe through it and then respond with positive action.</p>	<p>ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: Place my phone in another room while working</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: Uninstall the social media app or put a time limit on app usage so I don't get rewarded for responding to the craving.</p>	<p>NEW HABIT: When hearing a notification, instead of checking social media, take a moment to stretch or take a deep breath before continuing what I was doing</p> <p>NEW REWARD: Feeling of relaxation and stress-relief</p> <p>Greater sense of accomplishment from staying focused.</p>



Exercise 4: The X Effect – Habit Streaks

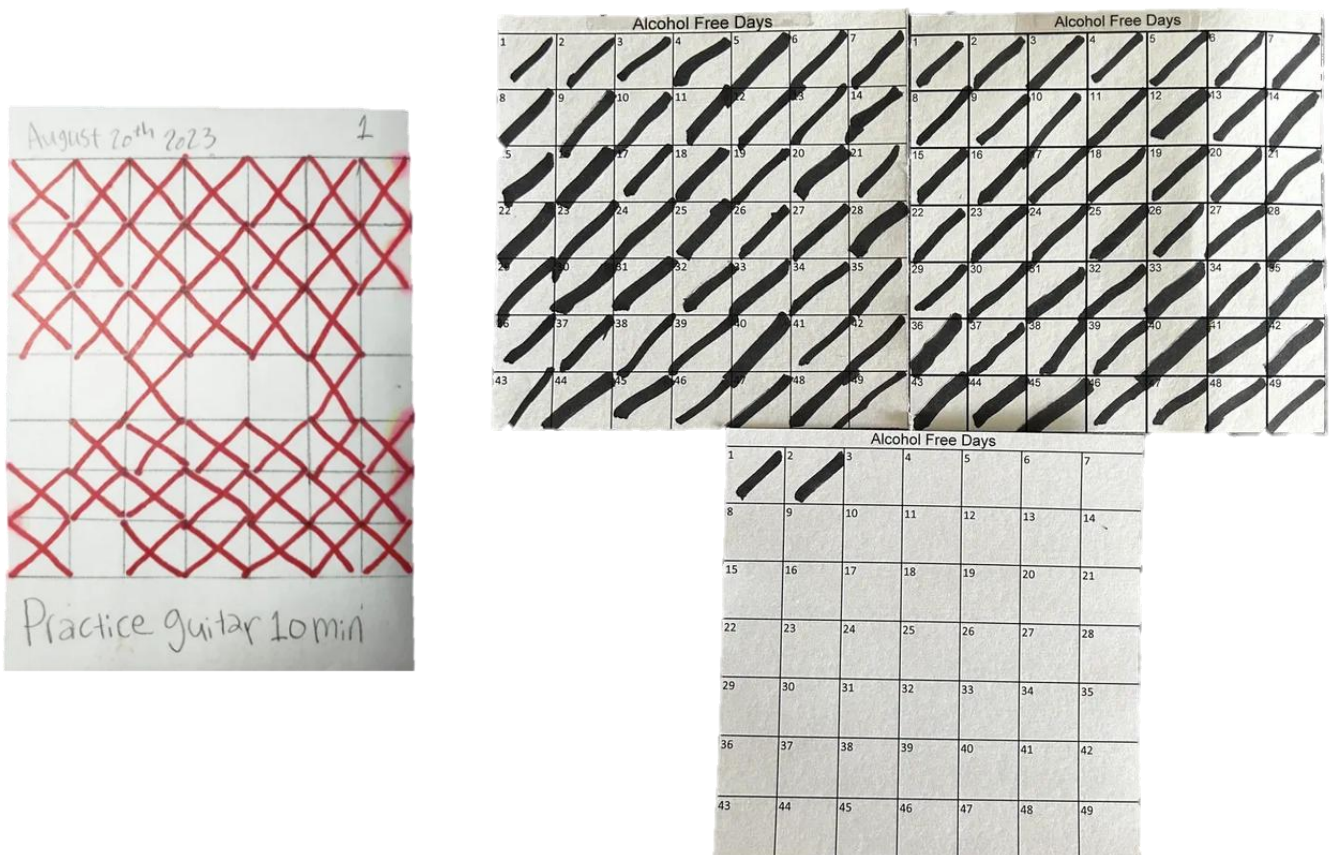
Steps

Make use of the fact that crossing stuff out and getting uninterrupted streaks feels good. This can be used for building or breaking a habit.

1. **Pick a habit to make or break, and write it at the top of the grid.**
2. **Make a cross every day you complete or refrain from the habit.**
3. **Take a moment** to mentally register the win every time you cross a square.

Bonus: Play with rewarding yourself for full weeks, or full grids, placing milestone rewards for yourself to incentivise more streaks.

Examples:







RESOURCES: Habit Formation

Websites

- **Habit Guide**
A simple guide to starting a habit effectively.
<https://jamesclear.com/habit-guide>
 - **Habit Triggers**
Useful if you're stuck thinking of triggers for your habit.
<https://jamesclear.com/habit-triggers>
 - **Habit Articles Index**
A full collection of James Clear's best writing on habits.
<https://jamesclear.com/habits>
-

Videos (Search on YouTube)

- **"Forget big change, start with a tiny habit: BJ Fogg at TEDxFremont" (17 mins)**
A pioneer of behaviour design explains how to start ridiculously small and anchor habits to existing routines.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdKUJxjn-R8>
 - **"Atomic Habits: How to Get 1% Better Every Day – James Clear" (8 mins)**
The author of *Atomic Habits* breaks down how small, consistent behaviours compound over time.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_nzqnXWvSo
-

Books

- **Atomic Habits – James Clear**
A practical and easy-to-apply guide to behaviour change using identity, cues, rewards, and systems.
 - **Tiny Habits – BJ Fogg**
Learn the science of making habits so small they're impossible to fail, and how emotion wires behaviour.
 - **The Power of Habit – Charles Duhigg**
A deeper dive into the habit loop of cue–routine–reward, with real-world stories from business, neuroscience, and life.
-

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." — Will Durant