

# HOW TO CREATE A FOCUS-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Does your brain regularly go off for a wander in the middle of a crucial task? Here's how to find your focus – and keep it.



## 1. Use the “Zeigarnik Effect”

This principle basically means that unfinished tasks are harder to get out of your brain than tasks you haven't started yet.

Do this: If you're struggling to get started, set a timer for 10 minutes and then work on an aspect of your task for those ten minutes. Once you start, it turns the big, scary project into just another unfinished task – which means your brain will start working to figure out how to get it done.



## 2. Create a “Daily Focus” list

A daily focus list is a short, bulleted outline of three major and three secondary priorities for the day. Create it first thing every morning – use a post-it note and put it where you can see it to keep you focused on what's really important.



## 3. Create a “Parking Lot”

If you tend to daydream a lot or have a hyperactive imagination, you can easily be distracted by passing thoughts that have nothing to do with work. “Park” these thoughts (and the anxiety they create) in a “parking lot”: an easily accessible place where you can dump these thoughts until a more appropriate time. Your parking lot could be a notebook you carry in your backpack, for example.



## 4. Identify your “overwhelm” triggers

We all have triggers that make us feel overwhelmed. Perhaps yours is getting hungry, experiencing really noisy environments or just having too many conflicting priorities. Try to identify the triggers that cause you to feel overwhelmed: this will help you to anticipate their arrival and plan accordingly.



## 5. Go with your flow

It's important to get to know your brain and to figure out when you're working productively, or when you need a time out. When your brain is “in the zone”, tackle tasks that require attention and focus. When your brain is foggy, shift your attention to less demanding tasks. You might find that the time of day influences your focus, for example. Getting to know yourself is key to figuring out your flow.



## 6. Find positive distractions

If you really just can't focus anymore, then get distracted – but in a positive way. Going for a run or a walk might be the best type of procrastination you can do! Physical activity boosts the brain and can help you operate more efficiently when you come back. Other positive distractions include meditating, having a quick dance break or working on a creative art project. Make sure to set a timer so that you don't get lost in the distraction!



## 7. Forget perfection

Obsessing over small, unimportant details can kill productivity. Work on letting go of perfectionism and settling for "good enough." This will take time to master, but keep trying.



## 8. Make time for planning

As the saying goes, "those who fail to plan, plan to fail" – a lack of planning drains your focus, and it's hard to be productive if you don't know exactly what you're supposed to be doing. Schedule regular, short planning sessions to sketch out priorities and deadlines for the upcoming days or weeks.



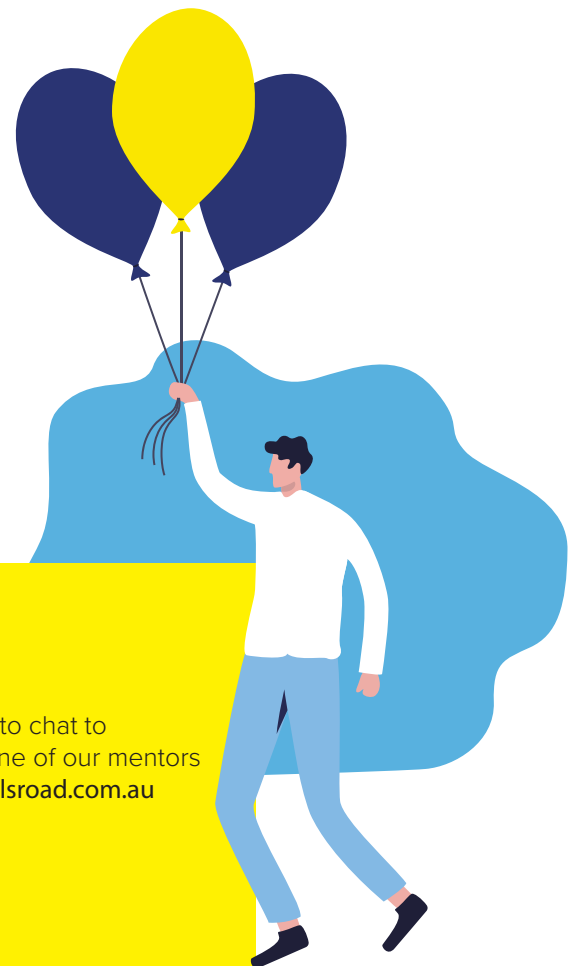
## 9. Acknowledge negative thoughts...

And then let them go. Dwelling on recent failures or troubles can block out other important thoughts, and make it impossible to get stuff done. But don't block your negative thoughts entirely: rather acknowledge their validity, and plan a time later when you can give them the attention they deserve.



## 10. Find clarity

It's easier to stay focused and get things done if you have clarity about what and why you are doing. It will also help you maintain a positive mindset. Ask yourself these questions when you're having trouble paying attention: What do you want to achieve? Whose expectations are driving this project (your own or someone else's)? Do you understand what you need to do?



## GET IN TOUCH

If you're ever unsure or want to chat to someone, get in touch with one of our mentors by emailing [CareerCoach@skillsroad.com.au](mailto:CareerCoach@skillsroad.com.au)