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Edition

HABIT STACKING



THE MORNING ROUTINE
FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

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THE MORNING ROUTINE FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Morning routines are a vital part of living a successful life. There's something magical about repeating the same positive habits every single day.

Whereas most people wake up in “reaction mode” by checking their email or logging into Facebook, you can complete a series of actions that will have a positive impact on the rest of the day.

Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges to building a morning routine is knowing what habits to pick. There are hundreds of options. So, a simple solution is to build a routine around the habits that most successful people do when they first get up in the morning.

In this free PDF (and the checklist provided at the beginning of this document), I will review 11 habits that thousands of others have as part of their morning routine.

This routine won't take too much of your time—in fact, you can breeze through these habits in about 30 to 60 minutes.

Finally, these habits are part of my book, ***Habit Stacking: 127 Small Changes to Improve Your Health, Wealth, and Happiness***. If you'd like to learn more about routines and how they can have a powerful impact on your life, then I highly recommend that you check out my book.

Let's get to it...

1 WEAR A STEP-TRACKING DEVICE

Time required: < 1 minute

Benefit: Wearing a step-tracking device can have an amazing impact on your physical fitness. If you're not familiar with them, step trackers are small devices or watches that track your total steps and floors climbed every day.

At first glance, "putting on a step-tracking device" might seem like an inconsequential habit. But there are a surprising number of people who buy these devices and never wear them. If you start each day by clipping on this device, you'll take that crucial first step to building the exercise habit. And when you constantly wear this device, you'll find reasons to get more movement throughout the day.

Description: This is another super simple habit. When you wake up in the morning, put on your step-tracking device. This should be the first action you complete to start the day.

If you don't have a step tracker, then feel free to check out the **exhaustive review that I posted on my website**, which compares the pricing and features of the popular pedometers.

2 FILL A 32-OUNCE WATER BOTTLE

Time required: < 1 minute

Benefit: Even mild dehydration can cause headaches and fatigue, affect your concentration, impair short-term memory, and impede mental function. If you want to be at your most productive, it's important for your brain to be firing on all cylinders. Therefore, you should make sure you are sufficiently hydrated before starting work.

Description: Fill a thirty-two-ounce bottle and drink it over the next few hours.

(Here is the Contigo bottle that I use every day.)

Either warm or cold water is fine—there are health benefits to both, so pick whichever you prefer. If you find plain water unpalatable, try adding ice and a squeeze of lemon.

Additionally, the rule of thumb for the right amount of water intake is eight eight-ounce glasses per day (or a total of sixty-four ounces.) This number will vary according to your weight and level of physical activity.

To keep it simple, I recommend filling up your bottle twice a day and committing to drinking the entire thing. That should be enough to give you a basic level of hydration.

3 COMPLETE A 7-MINUTE WORKOUT

Time required: 7 minutes

Benefit: Okay, let me get one point out of the way before we talk about the benefits of this small action: No, I don't think you can get a full workout in this short amount of time. However, if you live a completely sedentary lifestyle, then completing a seven-minute daily workout is a good step in the right direction.

All that said, a great way to start or end your day is to use an app like 7 Minute Workout, which acts like a personal trainer that guides you through a 12-exercise total-body workout. Obviously, it only takes you seven minutes to complete.

Description: This is another simple habit. Just fire up the app and complete the recommend exercises. (You might have to buy a few pieces of equipment ahead of time to get the real value from this app.)

Also, you should consider upgrading to their "All the Things" level, which gives you a few different program options: Arms, Cardio, Core, Pilates, and Toning.

If you alternate between these options with each stack, you'll get a decent amount of exercise that's better than what most people do during their day.

Check out the 7 Minute Workout app!



4 PREPARE A SMOOTHIE DRINK

Time required: 3 minutes

Benefit: If you need a quick pick-me-up, try making an antioxidant smoothie. These delicious drinks contain essential vitamins and minerals, so drinking one in the morning can give you energy that will last for many hours.

