

It can be done today

A short book about letting small tasks pile up until they
turn into things you dread

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, and the habit is made of very small things. A form that needs a signature. A renewal that needs a click. A message that needs a reply. An appointment that needs booking. A receipt that needs uploading. None of them takes more than a few minutes and none of them gets done, and by Friday there are eleven of them, and each one has quietly become a thing you dread, and the dread is bigger than all eleven put together.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the habit makes sense from the inside. Each item is small, so it can wait, and it's dull, so it should wait, and there'll be a proper chunk of time at the weekend. The second is that the waiting is where the cost is, and there's research on why. Undone tasks stay active in the mind and get in the way of everything else until a specific plan is made for them. The dullness that makes an item easy to put off is the strongest predictor of its being put off, and the putting off is a way of feeling better now that the you of next week pays for. People overestimate how long very short tasks take and remember them as longer than they were. And the dread you feel about the form isn't the form. It's what three weeks of not doing the form has added to it. The third is practical. If it takes under ten minutes, do it when it arrives. Everything else goes on a list, and the list gets fifteen minutes every day at the same time. That's all of it, and chapters 20 to 23 cover how.

This book doesn't call you lazy or disorganised, and it doesn't think admin is a test of character. Chapters 15 and 17 are about why those ideas make the heap worse.

Three cautions.

If you've always found it hard to organise time and finish tasks, if you lose things and are easily distracted, and this has been true since childhood and affects your work or your relationships, the NHS says to see a GP, because it may be attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and that has its own help.

If the heap is unopened post about money you can't pay, that isn't this book. An earlier book in this series is about opening the envelope, and StepChange, Citizens Advice and National Debtline give free advice.

And if the heap has grown because you've felt low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, the NHS says to see a GP, and the heap can wait until you have.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Eleven tabs and a brown envelope

There's a brown envelope on the side. It's been there since Tuesday. It's from the council, or the DVLA, or the school, and it needs something, and you've moved it twice to wipe the surface under it and put it back. Next to it is a form from a school bag, for a trip, with a date on it that's getting closer. On your laptop there are eleven tabs open. The car insurance renewal, which is going to auto-renew at a price you know is wrong. A booking page for the dentist you've been meaning to ring. A message from a friend asking about a date in November, unanswered for nine days. An expenses claim with a receipt you can't find. A form for something you've forgotten the purpose of, kept open because closing it feels like losing it.

None of these would take long. You know that. The insurance is ten minutes on a comparison site. The dentist is a two-minute phone call. The reply is four sentences. The form is a signature and a photograph of it sent to a number. And yet it's Friday, and they're all still there, and the sight of them produces a small heavy feeling that you've stopped noticing because it's always there, and on Sunday evening you'll think about doing them and won't, and on Monday there'll be a twelfth.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours is close. Some words. **The heap** is all of it together, the tabs, the envelope, the form, the things you've promised to send. **An item** is one of them. **The ping** is the moment an item arrives, the envelope on the mat, the email, the text, the form in the bag. **The carry** is the weight of the undone items in your head, which chapter 3 is about, and which turns out

to be measurable. **The felt size** of an item is how big it seems from the sofa. **The actual size** is how long it takes when you do it. **The fourth reminder** is the item that's come round again. **The sweep** is fifteen minutes a day, at **the same time**, for the list. **A dated line** is what an item gets when it can't be done today. And **today** is the rule.

Before you go on, do one thing. Write down every item in the heap. All of them, the tabs and the envelope and the ones you can only half remember. Next to each one, guess how long it would take. Then pick one, any one, and do it, with a clock running, and write down the actual time next to the guess. Don't do any more yet. Most people who do this find two things. The heap has fewer items in it than the carry suggested, and the one they did took a fraction of the guess.

Why later seems right

Before I argue with later, I want to be fair to it, because every item in the heap got there by a decision that seemed sensible at the time.

It's small, so it can wait. A four-minute task doesn't need doing at the moment it arrives. It'll take four minutes whenever you do it, so do it when it suits.

It's dull. There's nothing in filling in a form that's worth interrupting a good evening for. You're tired. The form will be there tomorrow.

There'll be a proper chunk of time. Saturday morning. You'll sit down with a coffee and do the lot in one go, efficiently, instead of picking at them.

It's not urgent. The renewal isn't until the twentieth. The trip isn't until half term. Nobody's chasing yet.

There are more important things. The work thing, the children, the friend who needs a call. Admin comes after those, and there's always one of those.

And you need to be in the mood. Admin done in a bad mood is admin done badly, with a mistake in the form that you'll have to fix later. Better to wait until you're feeling capable.

