

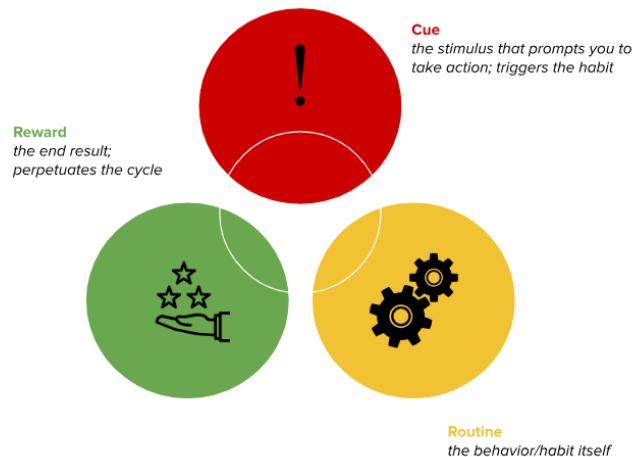
# Habit Loop Worksheet

## Habit Loop Worksheet

A habit is defined as “a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.” Whether we are aware of it or not, we establish our habits through the framework of the habit loop: cue, routine, reward.

Our habits are the things that we already do—they feel “easy” to us because we’ve practiced the actions and reinforced the loop so many times.

- The **cue** is the stimulus that precedes the action, or that gets you to take some action.
- The **routine** is what you do—the action itself.
- And the **reward**—also known as the result—is what you get out of the behavior, and why you keep doing it. This result can be positive or negative, but either way, it reinforces the cycle.



## Changing a Habit

If we want to break an old habit, it can help to write out the current loop. Since we typically engage in these habits without awareness, we need to first see what’s happening more clearly.

First, we need to really explore the trigger of our habit, to see what it is specifically that precedes or leads to this behavior. There may be multiple triggers for the same habit, and triggers can be **external** (like a time of day) or **internal** (like feeling stressed). Try to get down to the deeper and most impactful triggers for you. Then, we can explore opportunities where we may be able to take a different action—an alternative behavior—that does not perpetuate the same habit loop.

And finally, it’s important to **examine the result of the behavior honestly**. We often think we’re getting something that we need from a long-time habit, like relief or pleasure. But we must see and acknowledge what we’re actually getting from the behavior, like stress, pain, or shame. By seeing the result of the behavior more clearly—recognizing it’s not as great or helpful as we believed—we give our brains important new data that makes it easier for us to leave old habits behind.

**Step 1** – Choose a habit that you currently have that you’d like to change (e.g. rushing to finish papers):

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**Step 2** – Identify the **CUE** (e.g. feeling anxious and unsure about writing the paper):

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**Step 3** – Identify the **ROUTINE** (action or thought) you take (e.g. leaving the assignment to the last minute):

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**Step 4** – Identify the **REWARD** (payoff) (e.g. some sense of “filling your cup” or caring for yourself and the dopamine “high” that comes with working to a deadline):

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**Step 5** – Now, consider some options for different **ROUTINES** that you could try when you encounter that cue that might deliver the same or a similar reward (e.g. creating a to do list with little deadlines, or breaking the assignment down ).

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**Step 6** – Summarize your plan

When [cue] happens \_\_\_\_\_, I will [do or think] \_\_\_\_\_

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which will make me feel \_\_\_\_\_.