**How to Stop Procrastinating by Using the “2-Minute Rule”**

**by James Clear**

This article is an excerpt from Atomic Habits, my New York Times bestselling book.

Recently, I’ve been following a simple rule that is helping me stop procrastinating and making it easier for me to stick to good habits at the same time.

I want to share it with you today so that you can try it out and see how it works in your life.

The best part? It's a simple strategy that couldn’t be easier to use.

Here’s what you need to know…

**How to Stop Procrastinating With the “2-Minute Rule”**

The Two-Minute Rule 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.

**Why the Two-Minute Rule Works**

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.

As you master the art of showing up, the first two minutes simply become a ritual at the beginning of a larger routine. This is not merely a hack to make habits easier but actually the ideal way to master a difficult skill. The more you ritualize the beginning of a process, the more likely it becomes that you can slip into the state of deep focus that is required to do great things. By doing the same warm-up before every workout, you make it easier to get into a state of peak performance. By following the same creative ritual, you make it easier to get into the hard work of creating. By developing a consistent power-down habit, you make it easier to get to bed at a reasonable time each night. You may not be able to automate the whole process, but you can make the first action mindless. Make it easy to start and the rest will follow.

The Two-Minute Rule can seem like a trick to some people. You know that the real goal is to do more than just two minutes, so it may feel like you’re trying to fool yourself. Nobody is actually aspiring to read one page or do one push-up or open their notes. And if you know it’s a mental trick, why would you fall for it?

If the Two-Minute Rule feels forced, try this: do it for two minutes and then stop. Go for a run, but you must stop after two minutes. Start meditating, but you must stop after two minutes. Study Arabic, but you must stop after two minutes. It’s not a strategy for starting, it’s the whole thing. Your habit can only last one hundred and twenty seconds.

One of my readers used this strategy to lose over one hundred pounds. In the beginning, he went to the gym each day, but he told himself he wasn’t allowed to stay for more than five minutes. He would go to the gym, exercise for five minutes, and leave as soon as his time was up. After a few weeks, he looked around and thought, “Well, I’m always coming here anyway. I might as well start staying a little longer.” A few years later, the weight was gone.

Strategies like this work for another reason too: they reinforce the identity you want to build. If you show up at the gym five days in a row—even if it’s just for two minutes—you are casting votes for your new identity. You’re not worried about getting in shape. You’re focused on becoming the type of person who doesn’t miss workouts. You’re taking the smallest action that confirms the type of person you want to be.

We rarely think about change this way because everyone is consumed by the end goal. But one push-up is better than not exercising. One minute of guitar practice is better than none at all. One minute of reading is better than never picking up a book. It’s far better to do less than you hoped than to do nothing at all.

Whenever you are struggling to stick with a habit, you can employ the Two-Minute Rule. It’s a simple way to make your habits easy.