There are needs under all this. To spend your evening on something that isn't a form. Not to be a person whose life is admin. To do dull things efficiently rather than piecemeal. To put the important things first. Those are good needs, and the method later in the book meets every one of them better than the heap does, because the heap is what takes your evenings, and makes your life feel like admin, and is the least efficient way to do anything. An earlier book in this series is about housework, and its argument is that "later" is a decision made by someone who won't be there when it comes due. The same is true here. What I'll show is that later is where the cost lives, and that the item you're protecting your evening from is protecting nothing, because it's in your evening anyway, as the carry.

"I'll do it when I've got a proper chunk of time"

Start with the chunk, because it's the belief the whole heap rests on. Saturday morning, coffee, the lot in one go.

Two problems with it. The first is that the chunk doesn't come. It hasn't come for the last eleven items, which is why there are eleven. Saturday morning has a child's football or a lie-in or a supermarket in it, and the chunk gets moved to Sunday evening, and Sunday evening is the last place anyone wants to do a form, and the heap goes into Monday intact. This is my observation and not a finding, but I'd ask you to check it against your own record. When was the last chunk?

The second problem is what the items are doing while they wait for it. E. J. Masicampo and Roy Baumeister, in 2011, ran a series of experiments on what an unfinished task does to the mind. People were given goals and prevented from completing them, and then asked to do something unrelated, like reading or solving anagrams. The unfinished goals intruded. People had more stray thoughts about them during the reading, words connected to them came to mind more readily, and they did worse on the anagrams. The undone thing was running in the background and taking something from whatever was in the foreground. That's the carry, measured.

Then the researchers did something that matters for this book. They let some participants make a specific plan for the unfinished goal, when and how they'd do it. The intrusions stopped. The anagram performance recovered. The goal hadn't been done, but a

plan for it did what doing it would have done, and the effect was strongest in the people whose plans were sincere, the ones who actually went on to carry them out. The mind, the researchers suggested, treats a real plan as good enough to stand down.

Put that next to the chunk. "Saturday morning, the lot" isn't a plan in that sense. It's a vague intention with no when and no how, and the carry doesn't stand down for it, which is why the eleven tabs weigh on you all week. A dated line, "Thursday, sweep, ring the dentist", is a plan, and chapter 21 is about making them. And doing the item now, when it arrives, is the most specific plan there is.

An earlier book in this series is about putting off work that matters, and its point is that the dread lives in the gap between the decision to do the thing and the doing. The gap for a form is the same shape as the gap for a report. It's just that the form's gap is filled with a four-minute task and three weeks of carry, and the carry is the only real part of it.

"It'll take ages"

The item on the side has a size in your head, and the size is why it's still there. The insurance is an afternoon. The form is a saga. The dentist involves being on hold.

Michael Roy and Nicholas Christenfeld, in 2008, had people do tasks lasting between one and fifteen minutes and asked them, before and after, how long the tasks would take or had taken. For tasks under about two minutes, people overestimated, in both memory and prediction. For longer tasks, they underestimated. The pattern is an old one in the study of time, and they'd extended it to exactly the kind of tasks the heap is made of. A two-minute phone call is remembered as longer than it was and predicted to be longer than it will be. That's the felt size, and it's a systematic error, not a personal one.

The same researchers, with Scott Mitten, in another 2008 paper, found that the fix is feedback. When people were told how long the task had actually taken last time, or how long it took others, their predictions improved. Not their effort or their attitude. Their information. That's the chapter 1 exercise, and it's why I asked you to write down the guess and the actual time next to each other. The gap between them is the felt size minus the actual size, and seeing it once changes how the next item looks.

Now, the honest half. The underestimate for longer tasks is real too, and the heap sometimes has a longer task in it. The tax return, the insurance claim with the photographs, the passport renewal. Those take longer than you think, and chapter 24 is about them.

What they aren't is most of the heap. Most of the heap is the reply, the signature, the click, the two-minute call, and those are the ones you're overestimating, and the ones that stay on the side for three weeks because they feel like an afternoon.

There's a second thing inflating the felt size, and chapter 19 is about it. An item that's been on the side for three weeks has three weeks of not-doing attached to it, and the not-doing has a weight of its own, and the weight gets added to the estimate. The form isn't a saga. The form plus the guilt plus the fourth reminder plus the fact that you now have to explain the delay is a saga, and only the form is required.

Time one item a day for a week. Write the guess and the actual. By the end of the week the felt size will have started to correct itself, because you'll have information where you had dread.

"It's boring"

Here's the objection with the most truth in it. The form is boring. Filling it in is a dull four minutes, and your evening is yours, and you'd rather not.

