

Explore



Prepare



Develop



Rule of Three

A self-help tool

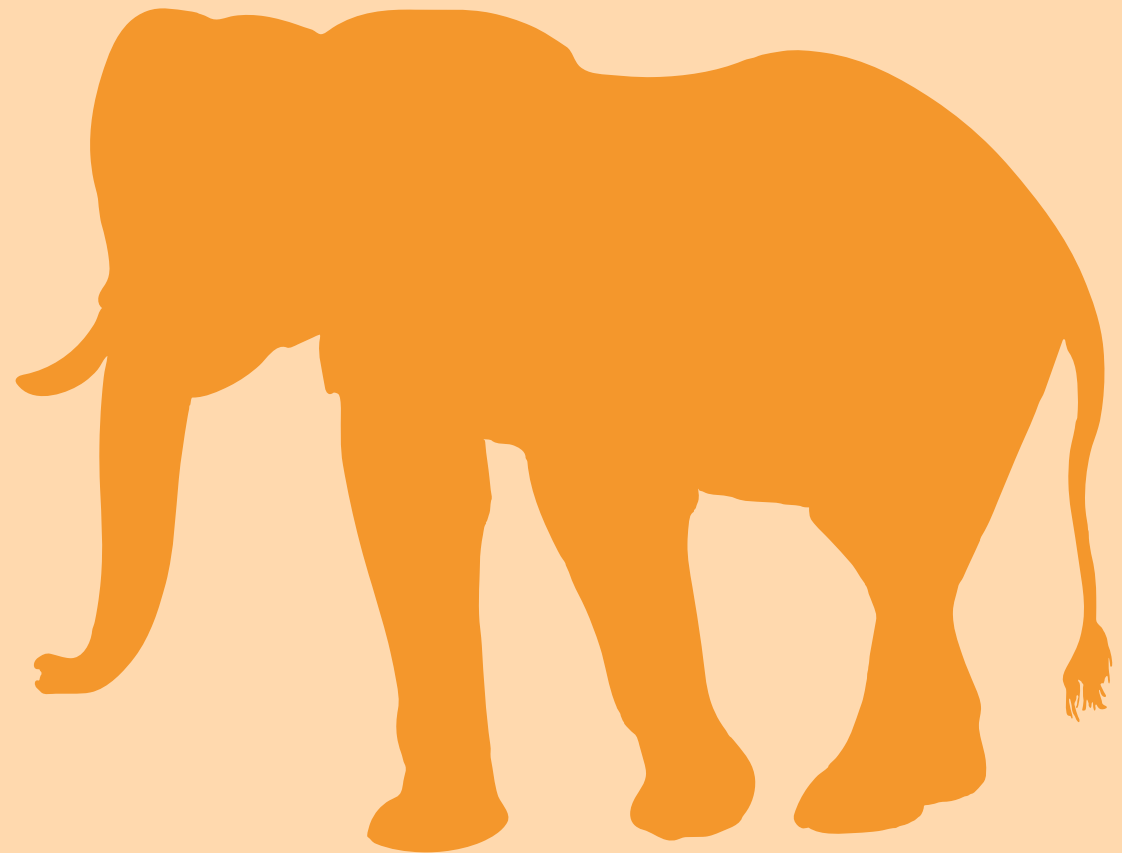
Introduction

Question: how do you eat an elephant? Answer: one bite at a time! It's an old joke but it contains an important truth. Big achievements consist of lots of little small actions which lead up to them. As Brian May, the lead guitarist in the rock band Queen once said: 'overnight success takes a long time.' (May, 2002).

This approach entails taking your actions list and doing three things from the list each week, every week. It doesn't matter if they are big or small actions. But if you keep chipping away you'll make progress.

Based on a combined 40 years of experience in education, Oakes and Griffin describe this as: ‘...one of the most effective tools we’ve ever used.’ (2019, p. 48). Drawing on Canfield (2005), they liken it to using a sharp axe to chop through a large tree, a few chops at a time.

They recommend putting your action list somewhere you can see it every day and ticking off your three actions to mark your progress.



This tool is designed to...

- Enable you to make progress with your plans.
- Offer a flexible way of taking action.
- Break a large task down into small chunks.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Feel you can't get going on a project.
- Like taking approaches which are adaptive and 'on-the-fly'.
- Find that formal project plans get in the way of actually doing stuff.



How to use this tool

First, create a simple way to log your progress.

This is important as the technique is about sustaining a habit of taking lots of (often small) actions. For it to work you need to keep at it.


Your log might just be a simple table like the one shown below which you can print out, stick on somewhere easily visible and then put a cross (or a tick) in each box as you go along. Simplicity is the key. Alternatively, you could write a key word in the box that sums up the action taken.

	Week 1			Week 2			Week 3			Week 4		
Month 1	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Month 2	X	X						X				

Second, share your approach with someone else.

To increase the likelihood that you'll stick to the approach, tell a friend or family member what you are doing and show them how you're making progress. A public commitment will increase your determination.

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



References and Resources

- Canfield, J. (2005). *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. HarperCollins.
- May, B. (2002). *Desert Island Discs, Sunday 15 Sept 02, 11.15 Am*. BBC Radio 4. Transcript by Jen Tunney. <https://brianmay.com/brian-news/brian-features/2002/11/desert-island-discs-transcript-bbc-radio-4/>
- Oakes, S., & Griffin, M. (2019). *The Student Mindset*. Crown House Publishing.

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.