Description: There are a lot of smoothie recipes on the Internet, but as mentioned before, I recommend mixing up different recipes that include proteins, fruits, vegetables, potassium, and antioxidants.

If you're interested in some of the ones that I typically drink, you can check out the **NutriLiving website and app**, which are part of the NutriBullet brand.

5 MEDITATE

Time required: 5 minutes



Benefit: Meditation helps you maintain focus on one thing (such as your breathing or the sounds of the ocean) and block out any other distractions. It has been proven to have numerous benefits, including reduced stress, improved creativity, better focus, and improved memory.

Some people meditate for hours on end, while others just take a few minutes out of their mornings. I suggest you start by meditating for five minutes so it fits neatly into your regular stack. But if you start to enjoy it, then I recommend increasing the length of your sessions.

Description: Find a quiet place that's free from distractions and set a timer for five minutes. Start by taking a deep breath and releasing the tension from your diaphragm. Stretch your muscles so you stay comfortable while you focus inward. Focus on clearing your mind and thinking about the present moment.

It's natural to experience frustration the first few times you meditate. If this happens to you, focus on your breathing and let your feelings of frustration dissipate. Focus on your body parts so you know when the meditation starts to take hold.

If you have trouble focusing, then try the **Calm** or **Headspace** apps, which provide specific prompts that you can use to create a relaxed state of mind.

Check out these apps: **Calm** 
Headspace 

6 PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Time required: 3 minutes

Benefit: It's easy to think that being grateful for what you have in life is something you do for other people. But the main benefit is an internal one. Not only does it make you feel better, but it also helps you become a better person because you'll gain more appreciation for what you already have.

There are many benefits of building the gratitude habit. Here are a few to consider:

- Gratitude makes us happier.
- Gratitude helps you reach your goals.
- Gratitude makes you a more likeable person.
- Gratitude will help you succeed in your career.

Description: Keeping a gratitude list doesn't need to be a formal process. You can write it online, in a journal, or even on a spare scrap of paper. What's important is to think about what (and who) you're thankful for and then write it down somewhere.

To get started, I recommend a four-step process:

- 1. Be Consistent:** Choose a number of items to be grateful for every day and then stick to this format. The key thing is to have a number in your mind ahead of time.
- 2. Be Specific:** Take time to clearly describe why you're grateful for a person, event, or item.
- 3. Share your thoughts:** Being grateful to yourself is only half of the job, then express this gratitude to the people who made it happen.
- 4. Find the good in the bad:** Use this habit to look for a positive outcome or an important lesson you learned.

7 READ A BOOK CHAPTER

Time required: 5 to 10 minutes

Benefit: Reading is a simple task that can provide you with benefits such as:

- Giving your mind a workout as you learn something new or escape into a different world.
- Improving your concentration as you singularly focus on one activity.
- Reducing stress and lowering blood pressure.

In my opinion, reading is a leisure habit that should be enjoyed throughout the day, but it can also provide a mental break between two difficult tasks.

Description: Set aside 5 to 10 minutes to read first thing in the morning. A chapter is the perfect length because it is long enough to complete one strategy (nonfiction) or one scene (fiction) without it disrupting your workday.

If you're struggling to find a good book, then here are a few places to look:

- Ask for recommendations from friends, family, coworkers, and mentors.
- Google: best [genre] book.
- Google: best [genre] book [current year].
- Browse **Amazon's Top 100 List** (look in your preferred category).
- **Join Goodreads** and see what others have enjoyed in your preferred genre.

If you bring a book wherever you go, then you'll always have a way to relax for 5 to 10 minutes during a hectic workday.

8 WRITE IN A JOURNAL (OR WITH “MORNING PAGES”)

Time required: 5 to 10 minutes

Benefit: In her book *The Artist’s Way*, Julia Cameron invites readers to begin each day with what she calls “Morning Pages.” As Cameron explains on [her blog](#),

Morning Pages are three pages of longhand, stream of consciousness writing, done first thing in the morning. There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages – they are not high art. They are not even “writing.” They are about anything and everything that crosses your mind – and they are for your eyes only. Morning Pages provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the day at hand.

