Start the Task: A Guide for Brains That Stall

Practical ways to get going when starting is the hardest part — written with ADHD and task paralysis in mind.

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Starting is its own problem

If you can do the work once you're in it but can't make yourself begin, you're not lazy. Starting is a separate skill from doing, and it can be supported.

This guide is a set of tools, not rules. Try one at a time and keep the ones that work for your brain.

Shrink the first step

'Write the report' is not a step; it's a project. The first step should be so small it feels slightly silly.

Once you start, momentum often carries you further than you planned. If it doesn't, you still did the step.

- 'Open the document and type the title'
- 'Put the dishes from the counter into the sink'
- 'Find the email I need to reply to'

Make time visible

Time can feel invisible: 'later' never arrives, and an hour disappears. A visible countdown makes time concrete.

Try a short sprint: 10 or 25 minutes, one task, then a real break. Stop when it ends — that makes the next start easier.

Borrow someone else's presence

Many people find it easier to work when someone else is around, even if they're doing something different. This is often called body doubling.

Work in a café, sit with a friend who's also working, join a quiet online co-working session, or simply tell someone 'I'm starting now, I'll message you in 25 minutes'.

Lower the bar on the hard days

Some days the plan will fall apart. That's information, not failure.

On a bad day, pick one thing that would make tomorrow easier and do just that: lay out clothes, write tomorrow's first tiny step on a sticky note, refill the water bottle.

Build a starting ritual

The same small ritual before you work tells your brain what comes next: a drink, a song, the same seat, the same timer sound.

After a week or two, the ritual starts doing some of the work of starting for you.

> My starting ritual: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. Start the timer

Want this on your phone?

Now helps you start the task you keep avoiding: one tiny first step, a visible timer, and no shame when the day goes sideways.

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