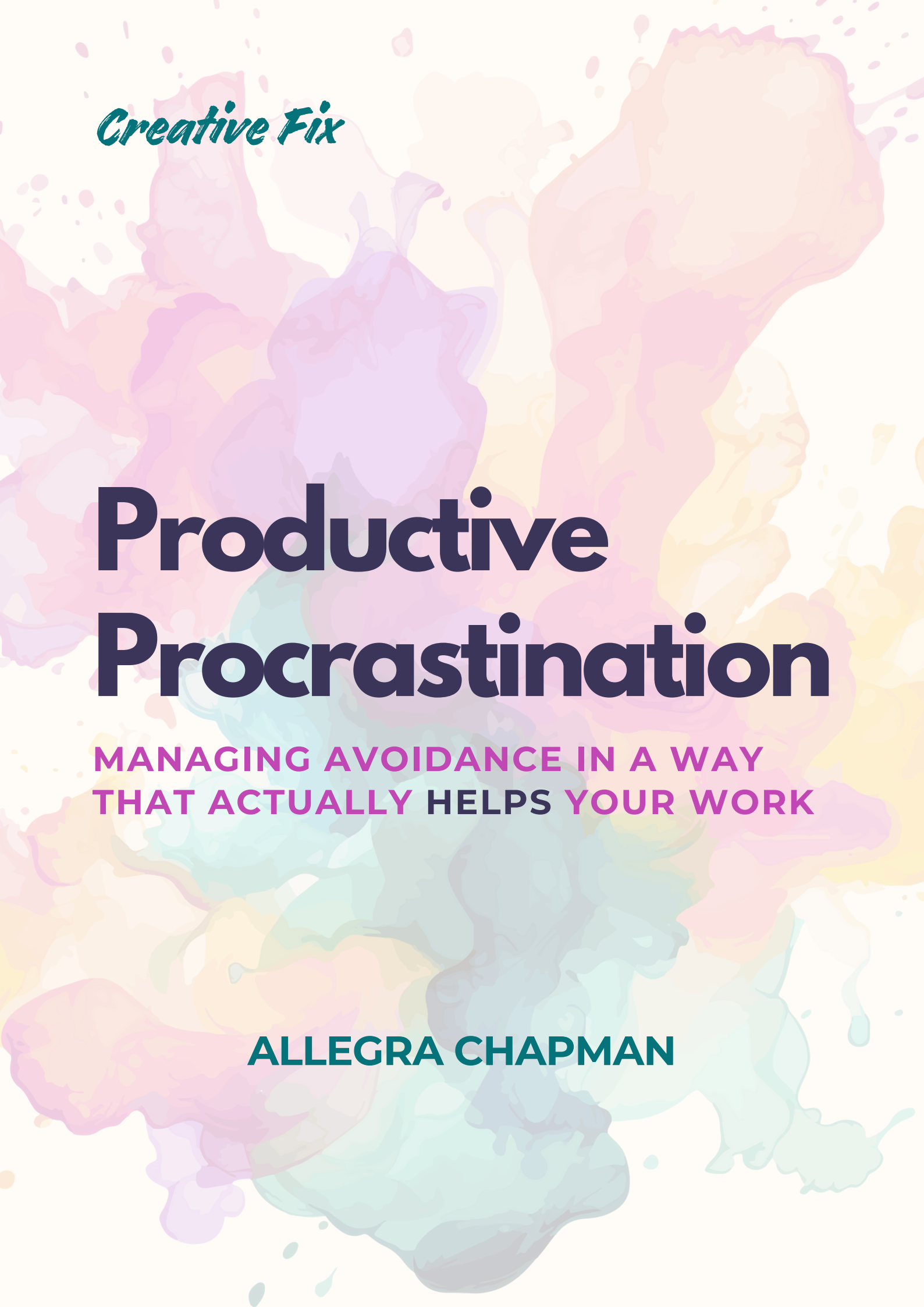




Creative Fix

Productive Procrastination

MANAGING AVOIDANCE IN A WAY
THAT ACTUALLY HELPS YOUR WORK

ALLEGRA CHAPMAN



I'm so glad you're here

I will do **anything** to avoid starting a task. My bathroom is never cleaner than when I'm on a deadline. When I am beginning a big new project, I suddenly identify a million small tasks I must do first.

