

In *Atomic Habits*, author and world-renowned habits expert James Clear conveys how big change starts with small everyday shifts. In this extract from the book, he writes about how any new habit can start with a simple two-minute action.

How to Stop Procrastinating

“Even when you know you should start small, it’s easy to start too big. When you dream about making a change, excitement inevitably takes over and you end up trying to do too much too soon. The most effective way I know to counteract this tendency is to use the *Two-Minute Rule*, which states, “When you start a new habit, it should take less than two minutes to do.”

You’ll find that nearly any habit can be scaled down into a two -minute version:

- * “Read before bed each night” becomes “Read one page.”
- * “Do thirty minutes of yoga” becomes “Take out my yoga mat.”
- * “Study for class” becomes “Open my notes.”
- * “Fold the laundry” becomes “Fold one pair of socks.”
- * “Run three miles” becomes “Tie my running shoes.”

The idea is to make your habits as easy as possible to start. Anyone can meditate for one minute, read one page, or put one item of clothing away. And, as we have just discussed, this is a powerful strategy because once you’ve started doing the right thing, it is much easier to continue doing it. A new habit should not feel like a challenge. The actions that *follow* can be challenging, but the first two minutes should be easy. What you want is a “gateway habit” that naturally leads you down a more productive path.

You can usually figure out the gateway habits that will lead to your desired outcome by mapping out your goals on a scale from “very easy” to “very hard.” For instance, running a marathon is very hard. Running a 5K is hard. Walking ten thousand steps is moderately difficult. Walking ten minutes is easy. And putting on your running shoes

is very easy. Your goal might be to run a marathon, but your gateway habit is to put on your running shoes. That's how you follow the Two-Minute Rule.

Very easy	Easy	Moderate	Hard	Very Hard
Put on your running shoes	Walk ten minutes	Walk ten thousand steps	Run a 5K	Run a marathon
Write one sentence	Write one paragraph	Write one thousand words	Write a five-thousand-word article	Write a book
Open your notes	Study for ten minutes	Study for three hours	Get straight A's	Earn a PhD

People often think it's weird to get hyped about reading one page or meditating for one minute or making one sales call. But the point is not to do one thing. The point is to master the habit of showing up. The truth is, a habit must be established before it can be improved. If you can't learn the basic skill of showing up, then you have little hope of mastering the finer details. Instead of trying to engineer a perfect habit from the start, do the easy thing on a more consistent basis. You have to standardize before you can optimize."

Extracted from *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, courtesy of PRHSA.