

3. Effort Activity: Mission and Medal

Effort is just a habit. Pupils who have the effort habit have created a weekly routine of repeated activities that allow them to respond to teacher requests (homework) and reinforce learning (independent work). Pupils without the effort habit have little or no routine and respond to work as and when it hits them.

Increasing your levels of effort can be a tiring task because it means moving away from a comfortable and familiar way of working into a less comfortable one. So rewarding yourself for increased levels of effort is hugely important. Parents and teachers might not spot the change in your work patterns right away, so it will be up to you to give yourself a pat on the back.

That's where mission and medal comes in: *the mission is the work, the medal is the reward!* This activity helps you to design and structure an effortful week of work that you can then repeat until it becomes a routine. Pretty soon you won't be the only person rewarding yourself – teachers, tutors and parents will spot your new routine and you'll be in line for some praise!

Step 1: Audit of a typical week.

Before you design your mission and medal week, you need to figure out what's currently happening. In the space below, record what you do with your time during a typical week. It might be the week just gone or the week you're in. Make a note of what work you do, where you do it and how much productive work gets done in each section of the day.

	Before school (early morning – 7am–8.30am)	During school (morning and early afternoon – 9am–3pm)	After school (twilight – 4pm–5.30pm)	Evening (7pm–9.30pm)
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Are there particular slots that work best for you? Are there slots that are hopeless – times when you find it very difficult to work or where you sit down to work but you don't get anything done?

Step 1: Creating a Mission and Medal Week

For five of the seven days, set yourself a *sixty-minute mission*. It might be to complete homework, plan ahead, consolidate learning, organise notes, research sixth form colleges, fill out an application or begin a revision guide. Complete the mission all at once or in parts. Choose times of day when you work well – without distractions.

For the same five days, set aside a *medal to be awarded on completion of the mission*. It might be a session on your games console, a TV programme, a football match, some time on social media, something nice to eat or drink or some favourite music. Vary your medals.

September Activities

Don't forget to assign yourself two *bonus* medals – a mid-weeker to pep you up and a Sunday-nighter to get you feeling good for the week. These medals should be a little larger than your regular medals.

	Before school (early morning – 7am–8.30am)	During school (morning and early afternoon – 9am–3pm)	After school (twilight – 4pm–5.30pm)	Evening (7pm–9.30pm)
Monday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Tuesday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Wednesday				
Mission:				
BONUS medal:				
Thursday				
Mission:				
Medal:				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Mission:				
BONUS medal:				

In this example, you've been given Friday evening and all day Saturday off. You might want to adjust these depending on what you do with your time – feel free to! Choose exciting medals which make you feel good about the work you've done!

Building a Scoreboard

There's a lot of conflicting research about how long it takes to create a habit. Unless you keep track you'll have no idea. Now you've devised a mission and medal week, you can use a scoreboard as a simple way of helping you with motivation.

We developed this idea after hearing the American comedian Jerry Seinfeld talk about how he writes jokes. He sets himself the goal of writing a joke every day and keeps a diary to check off when he's been successful. His argument is that once you see the days being ticked off, you don't want to see the pattern being broken,

so you keep going. After a few weeks, this new behaviour just becomes a habit and you might not even need to think about it – you just do it!

So, for every day you follow your mission and medal programme, you simply tick off the days. You'll need a monthly calendar like the one below.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Final Thoughts

Reactive missions are those set for you by others. It might be your teacher insisting on a finished piece of work by Friday, a tutor asking you to complete an application form, or your mum reminding you to do a job at home.

But what about **proactive missions** – targets you actually set yourself? Try this. Finish the following sentence:

"If I were the perfect student, this kind of things I might be doing at this time of year include..."

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You don't have to be perfect, of course – no one is. But there might be one or two things in the list above that you *genuinely could do*. Missions you set yourself that will make life so much easier later on in the year.

Why not choose one?