Working through Morning Pages for ten minutes is an excellent mindfulness habit because you completely focus on putting your thoughts onto paper. It’s a way to liberate your mind from the mental chatter that can set your morning off to a negative or anxious start.

If writing Morning Pages feels too unstructured for you, you can write in a journal about specific topics of your choosing or use journal prompts. Like Morning Pages, journaling brings your wandering mind to attention by actively engaging with your thoughts.

Journaling can help you focus on your inner world, your goals, and even your nightly dreams. (If you’re interested in journaling, [Steve has a detailed post about this habit on his blog](#).)

Description: Buy a few spiral notebooks or journals in addition to quality writing pens that flow well on paper.

Start by deciding where you want to write. It could be sitting in your bed, as soon as you awaken. Or you may need a shower and a cup of coffee before you are clearheaded enough to begin. Just be sure your notebook and pen are visible and readily available in your writing spot.

8 WRITE IN A JOURNAL (OR WITH “MORNING PAGES”)

Take a few deep breaths with your eyes closed, and then simply begin writing. For Morning Pages, simply write whatever comes into your head. It doesn't need to make sense or have any particular purpose. But if it does, that's fine too.

If you decide to focus on more directed journal writing, decide on the type of journaling you wish to do. You might want to write in:

- A dream journal
- A gratitude journal
- A relationship journal
- A prayer journal
- Or you can even draw or doodle in your journal

You can use journal prompts that you create for yourself or that you find online. Barrie uses the prompt, “What do I need to know today?” Then she waits for ideas or thoughts to arise that she writes down in her journal.

You can be as creative or simple as you wish with your Morning Pages or journaling. The purpose is to spend ten mindful minutes with pen in hand, writing down the contents of your mind—whether the thoughts are directed or stream of consciousness.

Once the ten minutes is up, finish the sentence you are writing or the thought you want to capture, and close your journal. Save what you have written to read at a later date. Allowing some time to go by before you read your journal entry can shed some additional light on the meaning of your writing.

9 REVIEW YOUR GOALS

Time required: 2 minutes

Benefit: Everybody has goals. Sadly, the hustle and bustle of life often derails us from what we'd like to accomplish. That's why it's important to review goals daily, so you can create a plan of what you need to do that day to make progress on these outcomes.

Goals can be set for the day, week, month, quarter, or year. My rule of thumb is to create five to seven goals per quarter (i.e., every three months), and I recommend you do the same. Quarterly goals are far enough away so that you can achieve significant outcomes. But it's also a short enough period that you can adjust if your long-term plans change.

Description: Keep your goals in an easy-to-access place. This could be in a binder or an app like **Evernote**. Then, once or twice a day, take five minutes to review these goals.

During this review, read each goal aloud and think about the tasks you have scheduled for that day. For each item, ask yourself, "How does this action bring me closer to one of my goals?" If you can't come up with a good answer, then perhaps it's a task that you should be skipped or delegated.

10 IDENTIFY YOUR 3 MOST IMPORTANT TASKS (MITS)

Time required: 3 minutes

Benefit: The best strategy for planning out your day is to focus on your most important tasks (MITs) before anything else. This eliminates the problem of scheduling too many activities, and the feeling of failure when you don't accomplish them all.

Identifying three MITs ahead of time keeps you focused on priority activities. In fact, if you only complete the MITs, then you can still consider it a productive day.

Description: If you keep a list of your projects in an app (like **Todoist** or **Evernote**), then it's easy to identify your next tasks. From this list, pick the three tasks that have the highest priority or are considered both urgent and important. Don't work on anything else until you have completed these MITs.

