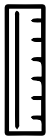
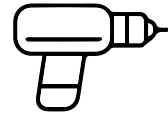
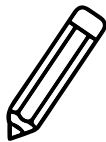
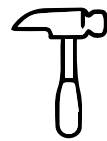


● ● ● **THE GROWTH MARATHON** ● ● ●
— One Stride At a Time —



**PRACTICAL TOOLS FROM
ATOMIC HABITS**



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————— **One Stride At a Time** —————

Contents

Introduction	1
Practical Tools	1
1. Pointing and Calling	1
2. Habit Scorecard.....	1
3. Implementation Intention	2
4. Habit Stacking	3
5. Temptation Building	3
6. Temptation Bundling + Habit Stacking	4
7. The 2-minute Rule	4
8. 2-Minutes Rule + Habit Shaping.....	5
9. Commitment Device.....	5
10. Technology for Automation.....	5
11. Reinforcement.....	6
12. Habit Tracker	6
13. Never Miss Twice	7
14. Habit Contract.....	7
15. Explore and Exploit	8
16. Feedback.....	8
My Top 5 Tools (Conclusion)	9

Introduction

I have covered some concepts I enjoyed from Atomic Habits as well as the 4 Laws of behavior change in these articles ([Here](#) and [Here](#)). In this article, I provide a summary of the tools James presents in various chapters of the book and what I think about them.

Practical Tools

1. Pointing and Calling

You can't change something if you are not aware of it. Pointing at important indicators and verbally calling out their status raises our level of awareness. It seems to originate from a Japanese rail safety measure, whereby, when performing a check, all staff has to "Point and Call". For example, before closing the doors, the train attendant points around (scanning) and says out loud that there is no one around and the doors can be closed. This technique ensures you are constantly aware of your actions and has drastically reduced accidents and mistakes in the Japanese railway system.

I personally don't use this technique as rigorously as Japanese to be aware of the habits I want to be aware of, and I don't think the goal is to be at that level of rigor, but simply saying out loud that you are about to mindlessly scroll on Instagram can make you think twice before doing it, and sometimes that's all it takes.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 4.

2. Habit Scorecard

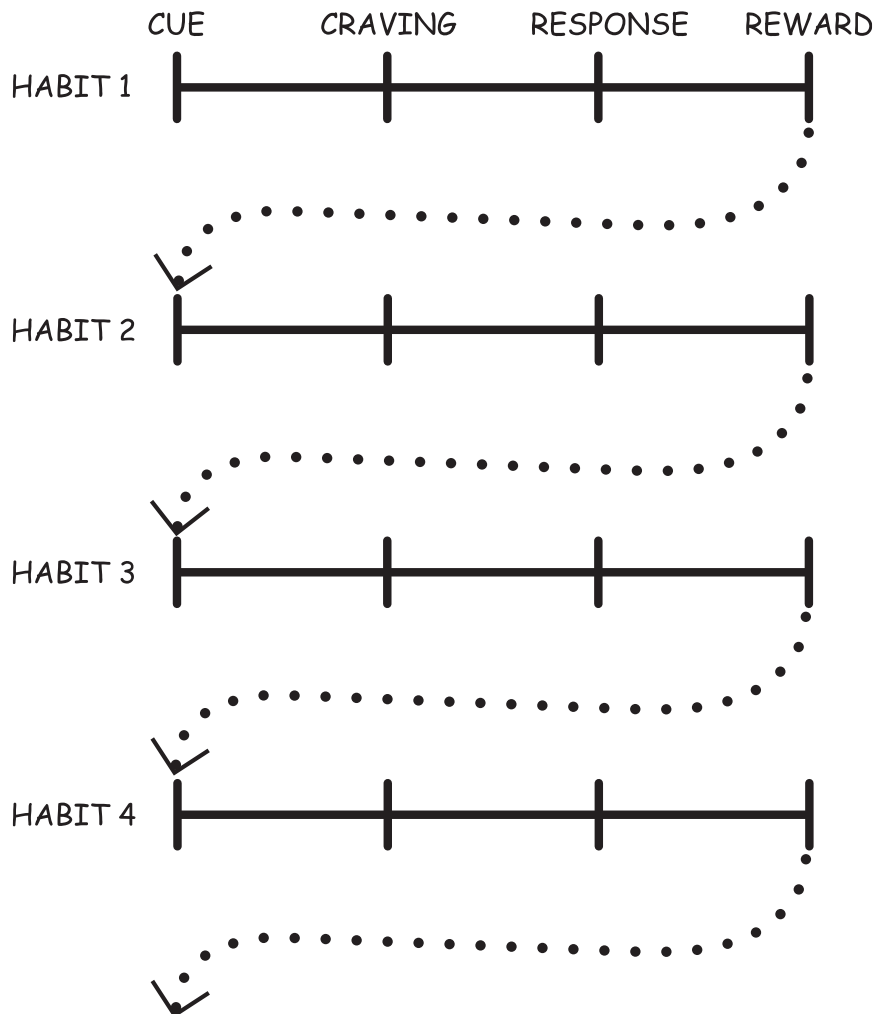
Another way to be more aware of your behavior is by writing them down. A habit scorecard is a simple exercise that can be used to become more aware of your behavior. To create a habit scorecard, draw up a table with two columns, record your daily habits on the left column, and on the right column, categorize a good habit with a "+" (One that brings you closer to the person you want to become), a bad habit with a "-" (One that reinforces an identity you dislike), a neutral habit with a "="'. The goal of this technique is just to be aware of your habits. You can record your habits throughout the day (using a method you find simple) and write them down on the scorecard at night, or use whatever method works for you, as long as you record them.

