

One of the best ways of doing that is with what I like to call “Focus Rituals”.

A ritual is a set of actions you repeat habitually — you might have a pre-bed ritual or a religious ritual or a just-started-up-my-computer ritual. One of the powerful things about rituals is that we often give them a special importance: they can be almost spiritual (and sometimes actually spiritual, depending on the ritual). And when they become special, we are more mindful of them — we don’t just rush through them mindlessly.

Mindfully observing a ritual is important, especially when it comes to focus, because often we get distracted without realizing it. The distractions work because we’re not paying attention. So when we pay attention to a ritual, it’s much more conducive to focus, and then to creativity. Mindful attention to a ritual also helps keep it from becoming too rote or meaningless.

It’s important to give importance to each ritual, so that you’ll truly allow yourself to focus and not forget about the ritual when it’s not convenient. For example, you might start each ritual with a couple of cleansing breaths, to bring yourself to the present, to clear your head of thoughts of other things, and to fully focus on the ritual itself.

Let’s take a look at just a few Focus Rituals. Please note that this isn’t meant to be a comprehensive list, nor am I suggesting you do all of these. It’s a list of ideas — you should try ones that seem best suited for your situation, and test them out to see what works best.

1. Morning quiet. You start your day in quiet, before the busy-ness of the world intrudes on your peace of mind. If you live with others, you might want to wake before they do. The key to enjoying this focus ritual is not going online. You can turn on the computer if you just want to write. You can have coffee or tea and read. You can meditate or do yoga or do a workout or go for a run. Or take a walk. Or sit quietly and do nothing. The key is to take advantage of this peaceful time to rest your mind and focus, however you like.

2. Start of day. Begin your work day by not checking email or any other distractions, but start a simple to-do list on paper or with a text file. On this blank to-do list, just list your three Most Important Tasks. Or if you like, just list the One Thing you really want to accomplish today. This helps you to focus on what’s important. Even better: continue this focus ritual by starting