This is not laziness. It's a nervous system response.

It took me years to understand that - I want to help you get there sooner. This guide is going to show you how to work with this neurological programming, instead of fighting against it.

Hi, I'm Allegra Chapman

I'm an author, creative wellbeing practitioner and AuDHD dissident. I help neurodivergent and disabled creatives reclaim their voices, and selves, from systems designed to silence them.

The real reason you procrastinate

I want to make sure we're clear here:

- ✗ You're not lazy
- ✗ You're not lacking in dedication
- ✗ You don't just "need to get your shit together"

There's no shortage of people claiming (usually in right-wing rags) that neurodivergent people simply need a kick up the arse and good old-fashioned discipline. But most of us have been hearing that since we were tiny - no one kicks our backsides more than we do.

If force worked, we'd have it sorted by now.

But we don't, because it doesn't.

The truth is, chronic procrastination is a nervous system response. It's a sign of one or more of the following:

- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Dysregulation
- ✓ Overwhelm
- ✓ Confusion

Pushing harder and dialling up the self-criticism only serves to exacerbate the problem. **You need to work with your brain, instead of against it.**

This is not a guide to "hacking" your brain or overriding your limits. This is a guide to understanding yourself and your needs so you can work more effectively as your true, full self.

The real reason you procrastinate

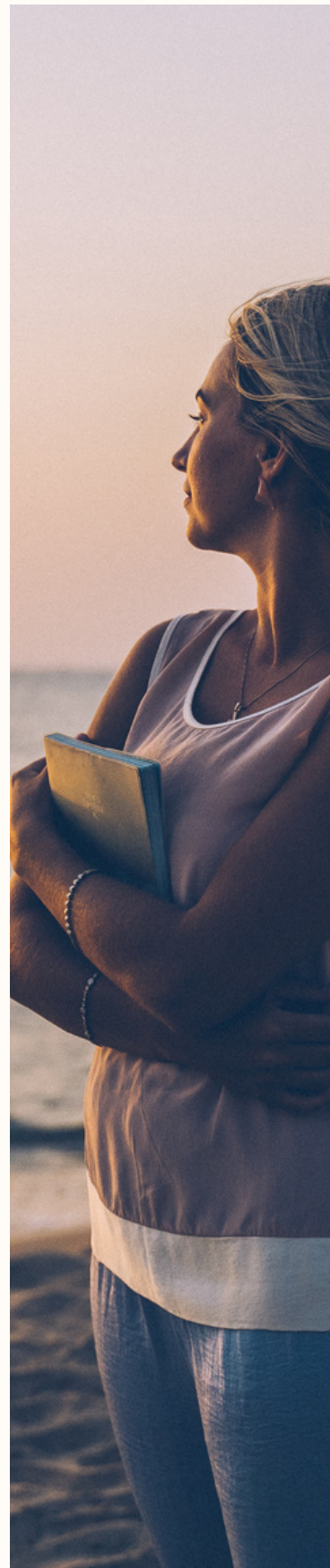
Avoidance is a tactic your brain uses to **keep you safe**.

If a task feels **scary** - say, it will make you visible, or leave you open to critique, or challenge you in some way - then you feel uneasy, your brain senses **danger**, and it tries to find something safer for you to do instead.

If you're **dysregulated** or overwhelmed, your brain recognises that this is not the state in which you are likely to do your best work, and tries to suggest that you do something else until you're in a **better place**. A frazzled nervous system signals to your brain that you're not safe, and puts you into escape mode.

If you're not totally clear on what you need to do or, crucially, **why** you need to do it, your brain deprioritises the task. Neurodivergent brains - especially ADHD ones - crave interest and novelty; a task without **interest or purpose** does not offer the dopamine we need, so we will seek it elsewhere.