I think after doing it for a couple of weeks you have a good idea of your daily habits, and from there you can start thinking of which habits to change, which ones to do more often etc.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 4.

4. Habit Stacking

No behavior acts in isolation, one leads to the next. An effective way to build a new habit is to identify an old habit you already have and stack the new habit on top of that. The end of your current habit becomes the cue to the one you want to create. The formula for this technique is as follows: *After **current habit**, I will **new habit***. An example can be after waking up, I will do 5 push-ups or after getting home from work/school, I will wear my sports clothes.



I particularly like this technique, and I have used it quite a bit since encountering it, I was actually using it even before knowing it was called habit stacking. I encourage you to pick one or two new habits and try stacking them for a week or two and see what results you get.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 5.

5. Temptation Building

I briefly touched on the 4 laws of behavioral change in my [previous article](#), and the second law was to make the habit attractive. Temptation bundling is an

excellent technique to make a habit attractive, as it follows the cardinal rule of behavior formation “*What is immediately rewarded is repeated, what is immediately punished is avoided*”.

Temptation bundling links an action you **want** to do with an action you **need** to do. This allows you to create an expectation for something you like, after an action you want to make a habit. Remember, dopamine is also released when you expect a reward, stimulating your motivation. A simple example can be; After doing 1 hour of online classes, I will read 10 pages of The Stormlight Archive (my favorite novel series).

This technique really helps stay motivated. It's analogous to giving a candy bar to a kid after he/she does a good deed (Hmm, maybe not a candy bar but a carrot rather).

James introduces this technique in Chapter 8.

6. Temptation Bundling + Habit Stacking

Temptation bundling can be combined with habit stacking for a more powerful effect. The formula is as follows: After **Current Habit**, I will **New Habit**, after **New Habit**, I will **What I want**. I don't have much to say here, it's a mix of two techniques I like.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 8.

7. The 2-minute Rule

How often do we go overboard when starting a new habit? You want to start running more frequently but you go and do 5 km in one day even though your typical monthly average is about 10kms. Starting too hard is difficult to maintain, you need a lot of willpower, hence it's not the most sustainable strategy. James suggests starting a habit by initially doing it for 2 mins (I take this number more symbolically than anything, I cannot spend only two minutes on a habit, except if I'm doing a plank).

Most habits can be scaled down to remarkably simple and easy-to-do versions, **2-minute versions**. For example, read before bed each night becomes read one page before sleeping. The idea is to make your habits as easy as possible to start. This allows you to use momentum to your advantage, once you start doing something, it is easier to continue doing it.

The point of the 2-minute rule is to master the habit of showing up. A habit must be established before it can be improved. In the words of James, “*You have to standardize before you optimize*”. As you master the art of showing up, the first 2-minutes become a ritual at the beginning of a larger routine. If this routine is the same every day, it's easier for you to perform the habit. For example, wearing running shoes can be a ritual for running. It's very easy to wear those shoes, but if you have been running immediately after wearing them for several days, once you wear them the automatic thing to do is for you to run (obviously you are wearing some form of decent clothing for your run).

Excellent technique. This has especially helped me in my running journey, on very difficult days I always tell myself I'll only jog for 10mins or so, but end up doing 30mins minimum. If you take one technique from this article, my recommendation is this one.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 13.