Piers Steel, in 2007, pulled together nearly seven hundred correlations from the research on putting things off and asked what predicts it. Personality traits like anxiety and rebelliousness barely did. What predicted it strongly was the task. How unpleasant it was, and how far off its deadline was, along with how confident people felt about it and how impulsive they were. The dullness isn't a side issue. It's the main reason the item is in the heap, and the research says so in a way that should make you feel less singled out. Everyone puts off dull things with distant deadlines. That's what dull things with distant deadlines are for.

Fuschia Sirois and Timothy Pychyl, in 2013, put the mechanism plainly. Putting something off is a way of fixing your mood in the short term. The form makes you feel a small unpleasantness, you close the tab, the unpleasantness goes, and the relief is real and immediate. The cost is passed to a later version of you, who has the same form and less time and a fourth reminder. That later version isn't consulted. They're not in the room when the tab is closed.

So the objection is right about the form and wrong about the arithmetic. The form is boring for four minutes. The heap is boring for three weeks. Every time you see the envelope, you have a small dull unpleasant moment, and there are perhaps fifteen of those moments a day, and over three weeks that's several hundred small

dull unpleasant moments in exchange for avoiding one four-minute one. The boredom you're avoiding is the smallest quantity of boredom in the whole transaction.

There's also the question of what the boredom is like when you're actually doing it. In my observation, and this is observation, the four minutes are not as dull as the sofa predicted, because doing a thing has a small momentum in it that dreading a thing doesn't. The dull part is the standing up. The form itself is mostly typing, and the last thirty seconds, when it's sent and the tab closes for good, are actively pleasant, which nothing about the heap ever is.

You'll still find the form boring. The rule in chapter 20 doesn't ask you to like it. It asks you to have four boring minutes instead of three boring weeks, and to notice, afterwards, which one you'd have chosen if the later you had been asked.

"I don't know where to start with it"

Some items aren't boring so much as opaque. You don't know what the form wants. You don't know which login. You don't know whether the insurance thing needs a phone call or a website or both. The item isn't small. It's unclear, and unclear feels big.

Look closely at what's blocking it, because it's almost always one thing. Not the whole item. One step, usually the first, and usually a piece of information. A reference number. A password you've forgotten. Which department to ring. Whether the school wants the form back on paper or by email. The item behind that one step is four minutes. The one step is what's making it feel like an afternoon, and the one step is usually two minutes on its own, if you name it.

So name it. Not "sort the insurance" but "find the policy number". Not "do the school form" but "check whether it goes back on paper". When the item on your list is the unknown step and not the whole thing, the felt size collapses, because the unknown step has a size and the whole item, wrapped in fog, didn't.

Then notice what the unknown step usually is. It's a phone number or a login. That's most of them. Admin lives behind those two things, and both of them are findable in under two minutes, and the finding is the whole of the hard part. The password reset email arrives, you're in, and the item is what it always was, which is a form. In my observation, the items that sit longest in the heap are not the dull ones. They're the ones with a fog on them, and the fog is one missing fact.

There's a version of this where the first step is a person. You don't know what the form means and you'd have to ring and ask. That feels enormous and takes three minutes, and the person on the other end answers this question all day and won't think anything of it. The dread of that call is almost entirely the dread of appearing not to know, and the person you'd be appearing to has never heard of you.

When an item has been on the list for more than a week and it isn't boring, ask what the one thing is that you don't know. Write that down instead. That's the item now, and it's the smallest one on the list.

"It's not urgent"

The renewal isn't until the twentieth. The trip is after half term. Nobody's chasing. There's no reason to do it now.

Steel's review put deadline distance next to unpleasantness as the two things about a task that most predict its being put off. The further away the deadline, the more the delay. That's not a character flaw. It's how anyone relates to a date that's three weeks off. But look at what it means for the heap. Every item enters the heap when it's not urgent, because that's when it arrives. It sits there while it's not urgent. And then it's urgent, and it gets done in a rush, late, with a fine or a lapse or a child without a place on the trip, or it gets done the night before with the fourth reminder open in another tab. Not urgent isn't a reason to wait. It's the description of the only time the item is cheap.

Consider what urgency actually is. It's a property the heap manufactures. The form wasn't urgent when it arrived, and you didn't do it, so it became urgent, and the urgency is now the only thing that gets it done. You've built a system in which nothing gets done until it's an emergency, and then wondered why your admin feels like a series of emergencies. The item didn't change. The date got closer, and the date getting closer is the one thing that was always going to happen.

There's also a cost to doing things at the urgent end that isn't the fine. It's the choice you've lost. The insurance done three weeks early can be shopped around. The insurance done on the nineteenth takes whatever price is on the screen. The dentist rung

in September gets an appointment in October. Rung when the tooth hurts, it gets whatever's left. Not urgent means you have options, and urgent means you don't, and the heap converts the first into the second at a rate of one item a day.