Throw in **perfectionism** and **anxiety** over past experiences, and it's no wonder your brain is hesitant to start.



Pressure turns

CARBON

into diamonds.

It turns humans into

squidgy goo

pancakes.

Willpower doesn't work

Here's why pushing yourself harder is not the answer.

Guilt is getting you stuck in the first place

Productivity guilt, and the idea that there's something wrong with you because you can't "just get on with it", is part of what's putting you in **freeze mode** to begin with.

Telling yourself that there is a "right" way to work, and that you *should* be able to do it that way, feeds the **shame and fear** that make this work feel unsafe.

Many of us have been shamed in the past for not following the "standard" approach, and anxiety about being shamed again, or being perceived (by ourselves or others) to have "failed", adds to the sense of danger.

Self-criticism leads to shutdown

We often employ negative self-talk in a bid to get ourselves moving, but all that does is contribute to **dysregulation and anxiety**. We feel more scared, and more avoidant. Dopamine drops even lower, and we run off in search of a quick hit to make us feel less sad.

The Boom and Bust cycle

Sometimes, you can force it. Occasionally you can push through and make yourself be productive for a while... but because you're working against your needs, this approach **depletes all your energy**. Leaving you with nothing in the tank for days, reducing productivity, leading to more guilt. And round and round we go!

Productive Procrastination

Productive procrastination is a way of working **with** your brain's need for dopamine, regulation and safety, so that you can work at your most effectively.

It is **NOT**:

- ✗ Multitasking
- ✗ Busyness
- ✗ Pretending avoidance is progress

Productive procrastination is choosing forms of avoidance that **support your nervous system**, keep you close to your work, or make future movement easier.

This way, we avoid spiralling into shame, and set you up to do your best work.

There are FOUR TYPES of productive procrastination:

1. Soothing
2. Circling
3. Micro-making
4. Supporting

Let's take a look at each of these in turn.



“ *Tension is
who you think you
SHOULD BE.
Relaxation is
who you
ARE.* ”

Chinese proverb

1: Soothing

When this is the right approach

When your nervous system feels frazzled.

If you're feeling **anxious**, overwhelmed, emotional, panicky or **overloaded** from a sensory perspective, choose a soothing action.

What soothing actions look like

As the name suggests, they're soothing and calming a nervous system that's in fight-flight-freeze mode.

Examples might be:

- ★ Make a hot drink and drink it slowly
- ★ Wrap yourself in a blanket or put on softer clothes
- ★ Look around and name five things you can see
- ★ Take a shower and notice the feeling of the water
- ★ Step outside briefly and feel the air on your skin
- ★ Light a candle and watch the flame
- ★ Do a gentle stretch
- ★ Put on music that matches your mood
- ★ Stroke an animal or something soft
- ★ Go for a walk
- ★ Take a nap

You are not being indulgent. You are making your body feel safe enough to continue.

2: Circling

When this is the right approach

When you're scared to start.

If you're intimidated by the task, afraid of the outcome or chasing perfection, circling keeps you close to the project while reducing the stakes.

What circling actions look like

These are gentle steps that move you a little way forward without forcing output.

Examples might be:

- ★ Re-read a part you've already written - no editing
- ★ Jot down messy notes about the project
- ★ Journal for five or ten minutes about your fears
- ★ Freewrite about your thoughts on the project so far
- ★ Collect relevant quotes, images, or references
- ★ Organise notes or materials into folders
- ★ Tidy your workspace
- ★ Write a list titled "Things this project is not"
- ★ Talk out loud about the work (to yourself or a friend)
- ★ Sketch, doodle, or map the idea visually

You are not delaying. You are building an on-ramp.

3: Micro-making

When this is the right approach

When you're low on energy or motivation.

Those times when you're restless and fidgety, or feeling like you've got a mountain to climb, are usually when you're seeking dopamine. This approach gives you little doses that get you moving.

What micro-making actions look like

Small steps towards your goal that give you a boost. Repeat them, with breaks in between, and you begin to associate this work with dopamine.