8. 2-Minutes Rule + Habit Shaping

Habit shaping is basically building up a habit. It helps you scale up a habit towards a specific goal you gave yourself. For example, you want to write an informative blog, with practical tips on how to develop yourself. You break it down all the way to its 2-minute version, i.e. write a sentence every day. Once you have mastered that, you move up to the next level, write a paragraph every day, till you get to a level that allows you to progress at the rate you wish and attain your goal. I think it is quite automatic for one to build up on a habit once they have mastered the first steps.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 13.

9. Commitment Device

A commitment device is a choice you make in the present that controls your actions in the future. The key is to make it difficult to get out of the good habit. It locks you into a future behavior. Commitment devices are useful because they enable you to take advantage of your good intentions before you can fall victim to temptation. James uses Victor Hugo as an example; to write *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, he gave out most of his clothes except an overall to his assistant if I recall correctly, to stop himself from going out. This locked him into the habit of writing.

I think we all use this technique to various degrees. You can use it in extreme ways like Victor Hugo if you have something you absolutely need to complete. I use it more moderately, and it works for me.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 14.

10. Technology for Automation

We have all experienced the benefits of advanced technology in one way or the other. Automation is one of these benefits. Numerous tasks that can be automated can be passed onto technology, freeing up some time for us to do something else. Social media notifications can be blocked, or specific notifications you might want to be aware of can be enabled. Reminders can be set for activities you don't want to miss, automatic replies can be set when you don't want to be disturbed, and the list goes on. If used for automation, technology can be a tremendous tool. Unfortunately, it is a double-edged sword, as a lot of tasks have minimal friction due to technology, making it challenging to stop once started (think about scrolling on Instagram or YouTube, the content bank is nearly inexhaustible, and you have recommendations and notifications etc.).

I use technology to automate bank transfers, reminders, alarms etc. I do not use it excessively, but it can be used in numerous ways to automate several activities, you just need to know what you want to automate, figure out if technology can help you with that and research which technology you need to use for that.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 14.

11. Reinforcement

Human beings are more likely to repeat a behavior if the feeling is satisfying. James' cardinal rule of behavior change states "*What is immediately rewarded is repeated, what is immediately punished is avoided.*" To ensure you are immediately rewarded, you can use **reinforcement**.

Reinforcement is a technique that links the end of a habit to an immediate reward. James indicates that reinforcement is good especially to end bad habits. We usually don't "punish" ourselves after a bad habit like overeating or mindlessly scrolling on social media etc. But if you add a bit of punishment immediately after each of these you can decrease the frequency of occurrence. I have no statistics for this, but I know it works for me. Your reinforcement needs to align with the belief of who you want to become. If you want to become an athlete for example, then after a workout session, your reward can be a massage rather than a glass of gin (pick your poison).

You might ask yourself if you will always need reinforcement, it is only required for the start of your habit, the closer you are to your identity, the less incentive is required.

This one is a bit of an obvious tool, we all intrinsically know that we need to reward ourselves for good deeds to ensure the motivation is always present.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 15.

12. Habit Tracker

Habit trackers provide clear evidence of your progress and as a result, reinforce your behavior and add a little bit of immediate satisfaction. They are also useful because they help you focus less on the final goal, but more on the process and who you are becoming (depending on how you use them). There are various types of habit trackers; putting crosses on a calendar, moving paper clips from one jar to another (I use marbles) etc.

James points out that tracking habits might be a hassle, hence to ease this activity, only manually track your 2-3 most important habits, record the habit you are tracking immediately when you complete it or automate the tracking (via various phone apps, this is valid only for those apps that can be automatically tracked via technology).

I like tracking my writing and running habits. Each hour I spend writing, I add a marble to a jar next to my monitor. The process is satisfying (like I am rewarding myself). I do the same for each of my runs. For easier habits like

intermittent fasting for example, I just mark my calendar with “X” for each successful day. These are both visual tracking methods, and they work well for me. You can also download James’ [habit tracker template](#) and use that.

An important consideration here is to measure the right thing. “*We optimize for what we measure, and when we measure the wrong thing, we get the wrong behavior*” — James Clear. In short, what you measure is of great importance. If you want to lose weight and your weight is the only thing you measure, you might take unhealthy routes to get there (like starving yourself). I think if you can associate an identity you want to have to whatever you measure, you won’t measure the wrong thing.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 16.

13. Never Miss Twice

This is self-explanatory, if you ever skip a habit, make sure you don’t skip it on consecutive days. In James’ words, “*missing once is an accident, missing twice is the start of a new habit*”. Lost days hurt you more than successful days help you.