The rule in chapter 20 is do it when it arrives, and the objection to that is that it isn't urgent, and the answer is that not urgent is the point. You're doing it while it's small and cheap and you've got a choice about how. The alternative isn't doing it later. It's doing it later under conditions you didn't choose, and paying for the difference.

"I'm waiting on someone else"

Some items really are stuck. You've asked the school and they haven't replied. The insurer needs a document from the garage. You can't do the form until your partner finds the reference number. It's not your delay.

Some of the time that's true, and those items need a dated line and not a guilty tab, and chapter 21 is about them. Go back to Masicampo and Baumeister. The unfinished goal intrudes until a specific plan exists, and "waiting for the school" isn't a plan. "Chase the school on Thursday if nothing by then" is. The item is still blocked, but the carry stands down, because the mind has a when and a how and no longer needs to keep raising the matter.

But be honest about how many of the waiting items are really waiting. In my observation, most "I'm waiting on them" is a chase not sent. You asked once, three weeks ago. They didn't reply. You didn't follow up, because following up feels like nagging, and the item has sat in the heap wearing a label that says it's their fault, and it's been comfortable there. The chase is two sentences. "Just checking you got my message about the trip form. Let me know if you need anything from me." That's not nagging. That's the item being done, and the person on the other end has a heap of their own and will be relieved to be reminded.

There's a variant where the person you're waiting on is in your house. The partner who has the reference number. The child who needs to tell you which day. These items are the easiest to unblock and the most often left, because asking feels like a conversation

and the conversation feels like effort. It's a sentence. "Can you find the policy number tonight so I can do this?" The item then has a when, and the when is tonight, and tonight it's done.

So the test for a waiting item is a question. What's the date I'll chase if nothing's happened? If there isn't one, it isn't waiting. It's the heap, with a better excuse. Give it the date, write the line, and let the carry put it down.

"I need to be in the right mood"

The form done tired is a form with a mistake in it. Better to wait until you're fresh, and capable, and in the mood for it.

Sirois and Pychyl's point from chapter 5 is that the mood is the mechanism. You put the form off because it makes you feel slightly bad, and putting it off makes you feel slightly better, and that trade is the whole of the habit. "I need to be in the right mood" is the same trade, said as a principle. The mood you're waiting for is a mood in which the form doesn't feel slightly bad, and that mood doesn't come, because the form always feels slightly bad, and the waiting is producing the heap.

Dianne Tice and Roy Baumeister, in 1997, followed students through a term and compared those who put work off with those who didn't. Early in the term, the ones who put things off were less stressed and less ill. They were, in a sense, in a better mood, and that's the trade working. By the end of the term they were more stressed, more ill, and sicker overall than the others, and they'd done worse on every assignment. The good mood at the start was borrowed from the end, at interest.

That's the mood to look at. Not the mood before the form, which is slightly bad either way, but the mood after. The form done, tired, at nine on a Tuesday, produces a mood at half past nine that's a little lighter, because the item's gone and the carry has one less thing in it. The form not done produces a mood that's the same as before,

plus a small guilt, plus the item still there in the morning. If you're choosing by mood, and you are, choose by the mood you'll have at half past nine.

And about the mistake. Forms done tired don't have more mistakes in them than forms done fresh, in my observation, because forms are mostly copying information from one place to another, and the tiredness that would ruin a piece of writing has no effect on a postcode. The mistake you're worried about is a story the mood is telling to justify itself. The one mistake that tired people do make with forms is not doing them, and that one's already happened.

You don't need to be in the right mood to do a form. You need four minutes and the policy number. The mood comes afterwards, and it's the good one.

"I've got more important things to do"

You're not putting the form off out of idleness. You've got a job, and children, and a friend who needs ringing, and a form is a form. It goes after the important things, and there's always an important thing.

Go back to Masicampo and Baumeister's anagrams. The unfinished goal didn't just sit there. It got in the way of the unrelated task. People with an undone thing running did worse at the thing in front of them. So the important things aren't being done instead of the form. They're being done with the form running in the background, and they're being done slightly worse for it, and so is the conversation with the child and the call to the friend. The heap isn't waiting politely behind the important things. It's taxing them.

A computer with twenty programs open is slow at the one you're using, even though the others are just sitting there. Closing them is faster than working round them.

Now look at the size of the tax against the size of the item. Four minutes of form, weighed against a week of doing everything else with the form open in your head. If the important things are important, the fastest way to give them your whole attention is to get the four-minute things out of the way, not because the form matters more than the child but because the form is the one that'll leave. The child won't be done in four minutes. The form will.

There's a second thing hiding in this objection, and it's worth naming. "More important things" is often true and is also the most respectable excuse in the heap. Nobody argues with it. You don't argue with it. And so it covers items that could have been done in the four minutes you spent choosing what to watch, which is not an important thing and didn't feel like it needed defending. The test is whether the important thing was actually happening at the moment the item was put off. Sometimes it was. Often it was a screen.

