

Keys to Help You Build New Habits

Creating new habits isn't easy. Our minds like the familiar. Taking on a new task or habit makes our comfort zone go haywire! Back in early civilization, anything "new" could often equate to "dangerous." A "new" animal on the horizon might attack the clan of people.

When we try to create habits, we are having to rail and fight against our "lizard brain" that is accustomed to familiar things. Anything unfamiliar, be it a real threat or not, gets categorized into the "danger" mode. The trick to developing a new habit is to get past these doubts and convince our brains that "new" does not always equal "bad."

Below are some keys to help you get started.

1. Write your goals/new habit down.

Start listing your new habit on your daily to-do list, near the top.

Want me to tell you a secret? Things at the bottom of our to-do lists don't ever get done. So put your new habit near the top. Write 1000 words today. Organize day job abilities and take your lunch hour to do some writing. Whatever you want to achieve with your daily writing, write it down.

2. Find an accountability system.

Get a buddy, an online check-in group, or some way to keep yourself accountable. Having a writing critique partner or critique group can really help with this method, but you need to make sure it's the right group/partner for you. Encourage each other on the struggling days, help brainstorm and plot on the good days, and this will renew your enthusiasm toward writing with others' support.

3. Attach your new habit to an existing one.

If you wake up early to walk on the treadmill, maybe use that time to plan out your next book. Or if you take a lunch hour at your day job, bring a notebook or small laptop where you can eat lunch and get in 30 minutes of writing. Try to attach writing to any existing place you can.

Writing a book is done one page at a time. While we would love a bunch of free-time hours in front of us to dedicate to writing, the truth is, life is busy. Grabbing a 30-minute break here and there can't hurt, especially if you're in the habit of writing every day. This will keep you immersed in your story so taking a few minutes here and there will help.

The novelist Claire Cook, who wrote *Must Love Dogs* which was made into a movie, wrote her first book in her minivan. She brought a small word processor to her kids' sports events and made time in her minivan whenever possible to get the book done.

4. Tell yourself that you can succeed.

The subconscious mind can't take a joke. That's why so many people say to visualize success, see what you want to become in your mind, for it to have a greater chance of coming true. Your subconscious does not have a wristwatch or a way to discern real from imagined. Only your conscious mind can do that.

Your subconscious? It believes anything it sees and hears. So telling yourself you'll never get a book written, you'll never be able to finish, etc. becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because the subconscious is what spurs our actions.

Visualize success and tell yourself (out loud, if need be!) that you can accomplish your goals.

5. Make Slipups Costly

You don't want to beat yourself up if you skip a writing day or miss your goal mark, but you don't need to let yourself off the hook easily, either. Here's a fun idea. Put a jar on the kitchen counter and each time you don't make your daily word count or don't get your writing goals done, put five dollars into the jar. At the end of the month, donate the money to charity or do something else positive with the cash - - but you are not allowed to pamper yourself as the money is meant to keep you doing your new habit!

Give these keys a try. Once you're in the habit of writing every day or achieving some other goal, your life will be better and you'll have tackled a new habit!