Examples might be:

- ★ Write just one sentence, then stop
- ★ Write bullet points instead of full sentences
- ★ Set a five-minute timer, work till it goes off, then stop
- ★ Draft a deliberately bad or incomplete version
- ★ Make notes or doodles about what you want to say
- ★ Voice note what you want this work to be about
- ★ Fill in just one section or answer one question
- ★ Do some admin jobs for the project

You have more chance of getting to the end by moving slowly than you do if you freeze altogether.

4: Supporting

When this is the right approach

When you've had enough or you're bored.

If you've already been working for a while or you're losing interest in this project, give yourself a break and set yourself up for a successful session next time.

What supporting actions look like

Caring for your future self by preparing the ground for the next time you return to this project.

Examples might be:

- ★ Write a note saying where and how to start next time
- ★ Summarise your next steps
- ★ Write a mission statement for why this work matters
- ★ Lay out materials or prepare tabs you'll need
- ★ Tidy the work area you'll be using next time
- ★ Close loops: save, name, back up, or archive files
- ★ Make a checklist for next time
- ★ Set a document or template structure
- ★ Write a kind message to yourself for next time
- ★ Note down what you've achieved today

Stopping and resting is strategic - you'll get more done in the long-term by pacing yourself than you will if you burn out.

“

*Caring for myself
is not*

SELF-INDULGENCE,

it is

SELF-PRESERVATION,

*and that is a act of
political warfare.*

”

Audre Lorde

Choosing the right approach

Firstly, if you choose an action and it doesn't help, that's **not failure**. It's feedback. You're learning to understand your nervous system and how to support it.

Below is a quick guide to finding an action, but often the activity you feel most drawn to is the one you need. Let your body lead.

I feel...

Anxious
Frozen
Overwhelmed

Soothing

Uncertain
Intimidated
Inadequate

Circling

Heavy
Flat
Inert

Micro-making

Done
Unmotivated
Bored

Supporting



Reflections to guide you

If you find yourself repeatedly procrastinating around a certain project, or a certain type of work, it might be a message - and one that's worth listening to.

Sometimes procrastination is your system's way of trying to protect you from...

- overcommitment
- visibility before you feel ready
- working in a way that doesn't fit you
- repeating an old pattern of burnout

If that's the case, the most productive thing you can do may be to change the terms of the work, not force yourself to complete it as planned.

Listening to procrastination doesn't mean obeying it blindly. It means treating it as information rather than a character flaw.

On the next page are some questions to help you break the cycle of self-criticism and shame, and, instead, to listen to what that instinctive part of you is trying to say so that you can use the information it gives you to inform a more effective approach.



Reflection questions

What am I afraid will happen if I do this?

What part of me feels exposed, judged or unsafe?

Is this task asking more than I realistically have right now?

Whose expectations am I trying to meet here?

Reflection questions

What would make this task 5% easier or safer?

What would make this task 5% more enjoyable?

What does my body most need right now?

What are the benefits of completing this task (for me and others)?

“

*Self-care is giving
the world the*

BEST OF YOU,

*instead of what's
left of you.*

”