11 PRACTICE SELF-EDUCATION

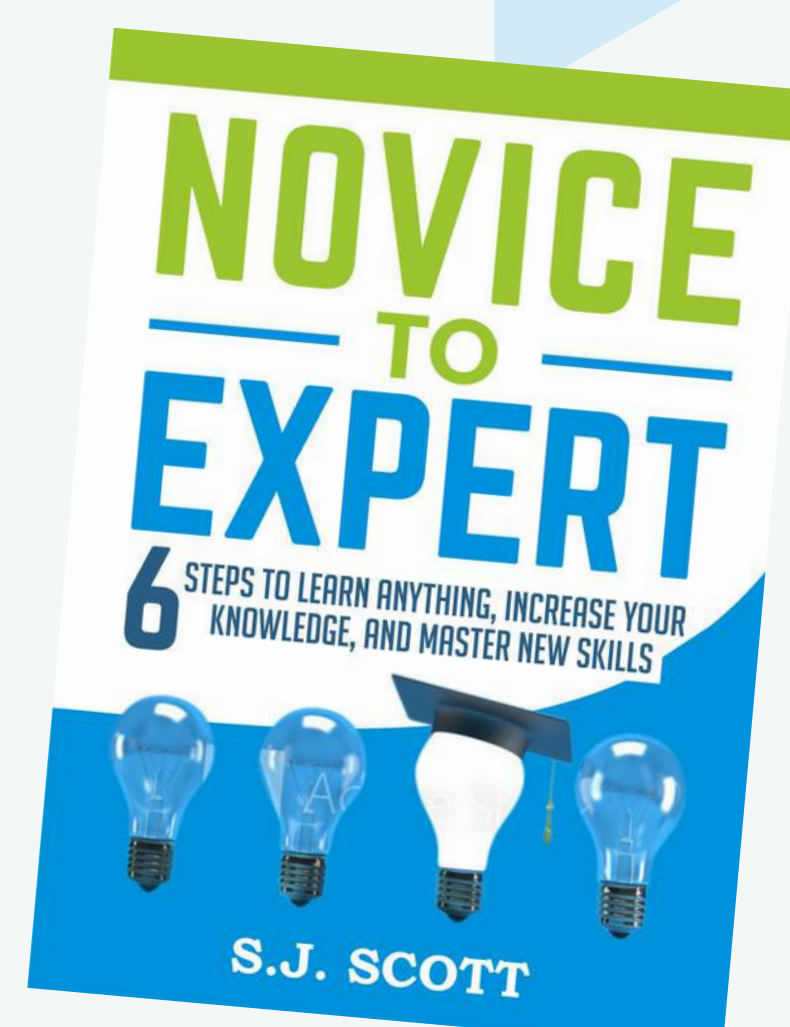
Time required: 5 to 10 minutes

Benefit: It's fun to learn new things on a regular basis. You could pick anything from juggling or coding to speaking a new language. Not only do these activities challenge your mind, but they can also become an enjoyable hobby that reduces your stress. That's why you should consider practicing self-education to learn something new.

And the morning is the perfect time to practice self-education. When leaving your house, you can turn on a podcast or audiobook that directly relates to the skill you'd to develop. So instead of wasting time while driving, you can use it as an opportunity to learn something new.

Description: In my book *Novice to Expert: 6 Steps to Learn Anything, Increase Your Knowledge, and Master New Skills*, I talk about a lot of ways to efficiently learn new skills. Two of the strategies that I discuss are to schedule time for deliberate practice and to research what you need to learn. Odds are, five minutes isn't enough time for deliberate practice—but it's perfectly adequate for researching one skill-related topic or a challenge that you're currently facing.

Check out the book:



11 PRACTICE SELF-EDUCATION

As an example, one of my current goals is to complete a few triathlon races. The problem? I don't have a bike. So, today my "practice self-education habit" was researching the specific questions to ask when buying a road bike.

With ten minutes of research, I learned about the difference between wheels, pedals, and frame materials on a bike. While this doesn't give me an expert-level knowledge on bikes, I now know the right questions to ask when I head into the shop later this week.

Practicing self-education is a perfect task for those longer breaks during the day, like on a drive, at lunchtime, or in the evening. This is the time when you can listen to podcasts, scan through blogs, or read books that focus on one specific, interest-related challenge.