

Making Habits the New Routine

What are habits?

Habits are behaviours that we automatically perform in response to certain contexts.

Why should students care about habits?

Habits often control our behaviour more strongly than our conscious goals and motivations do. Because they are automatic, we do not have to exert much cognitive effort to carry them out. Therefore, students may find it easier to discipline themselves if they turn their study behaviours into study habits.

What habits should students have?

Students cannot turn every aspect of the study process into a habit. Actions can only become habits if we perform them consistently, but studying will never be truly consistent because the material we learn constantly changes. However, students can make habits out of aspects of the study process that are independent of study material. That can include where you study, when you study, the activities you do to prepare for studying, who you study with, the study strategies you typically use, or the first subject you study for the day. Check out the video "[8 Habits of Successful Students](#)" by Thomas Frank to learn more about which habits students should have.

How do I change my habits?

Every habit is made of three things: context, reward, and repetition.

Context

The context of an action is the circumstances under which it is performed, such as the time of day, the scent of the air, the objects around you and the noises you hear.

A context cue is a specific component of a context that triggers you to perform a habit associated with that context. For example, the sight of a television in your bedroom may be a context cue that triggers a habit of watching TV late at night. To turn an action into a habit, you must always perform it in the presence of the same context cue(s).

To break a habit:

- Remove the context cues associated with the habit. For example, try the [FocusMe](#) app to block distracting apps and websites, the [MyNoise](#) app to drown out distracting noises, or the AA&CC's [tip sheet on managing difficult conversations](#) to tell distracting people that you need to work. To learn more about removing undesirable context cues, watch the video "[5 Tips to Avoid Distractions](#)" by Ways to Grow.
- Lower your stress levels. For example, you can visit the [American Sleep Association](#) website for sleep tips, or use the [Daily Workouts Fitness Trainer](#) or [MyLife](#) apps to practice exercise and meditation, respectively.

To build a habit:

- Make it easy to perform the habit in your daily life
 - Establish a stable context cue to associate with the habit. For example, you might always study

with the same people, review your notes whenever you get a text message, or study chemistry at the same time each day

- Create an environment where performing the habit is convenient. For example, you might study in your pajamas if you want to go to bed right after, place an exercise mat near your desk if you want to stretch before studying, or place your notes near your bed if you want to review them as soon as you wake up

Reward

An intrinsic reward comes from inside us; it is a feeling of interest or satisfaction that we get from completing a task. Intrinsic rewards are usually very powerful.

Activities become intrinsically rewarding when they are...

- Optional, so we perform them of our own will
- Related to our goals and values
- Aligned with our skills, giving us a chance to demonstrate them

Intrinsic reward

Try to link your habit to a short-term intrinsic reward. For example, the [HabitShare](#) app allows you to build habits with friends, the [Everyday](#) app allows you to visualize your progress and challenge yourself to continue, and [Habitica](#) allows you to turn your habits into a game. You can also watch the video "[Temptation Bundling: Motivation Tip for Getting Things Done](#)" by Fernanda – Approximately Right to learn about the temptation bundling strategy.

Extrinsic reward

An extrinsic reward comes from outside us; it is a material prize or an escape from punishment.

Usually, extrinsic rewards are less powerful than intrinsic rewards. However, they can still work if they occur unexpectedly or uncertainly. To do that, you can try rolling a die whenever you complete a habit, but giving yourself an extrinsic reward for having done the habit only when you roll a "5."

Repetition

Habits usually take several months to form. Until then, you must consciously remind yourself to complete them. Here are some reminder apps that may help:

- [Any.do](#)
- [LifeReminders](#)
- [Just Reminder with Alarm](#)
- [Remember the Milk](#)

How do I string habits together into a routine?

Answer: Habit-stacking – attaching a new habit to a pre-existing habit

The habit stacking formula looks like this:

“After/before [pre-existing habit], I will [new habit].”

When choosing your pre-existing habit, try to find one that is specific, that you can do immediately, and that occurs the same number of times as you want your new habit to.

You can try [HabitApp](#) to get started with habit stacking.

References

The information in this Mural was adapted from:

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