So when the form loses to something important, ask two questions. Is the important thing happening right now, or is it a general condition of my life that I'm invoking? And would the important thing go better with the form gone? If the answers are "general condition" and "yes", the form is the important thing for the next four minutes, and then it's gone, and the important things have you back.

"I'll forget anyway"

There's a resigned version of the heap. You'd do things when they arrived but you don't remember them, and by the time you do it's the fourth reminder, and you've come to think of this as how your memory works.

Memory isn't the system, and it was never going to be. Nobody remembers eleven small items with different deadlines by holding them in their head, and the ones who seem to have a list somewhere. The carry from chapter 3 is what memory does when it's asked to be a list. It keeps everything half-active, raising each item at random, usually at eleven at night when nothing can be done about it, and never once at the moment you're actually at a computer with four minutes free. That's not a bad memory. That's a memory doing a job it isn't built for, and doing it the only way it can, which is by nagging.

Masicampo and Baumeister's intrusive thoughts are, from this angle, memory's reminders. The stray thought about the form during the reading task is the mind saying "the form" in the only voice it has. It's not failing to remind you. It's reminding you constantly, at the wrong times, at a cost to whatever you're doing. What it can't do is remind you at the right time, and what it stops doing, in their experiments, is reminding you at all once a plan exists somewhere outside your head.

So the answer to "I'll forget" isn't to remember harder. It's to give the item somewhere to be that isn't your memory. The list in chapter 21 is that place. Once the item is on it, with a day, the

memory can put it down, and in the experiments it does, and the eleven-at-night version of the form stops arriving because there's a Thursday version of it written down.

And the ten-minute test in chapter 20 removes most of the forgetting altogether, because an item done when it arrives is never remembered or forgotten. It's just done. The forgetting only happens to items that were allowed to leave the moment of arrival without either being done or written down, and that's the one moment the method doesn't allow.

You will still forget things. Everyone does. What you'll stop doing is using forgetting as the reason for a heap that was built by putting things down without writing them down, which is not a memory problem. It's a habit, and habits can be changed, and chapter 21's list is the change.

"It's just admin"

Here's the belief that lets the heap grow without alarm. It's just admin. Nobody's life was ruined by a late form.

Look at what the items actually are, and what happens when they aren't done. The car insurance that auto-renews at the wrong price is money, possibly a lot of it, for nothing, every year it happens. The insurance that lapses because the renewal went unopened is a car you can't legally drive, and possibly a fine, and possibly a prosecution. The school form not returned is a child who doesn't go on the trip, and stands in the playground while the coach leaves, and that's a small thing to a form and not to a nine-year-old. The dentist not rung is a check-up missed, and a filling that's a root canal by the time it's seen. The expenses not claimed are your money, in someone else's account, with a deadline after which it stays there. The reply not sent is a friend who stops asking.

None of this is dramatic. It's the point that it isn't. Each item is small and each cost is moderate and the costs arrive one at a time, spread across a year, never all together in a way that would make you sit up. So the heap looks cheap, because you never see the bill in one place, and this chapter is the bill in one place. Add up, honestly, what the heap cost you last year. The auto-renewal premium. The late fee. The missed claim. The thing you had to buy again because the return window closed. Most people who do this arrive at a number that would have bought a good holiday.

"Just admin" is also doing something to how you see yourself. A person who has a heap describes themselves as someone who's bad at life's small stuff, and that description spreads. It becomes a reason not to take on things, not to volunteer for the committee, not to be the one who books the holiday, because you'll only end up with a heap. The items are small. The identity they're building isn't, and chapter 15 is about it.

It's admin. It's also your money, your child's trip, your teeth and your friendships, wearing the costume of a form. The costume is why it gets put off, and the contents are why it shouldn't be.

"I work better under pressure"

Some readers will say the heap is a method. Nothing gets done until the fourth reminder, but then it does get done, fast and focused, and they're not sure it would without.

Tice and Baumeister's students would have said the same, and their work was worse. Lower grades on every assignment, along with the stress and the illness at the end of term. Pressure produced completion. It didn't produce quality. That's the finding for work with a quality dimension, and it's worth having in hand for the report or the essay.

But admin mostly doesn't have a quality dimension, and that's the point here. A form filled in fast under pressure is a form. It's not a better form than one filled in slowly, and it isn't a worse one.

Nothing about the last-minute version is improved by the last minute. What the pressure adds isn't focus. It's a fine with a date on it, and the fine is the thing you're calling motivation. "I work better under pressure" means, for admin, "I only do it when the cost of not doing it has become visible", and that's not a working style. That's the heap describing itself.

