



Building a Reading Habit

This is (essentially) [James Clear's take on building habits](#). And I'll try to put context into it in terms of reading - for learning or leisure.

There are 4 stages to habit building:

- **Cue** - What triggers us to recall the reward we got last time we did the habit. If it is food, it might be the taste or the feeling of being full. It might be walking into the kitchen. It might be boredom.
- **Craving** - The motivational force to start the habit or behaviour. Checking what there is to eat.
- **Response** - The actual habit. Preparing and eating the food.
- **Reward** - Your craving is satisfied. You no longer feel bored, hungry, lonely, etc.

Thus, to build or break a habit you should attack each of these stages:

1. **Cues** - Make them obvious to build a habit. Remove them to break one.
2. **Cravings** - Make them attractive to build a habit, make them unattractive to break one.
3. **Response** - Make it easy to build a habit, make it hard to break one.
4. **Reward** - Make it satisfying to build a habit, make it unsatisfying to break one.

Stating your intention helps maintain progress.

Stacking habits helps generate cues where one habit leads to the completion of many.

Applying these 6 things to reading...

Building the reading habit

1. **Cue** - Place reading material close to you. If you like to read hard copies, place them around your house. Kitchen table. Bedside. Toilet. If you like to read digital copies, put them on your desktop. Put them on your home screen. Ensure they are available on all devices you use. So that might mean using a cloud storage system like OneDrive, Google Drive or Dropbox.
2. **Craving** - Write down all of the positive things you'll gain from reading. Entertainment. Knowledge. Understanding. New ideas.
3. **Response** - To start with, reading is all we care about. So, choose to read what you like. If research is not what you like, don't read it. Instead, read something you like. When I was in my post PhD years, a mentor suggested I read the newspaper each day. Anything from the newspaper. I focused on the news and opinion section. But like I said, it is anything. So, if you like gardening, read gardening material. If you like religion, read religious material. And if 5 minutes is your max, no drama, read for 4 minutes. Stop. We're making it easy by using material you like and limiting the duration to a time you could do. But we could make it longer or shorter. Or change the material type. My view is to only make it longer or different (less attractive) reading material once you've hit a streak of a week.

4. **Reward** - You could do many things, but I recommend these two. (1) Track your habit. You could a spreadsheet, or a hard copy diary or even design something. The aim is to have a tick/cross/checked-mark in for each day for your reading habit. Don't get carried away with going for lots of habits and lots of progress immediately. Stick with one at a time. So, in this case, reading. And stick with what you can complete. In this case 4 minutes. If you hit those two things, you tick! Place the tracker somewhere public too - near or with your reading material - so you get the cue to read, and you can immediately read. (2) Set a target (e.g., a streak of a month) that allows you to afford yourself a different reward (e.g., yoga class, special meal).
5. **Stating your intention** - I will read for 4 minutes in the morning while I have breakfast.
6. **Stack habits** - I'll read over breakfast, and/or I'll [something fun] for 4 minutes before reading.

Breaking habits that distract you from reading

1. **Cue** - If reading is boring and other things distract you, then reduce the stimulation in the place you read. Move from a busy room to a quiet one. Move from inside to outside (or vice versa). Turn off phone notifications. Turn off email notifications.
2. **Craving** - When you catch yourself being distracted from reading, note the habit. And apply the rules above to make it less obvious, less attractive, more difficult, and less satisfying. Or move to an even more boring activity. e.g., sitting in a chair, facing the corner of the room. No phone. No reading material. No computer. No table. When you get bored of that, then start reading again.
3. **Response** - Depending on what has distracted you from reading, you could make rules. If I must eat, I have to eat something healthy that I don't like the taste of, and I'm not allowed to sit while doing so. If I must check email, I have to do it using my least preferred device, app or location, and I have to do it standing up without a desk.
4. **Reward** - Make the other things less satisfying. Like I wrote above - yuck food, difficult positions, poor locations.
5. **State your intention** - I will not do anything else at breakfast, until I have read for 4 minutes.
6. **Stack habits** - I'll only [fun activity] after reading for 4 minutes.

Sometimes all you need is an independent umpire. Someone who can read a room, learn about your research quickly and get to an outcome. As a Centre Director, Faculty Dean or University Vice-Chancellor, leading your team through a planning and development exercise is almost impossible. You're either too deep in the discussion – perhaps even pushing things in a very specific direction – with your team reluctant to bring you back. Or, you're avoiding making reasonable suggestions, because you don't want to be that boss.

Dr Richard Huysmans can help with annual plans, building teams or new initiatives, or refining existing activities. If you need help or advice with your strategy and planning get in touch via phone (0412 606 178), email (Richard.huysmans@drrichardhuysmans.com) or [subscribe to the newsletter](#). You can find him on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [ResearchGate](#), [Google Scholar](#), [Spotify](#), [YouTube](#), and [Medium](#).