Doing an activity when you feel good is easy. It is crucial to show up when you don’t feel like it, even if you do less than you hope (This reaffirms your identity). Always have that in mind, the goal of a habit is to become a certain type of person, each time you complete your habit you cast a vote towards becoming that person.

If I skip a habit, the next time I usually do a simple version of the habit just to bring me back on track and build back up from there. Nike says it all, “*Just do it*”. Breaking momentum is a pain, unfortunately, so just figure out the simplest way to bring yourself back to doing the activity you want to turn into a habit as soon as possible.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 16.

14. Habit Contract

It’s great if you can be accountable for your actions, but sometimes we need a little push in the right direction, and this is where accountability partners become valuable.

Pain is an effective teacher. If a failure is painful, it gets fixed, if a failure is painless, it gets ignored. The more immediate and costly a mistake is, the faster you’ll learn from it. A simple way to add an immediate cost to any habit is by creating a Habit Contract. This is a verbal or written agreement in which you state your commitment to a habit and the punishment associated if you don’t follow through. Once you have that set, you can find an accountability partner who will sign off (shake hands, whatever form you want it to take to seal the agreement) on the contract with you.

Unfortunately or fortunately, we care about the opinion of others, we like it when people like us or think we are doing something well etc. This is one of the main

reasons accountability partners are so useful, they infuse a bit of social status in our habit development journey.

I personally don't like relying on such a method to develop a habit, I have tried it, and it's a pretty efficient technique to be honest, but I always feel like I am doing the habit only because someone else is watching me, hence I have stopped using this technique for the most part.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 17.

15. Explore and Exploit

This technique should be taught to everyone at an early age. The secret to maximizing your odds of success is to choose the right field of competition (remember, you can't expect a fish to climb a tree, I think that's how it goes. Anyway, you get my point). This is true for habits, sports, and business. The question is, "How can I determine what the right field of competition for me?"

James touches on this quite thoroughly in Chapter 18, but in summary, we all have natural inclinations and abilities. We are all predisposed to be better at some skills faster than others, hence we need to figure out what those skills are as soon as possible. Example, according to the NBA, the average player's height is 1.98m. If I am 1.6m, I am not predisposed to be an NBA player, but I might be predisposed to be good at a sport where the closer my center of gravity is to the ground, the better I can be, like football (think Agüero, Tevez, Messi, etc.).

The Explore-Exploit strategy is a fantastic way of finding where the odds are in your favor. This strategy consists of two steps, the first is to explore, which means doing a lot of research about a variety of things to figure out what gels well with you and what you have an affinity with. Once you find something that aligns with your assets, exploit, dive into it, but still keep about 10–20% of your time exploring.

I believe this technique is great and helps you broaden your mind and your understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. Take some time (maybe 6 months) and explore and exploit. I doubt you will regret it.

James introduces this technique in Chapter 18.

16. Feedback

You have repeated an action long enough and now it's automatic, do you just keep doing it blindly, in the same way, all the time? For habits you do not want to be exceptional at, it will be fine to keep doing the same thing (e.g., making your bed or tying your shoelaces etc.). But for habits you want to be exceptional at, a more nuanced approach is required.

You need a way to remain conscious of your performance over time, so you can continue to refine and improve. **Habits + deliberate practice = mastery.** Avoid complacency at all costs. To ensure this, you need to establish a reflection and review system.

I am currently quite bad at giving myself feedback and acting on it to be honest, but the few times I have done so I could clearly see myself becoming better. For example, I used to go for runs without warming up or cooling down. After several injuries and advice from friends and more experienced runners, I incorporated a multitude of strength exercises for my knees, and I started warming up and cooling down before and after each run. In this specific case, the pain of the injury forced me to act and become better.

James uses 2 modes of review, every December he reflects on the year that just ended by tallying how many articles he published, how many workouts he put out, how many places he visited etc. He does this by answering three questions:

- What are the core values that drive my life and work?
- How am I living and working with integrity right now?
- How can I set a higher standard in the future?

Every half a year he does an integrity report that answers the question: "Am I actually living like the type of person I claim to be?"

James introduces this technique in Chapter 20.

My Top 5 Tools (Conclusion)

Visit jamesclear.com for relevant information regarding James' work. Maybe pick 5 of these tools and see how they impact your life over the next 2 months. My top five tools are:

1. Explore and Exploit
2. 2-Minute Rule
3. Reinforcement
4. Temptation Bundling + Habit Stacking
5. Commitment Device

Have you been using these tools? Do they work for you? Let me know in the [comments section](#) what you think about this article.