Notice where the pressure comes from. You made it. The item arrived without any, three weeks ago, when it could have been done in four minutes with a choice about how. You let it sit until the fourth reminder, and the fourth reminder is the pressure, and now you're crediting the pressure with the doing. The item would

have got done in four minutes without any pressure at all, at a moment of your choosing, if the moment had been the moment it arrived.

There's a real thing underneath the objection and I want to honour it. Some people find it hard to start anything without a reason to start it now, and the deadline supplies the reason. That's a fair description of a lot of people, and the method in chapter 20 is built for it. The ping is the reason. The item arriving is the deadline. "Now" is when it arrives, and you never have to find a reason to start, because the reason is in your hand, in the form of the envelope.

You may well work better under pressure at things that need working at. Admin doesn't need working at. It needs four minutes, and the pressure is just the fine you've agreed to pay for having them later.

"Once I start I'll be there all night"

There's a fear that goes the other way from the last one. If you open the heap, you'll be in it for hours. One item leads to another, the insurance needs a document, the document needs a login, the login needs a reset, and it's midnight and you've done half of it. Better not to start.

This is a fear about the heap having no edge, and the answer is to give it one. The sweep in chapter 21 is fifteen minutes with a timer, and when the timer goes, you stop, whatever you're in the middle of, and write a dated line for where you got to. That's the whole protection. You never open the heap without a way out, and the way out is a clock.

An earlier book in this series is about switching between tasks, and one of its tools is a stopping point named in advance, so that you can leave a thing cleanly and come back to it. The sweep borrows the idea. Fifteen minutes is the stopping point, every day, and because it's every day, nothing has to be finished tonight. What's left at the timer is left for tomorrow's sweep, which exists, which is the difference between a fifteen-minute sweep and an all-nighter. The all-nighter happens because you believe this is the only chance. The sweep removes that belief by being there tomorrow.

And the heap is finite. This is the thing the fear gets most wrong. It feels bottomless because you've never seen the bottom, because you've never listed it, and the carry from chapter 3 makes eleven items feel like fifty. Chapter 22 is about listing the lot once, and

most people who do it find it fits on one side of a page and that the ten-minute items, done then and there, take the page down by half in an hour. What's left isn't a night's work. It's a week of sweeps.

There's also the chain, the item that needs a document that needs a login. Chains are real and they're the reason for the dated line. When an item hits a wait, the password reset email, the document from the garage, you write "Thursday, insurance, once the reset's come" and move to the next item. You don't sit in the chain. The chain is what makes fifteen minutes feel like all night, and the dated line is the exit from it.

You won't be there all night. You'll be there fifteen minutes, and then the timer, and then tomorrow. The heap has an edge now, and it's the clock.

"I'm bad at admin"

At some point the heap stops being a thing you have and becomes a thing you are. You're bad at admin. Some people are organised and you're not, and the heap is just what that looks like.

Steel's review found that conscientiousness, and its parts, self-control, organisation, not being easily distracted, do predict putting things off, and I'm not going to pretend the trait doesn't exist. Some people find it easier than others. That's true of most things. What the trait doesn't do is decide the outcome, because the method in this book doesn't run on the trait. It runs on a rule and a clock.

Consider what "good at admin" looks like from the outside. A person whose forms go back on time and whose renewals get shopped around. Now look at what they actually do. In my observation they don't have a gift. They have a habit. They open the post at the door and do the two-minute thing standing up. They have a list somewhere and they look at it at the same time every day. They write "Thursday, chase the school" instead of holding it in their head. None of that is a personality. It's a system, and the system is what you're seeing when you call them organised, and every part of it is in chapters 20 to 22.

There's a reason the trait story is attractive, and it's that it lets you off. If you're bad at admin, the heap isn't a habit you could change but a fact about you that you can't, and there's a kind of rest in that. But look at what the rest costs. It costs the heap, permanently, and it costs the identity from chapter 12, the one that stops you

volunteering for things. That's an expensive rest, and it's being paid for with a story that the research doesn't support in the form you're telling it. Conscientiousness predicts. It doesn't determine, and a rule that says "if it's under ten minutes, now" doesn't care how conscientious you are, because it doesn't need you to decide anything.

I'd also gently ask where the story came from. Often it's old. A parent who was organised and said you weren't. A school report. A partner who does the admin and sighs. Those are data about how you were seen, and not about what a fifteen-minute sweep will do.

You may be less naturally inclined to admin than some people. You're not bad at it, because it isn't a skill. It's a rule and a clock, and both of those are available to you tonight.

"If I open it I'll have to deal with it"

The brown envelope has stayed shut since Tuesday for a reason, and the reason is that a shut envelope is a thing that hasn't happened yet. Open it and it becomes a task. Leave it and it's just an envelope.

