

A Fresh Start

A self-help tool

Introduction

This tool is based on evidence showing that people are more likely to undertake a significant change if they see it as a fresh start (Milkman, 2022, pp. 23-36). Research shows that people who have experienced a significant change in life situation, like moving house, are more likely to make other big changes in their life. This research indicates that we can be motivated to make changes by finding a ‘fresh-start date’ a time when new beginnings can occur, like a birthday, or the first day of a week. These points are an opportunity to reset the clock and to start with a clean sheet.

This tool is designed to...

- Identify an effective time to start making a change in your life.
- Help you begin something you've been putting off.
- Motivate yourself to take action.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Feel like the past is holding you back.
- Have goals you have been delaying getting on with.
- Want to turn your dreams into reality.



How to use this tool

First, think of a change you want to make

Write your change here:



Tip: state what you want to achieve as a specific and concrete goal. So instead of saying 'I want to get fitter and start running' say 'My goal is to go from couch to 5k in 9 weeks so that I can become fitter'. This will be more motivational and help you focus your efforts.

Secondly, find a point in your calendar which you can badge as a fresh start day, when you would like to start your change.

Think of this as a 'spring-board' to a new future. This draws a line under what went before. It is your permission to start from scratch. This might be:

- The first day of the week.
- The first day of the month.
- New Year's day.
- A day of religious significance.
- A personal anniversary.
- A birthday.
- The start of a new academic year or term.
- A seasonal change (e.g. summer solstice).
- A return from vacation.
- Moving house
- Starting University.
- Completing a major project or assignment.
- Recovering from a sports injury.
- Other

Write your fresh-start day here:



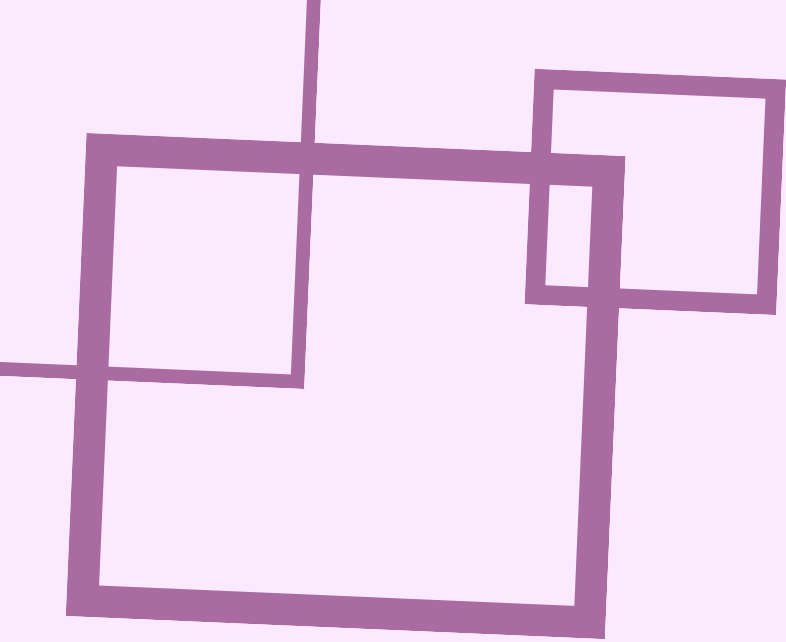
Thirdly, make your fresh-start day special.

What can you do to make your new start feel really new? There are many simple things you might do. Here are some examples:

- Change the background image on your computer or mobile to something that encourages you to press on to your goal.
- Write your new change goal on a card and put this somewhere visible in your room.
- Change an aspect of your room layout (like where your desk is) to mark your fresh start.
- Change your daily routine to create a space for your new change behaviour (e.g. work on job applications for half an hour before breakfast).
- Use a phrase that reinforces the fresh start (for instance 'That was then; this is now'; 'I'm a new person going forward').
- Invent a slogan for your new fresh start. For instance, 'Stoptober or Movember'.

Write how you will symbolically mark a clean break with the past and give yourself permission to start with a clean sheet.





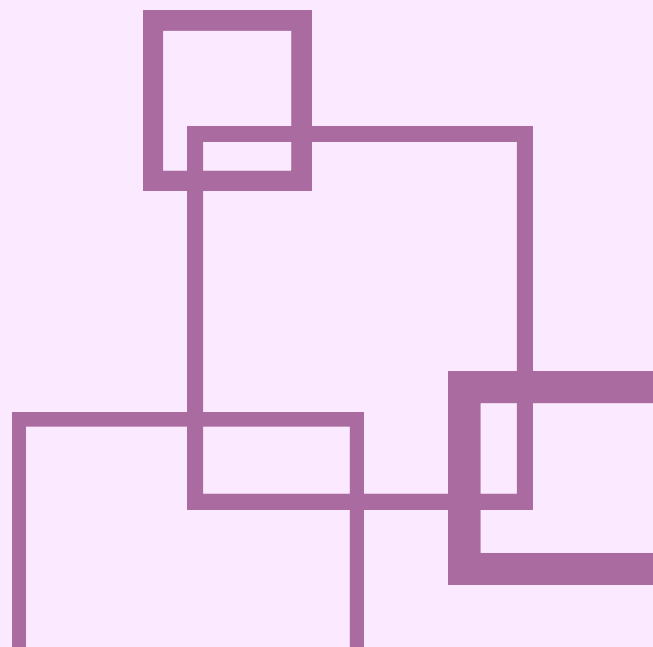
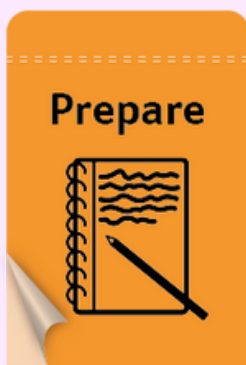
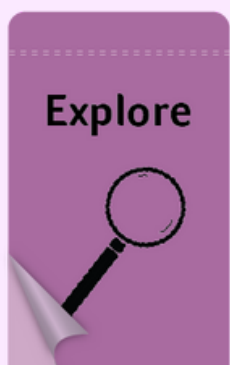
Pause, Reflect, Act

- How would you like to use this approach to help you make a change?
- When is the first good opportunity coming up for you to make a fresh-start?
- Who could help you with this?
- What actions do you need to take now to build on this exercise?
- Are there other related self-help tools you'd like to use as well?

NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

References and Resources

- Milkman, K. (2022). *How to Change: The science of getting from where you are to where you want to be*. Penguin.
- Webinar with Katy Milkman discussing her research.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3mxsB1ZRtA>



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.