

11. Effort Activity: The Three R's of Habit

Stanford University has a Persuasive Technology Lab. Here, academics study how interactive technology is changing our habits. Its founder and director, Dr B. J. Fogg, is studying how smartphone technology can develop habit formation. Effort is also a habit. The level of effort you put into your study is a result of your habits. Some people have got the effort habit, some people haven't.

The argument goes that there are three elements to habit formation, often referred to as the three R's:

- » **The reminder.** This could be a feeling, a place or a time of day – it's your body or brain giving you a trigger that initiates the behaviour. It might be getting some chocolate, going home early or putting away the work you know you should be completing.
- » **The routine.** This is the behaviour itself. Going to the canteen and buying the chocolate or taking the bus home instead of staying on to do some studying. Often people will feel a twinge of guilt during the routine but do it anyway.
- » **The reward.** This is the good feeling you get – the benefit you gain from engaging in the behaviour. It might not last long but it is a tempting prospect.

If you haven't currently got into the effort habit, how can you go about changing? You can use the three R's in your favour. Rather than thinking about stopping old habits – which is a mistake many people make when 'giving up' something – the trick is to think of it as starting a new habit. This means you will need a new reminder to trigger your new habit, a new routine to go through and, best of all, a new reward to give yourself!

Using the Habit-Planning Grid

- » Choose a trigger attached to something that happens to you every day. For example, 'At the end of every lunch hour I will ...', 'As I finish my breakfast I will ...', 'As the bell for the end of the college day goes, I will ...' or 'At the end of the 6 o'clock news I will ...'.
- » Choose a routine that is easy to achieve. It might be to sort out your notes for thirty minutes, review the homework you've been set for thirty minutes or do one hour's work on a difficult A level. The key thing is this: in the beginning, performance doesn't matter. Routine matters.
- » Finally, the reward. Start small with a verbal reward. It might be a 'Good work!' spoken aloud to yourself, a short period of time doing something you enjoy or a cup of coffee.

Effort

Reminder:	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Routine:	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Reward:	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>

Final Thoughts

It is far easier to establish a new habit than it is to break an old one. When you plan a new habit, never use the negative language associated with breaking habits. Avoid ‘I must stop being lazy ...’ or ‘I’ve got to give up skipping homework ...’. Instead, use positive language. Try, ‘From Wednesday, I’m going to start working harder.’

Allow yourself slips and mistakes. They happen to everyone. Successful students keep going even when they’ve broken a habit. One way to help with this is to give yourself one day a week when you don’t have to follow your new habit. Every Friday might be the day when you behave like the old you – what fitness fans or dieters sometimes refer to as a ‘cheat day’. Putting a cheat day into your schedule might help keep you motivated. Plus – you’re still following your new habit on the other six days and that might well keep you going for much longer.