Russell Golman, David Hagmann and George Loewenstein, in 2017, reviewed the research on why people avoid information, and found that they do it even when the information is useful, free, and would change nothing about what they'd have to do, and that the avoidance is often costly. The shut envelope is a small clear case. Whatever's in it is already true. The renewal date is the renewal date whether or not you've read it. Not opening it changes nothing about the item and everything about your knowledge of it, and the knowledge is the only part you can act on.

An earlier book in this series is about money post specifically, and if the envelopes you're not opening are about money you can't pay, that book and the debt charities in the preface are where to go, and this chapter is about the other envelopes. The council. The school. The DVLA. The optician's reminder. The ones where the content is almost always a small task with a date, and where not opening it turns a small task with a date into an unknown task with a shrinking date.

Look at the two sizes. Opening is ten seconds. Dealing, for most envelopes, is under four minutes, because the content is a form to sign or a date to write down or nothing at all, and quite often nothing at all. A fair proportion of unopened post, opened, turns

out to require no action, and has been carried for a week as a task. The shut envelope isn't protecting you from dealing with it. It's making you deal with it on the side, every time you pass it, in the form of the carry, without ever getting the relief of finding out it was a leaflet.

There's a version of this with email. The message left unread because reading it will commit you to replying. Same shape, same answer. The reply is the same size whether you've read the message or not, and unread it's a task with a fog on it, and read it's four sentences.

Open it at the door. That's the whole of the advice, and it's in chapter 20. The dealing is ten minutes at most or it goes on the list, and the opening is what turns an unknown weight into a known size, and known sizes are almost always smaller.

"I'll feel guilty either way"

By now the heap has a feeling attached, and it isn't boredom. It's guilt. You feel guilty when you see the envelope and guilty when you don't do it and guilty, oddly, even when you finally do, because it took three weeks. Some readers will say the guilt is the price of the heap and they've been paying it and it hasn't helped.

It hasn't, and there's research on why. Michael Wohl, Timothy Pynchyl and Shannon Bennett, in 2010, followed students through two sets of exams. Those who forgave themselves for putting off revision before the first set put off less before the second. The self-forgiveness wasn't letting themselves off. It was what let them start again, and the ones who stayed guilty carried on as before. Fuschia Sirois, in 2014, found across four samples that people who put things off were less kind to themselves and more stressed, and that the lack of kindness accounted for part of the stress. The guilt isn't a corrective. It's a weight, and it's part of what makes the next item harder.

Think about how guilt operates on the heap. The envelope produces a small guilt. The guilt is unpleasant. The way to end the unpleasantness fastest is to look away, and Sirois and Pynchyl's mood repair from chapter 5 does exactly that. So the guilt, far from driving you to the form, drives you off it, because the form is now the source of a bad feeling and bad feelings are avoided. A heap with guilt on it is heavier and stickier than a heap without, and you've been adding guilt to yours in the belief that it would help.

There's a plainer point too. The guilt is about the past three weeks and the form is about the next four minutes, and the two have nothing to do with each other. Whatever you feel about the delay, the form is the same form and takes the same time, and the delay is over, because it ends the moment you start. Feeling bad about the three weeks doesn't shorten the form and doesn't lengthen it. It's a separate activity, and it's one you can stop.

So when the item's finally done, and the guilt arrives about how long it took, notice it and let it go without an argument. "Three weeks, done now." That's the whole sentence. The Wohl finding says that people who can say that put off less next time, and the ones who dwell on the three weeks put off the same, and you've tried the second way for long enough to know.

You'll feel guilty either way for a while, because habits of feeling change slowly. What you can change today is whether the guilt is allowed to make the next item harder, and it isn't, because the next item is four minutes and starts now.

What the heap costs you

I've argued the mechanism. This chapter is the bill, and it's the one you've never seen in one place, because the heap sends it in instalments.

The money. Chapter 12 listed it. Auto-renewals at the wrong price, late fees, the expenses not claimed, the return window closed, the appointment charged for because you didn't cancel. Add up last year's honestly. It's a holiday.

The time. Not the four minutes per item, which you'd have spent anyway, but the time round the items. The fourth reminder that has to be read and felt bad about. The explanation to the school. The extra call because the first deadline went. The hunting for the document that would have been in your hand when the item arrived and is now somewhere in a drawer. An item done late costs its own time plus the time of being late, and the second is usually larger.

The carry. Masicampo and Baumeister's anagrams, done worse with an unfinished goal running. That's every piece of work you did last week, every conversation, every evening, with eleven items running in the background and taking a little from each. You don't notice it because it's always on. You'd notice it if it stopped, and chapter 22 is the day it does.

