

The Next Step

Shrink resistance. Build momentum.

Big goals overwhelm the brain. Micro-steps calm it. Whether you're starting or restarting, shrinking the next move makes forward motion possible.

The Science Behind It

Why Shrinking the Step Works

Our brains freeze when we try to tackle everything at once. The nervous system reads “big” as threat.

When you shrink a task to the smallest visible step, your system relaxes. Starting feels possible.

Every time you begin, your brain releases a small hit of dopamine. That reward reinforces action. Over time, your brain starts associating effort with progress instead of danger.

Small, repeated starts build habits more reliably than occasional bursts of effort.

Consistency teaches your brain, “This matters.” That’s how momentum grows.



How to Use This Tool

- Use the worksheet anytime you feel stuck or overwhelmed.
- Keep your first step under two minutes. Less is better.
- Stop when the timer ends or keep going if you have energy.
- Celebrate starting. Even two minutes counts.
- Repeat tomorrow. The goal isn't perfection. It's momentum.

1) What feels big right now?

Write it down.

2) What is the smallest move?

It must take 2 minutes or less. Less is better.

What could you do?

Examples: open the doc, put on shoes, fill water bottle, lay out meds, text "ready?"

The next step: _____

3) Remove friction

Before you start,
list 5–10 small things that would make beginning easier.

Think environment, tools, timing, distractions, setup.

After you list them,
circle the 1–3 smallest actions you can do right now.

Make them so small you have no excuse not to.

Examples (if helpful):

- Lay out what you'll need
- Open the tab, file, or app
- Set a 2-minute timer
- Silence notifications or move your phone
- Clear your space
- Move to where you'll begin

4) Pick your start cue

What will trigger the action?

- After coffee
- After bathroom
- When the timer hits the top of the hour
- When my song starts

My cue: _____

5) Do the tiny step now

Set a 2-minute timer. Start. Stop at the bell.

Starting is what counts.

6) Optional momentum

If you have energy, continue for another 2-minute block.

If not, that's enough.

7) Celebrate the Start

Check one tiny reward:

- Mark a ✓ on a calendar
- Say “done” out loud
- Stretch and smile
- Check it off your list (even if it's the only thing on the list)

8) If stuck, shrink again

Make it smaller.

Examples: open the doc, type the title, write one sentence, put one dish in the sink, floss one tooth.

New tiny step: _____

Consistency is What Matters

If all you do is the smallest possible step, and you do it every day, that counts. Over time, you can expand it slightly, then repeat. No step is too small. The power is in showing up daily.

Everyday Examples

A small step repeated daily builds habits faster than one big effort once a week.

- Clean the kitchen » Put one plate in the sink.
- Write the report » Open the doc and type the title.
- Exercise » Put on shoes and stretch for two minutes.
- Call the dentist » Find the number and add it to contacts.

ADHD Notes

External cues, movement, and environment help create lift-off.

- Use a timer or song that always signals “start.”
- Keep your tools visible.
- Body double: work beside someone, in person, on a video call, or even on speakerphone. Their presence helps your brain stay anchored.
- Text a buddy when you begin: “Starting two minutes on ____ now.”

Starting small isn’t lowering the bar. It’s lowering resistance.

You don’t move forward by staring at the whole path.

You take the next visible step.

Then another.

Then another.

Inspired by James Clear’s 2-Minute Rule (Atomic Habits) and behavioral activation research. Useful for ADHD and non-ADHD brains alike.

Positive Impact Path