Katie Reed

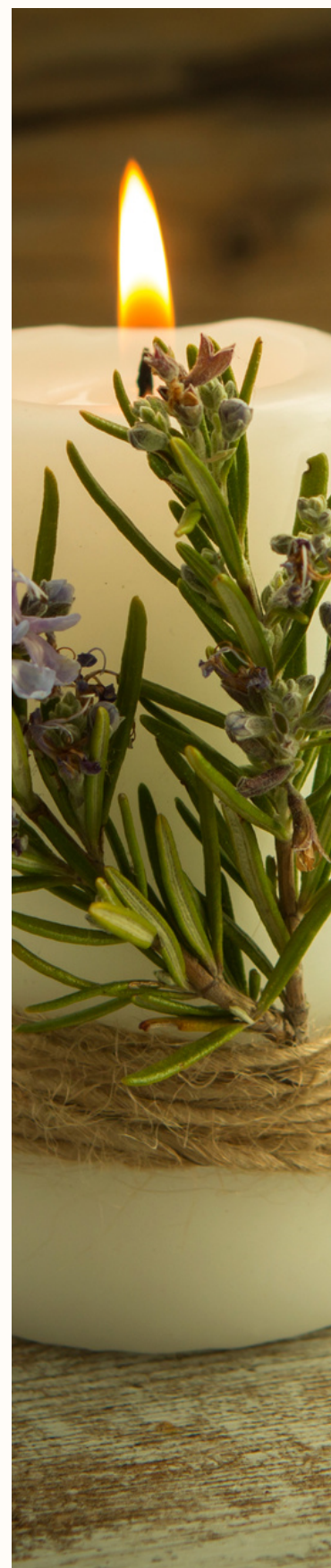
Gentle Reset Rituals

When you find yourself caught in a loop of avoidance and self-criticism, it can help to have a simple ritual that marks a pause - a moment to acknowledge that you're fighting against yourself, to let go of that struggle, and reset your nervous system so you can move forward with intention.

These rituals are simple ways to break the cycle and give you a moment to breathe, before you take the actions you need to take. You can return to work after a reset, or stop.

Soothing Reset

- **Optional:** Light a candle and/or incense or an essential oil burner
- Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor
- Inhale and exhale deeply three times
- Name one thing you can see, one thing you can hear and one thing you can feel
- Say a calming affirmation out loud or in your head three times - "I am safe", "I am capable", or whatever feels right to you.
- Blow out your candle and/or any burners



Gentle Reset Rituals

Inspiration Reset

- **Optional:** Light a candle and/or incense or an essential oil burner
- Sit comfortably with your spine straight
- Breathe deeply and imagine yourself inhaling energy and creativity, and exhaling worries and blocks
- Ask yourself why this project / task matters and/or what the impact will be, and listen for the answer (talk about it out loud to yourself if it helps)
- Say out loud or in your head three times, “The work I do matters, and I am guided from within”
- You may like to keep your candle and/or burners lit while you work (remember to extinguish them when you’re done)



Gentle Reset Rituals

Energy Reset

- **Optional:** Put on some music you love
- Stand up and stretch your arms overhead
- Roll your shoulders
- If it feels good, shake out your hands, your feet, and your whole body
- Notice if you feel at all different
- Ask yourself what your body and mind need most in this moment

Closing Ritual

- Tidy away your work - put away any materials, close any notebooks, file documents, shut down your computer
- List what you have done today, even if it seems small or tangential
- Write one sentence to summarise what you have achieved today
- Say out loud or in your head, "I have done enough for today."
- Make a favourite drink or nourishing snack and savour it



Making it yours

This is about finding out what works for you.

You **do not have to do everything** suggested here.

You absolutely can come up with your own **additional ideas**.

You can (and should) **take what resonates** and ignore the rest.

Do not use the suggested actions as to do lists - treat them as **menus, or inspiration**. Choose an action that resonates, or allow the ideas to inspire a new action.

Over time, you might notice patterns

- Certain tasks that repeatedly provoke avoidance
- Certain actions that particularly help you re-engage
- Indicators that you need rest or soothing

Get curious about yourself and your system, so that you can respond with the care and support that empowers you, rather than the criticism that shuts you down.

You don't need more discipline, you need self-trust.



A few reminders

Remember this when you feel yourself sliding back into self-criticism:

- You are not broken, you just need a different approach that's better suited to you
- You don't need to do more, you need to do the things that support you and set you up for success
- Rest is not a reward to be earned, it is the foundation that enables you to perform at your best
- Slow progress is still progress (and it gets you to the finish line more effectively than burning out)
- You do not have to harm yourself in pursuit of any goal
- You do not have to justify your limits
- Your wellbeing is more important than your results
- Your value is not measured in productivity
- **Your way is the right way**





Want more?

You'll find more tools, guidance
and practices for reclaiming
your creative power, as well as a
supportive community of
neurodivergent and outside-
the-box creatives, at
YourCreativeFix.Substack.com