The health. Tice and Baumeister's students were sicker by the end of the term, and I'm not going to claim the form is making you ill, but the stress that comes with the heap is real, and it's a low

continuous kind rather than a sharp one, and low continuous stress is the sort that doesn't get noticed until something else shows it up.

The people. The friend who asked about November and has heard nothing for nine days. The colleague waiting on the expenses sign-off. The school office chasing the form for the third time. The partner who does the admin because you don't, and has stopped mentioning it, which is worse than mentioning it. Each item in the heap has someone on the other end of it, and they've all been waiting, and they've all drawn a conclusion.

The evenings. Not because the heap takes your evening. Because it colours it. The envelope on the side is visible from the sofa, and the tabs are visible when you open the laptop to watch something, and the Sunday evening has the whole heap in it, unaddressed, and that's the feeling you've stopped noticing. It's the heap.

What it does to the item

There's a cost that lands on the item itself, and it's the one I'd most like you to see, because it's the mechanism of the whole book in one place.

An item arrives at its actual size. A form. Four minutes. Nobody dreads a four-minute form on the day it arrives. It's just a thing in the bag with the lunchbox. But it isn't done, and it goes on the side, and the next day it's a four-minute form plus one day of not having done it. The day after, two days. By the end of the week it's a four-minute form plus a week, and the week has a weight, and the weight is the dread.

The dread isn't the form. Nothing about the form has changed. The questions are the same and the signature is the same and the four minutes are the same. What's changed is what's attached to it. The guilt from chapter 17. The felt size from chapter 4, inflated daily by the not-doing. The fourth reminder, which has now made it a thing you're being chased about, and being chased about a thing makes it feel like a bigger thing. The explanation you'll now have to give. The fact that it's become a symbol of the heap and of yourself as someone with a heap. All of that is bolted onto a four-minute form, and none of it is required to complete it.

Here's the test that shows it. Do the form. The moment it's sent, all of the attached weight vanishes, and what's left is the memory of four minutes, and the almost universal reaction, which is "why didn't I just do that". You didn't just do that because by the time you

got to it, it wasn't that. It was that plus three weeks, and you were right to dread the three weeks. You were wrong about where they'd come from.

So the heap isn't a collection of dreaded tasks. It's a collection of four-minute tasks that have been left long enough to grow dread, and the dread is made by the leaving, and the leaving is the only part of the process you control. An item done on the day it arrives never develops the dread, because there's no time for it to grow. It's done at its actual size, and its actual size is nothing.

This is why the rule is today. Not because today is virtuous. Because today is the only day the form is still four minutes.

Do it today

The next three chapters are the method. This one is the rule for the moment of arrival, and it's the one that stops the heap forming in the first place.

The ping is the moment. The envelope on the mat, the email, the form in the bag, the text about the date. When it arrives, you're already holding it and already thinking about it, and that's the cheapest moment the item will ever have. The rule attaches to that moment and not to a later one.

The ten-minute test. Ask one question. Would this take under ten minutes? Be honest, and remember chapter 4, which says your guess for short items runs high. Most pings pass. The reply, the signature, the renewal click, the two-minute call, the receipt photograph. If it passes, you do it now.

Now means now. Not later today. Not after dinner. Now, standing up, with the envelope in your hand. Later today is where the heap is made, because later today becomes tomorrow at the first interruption, and there's always one. The form gets signed at the kitchen counter with the bag still open. The reply gets sent from the pavement. The renewal gets done at the desk before the email is closed.

If it fails the test, it goes on the list. Not on the side. On the list, in chapter 21, with a dated line. The item leaves the moment of arrival either done or written down, and those are the only two exits. There is no third exit called "I'll remember".

Open it at the door. Post is opened where it lands, on the way in, and the ten-minute test runs on the contents. Chapter 16 is about why the shut envelope is heavier than the open one. Most of it is recycling, and the rest is a two-minute thing you do with your coat on.

What now looks like at a school gate. The form comes out of the bag at pick-up. You sign it against the wall and put it back in the bag, and it goes in tomorrow. Twenty seconds, and it never enters the heap. That's the rule at its most ordinary, and it's the whole book.

Expect it to feel wrong for a week. Doing a dull thing at the moment it arrives, when you could put it down, feels like an imposition. It is one. It's four minutes now against three weeks of carry, and chapter 5 did the arithmetic. By the second week, the relief of the closed tab starts arriving on time, and the rule stops feeling like a rule.

The sweep

The ten-minute test catches most items. This is for the rest, and it's the part that makes the list trustworthy enough that your memory can let go.

Fifteen minutes, the same time, every day. Pick a time that already exists. After the children are down. With the first coffee. Straight after work, before the laptop closes. The same time is the whole trick, and Phillippa Lally and colleagues, in 2010, followed people building one daily habit in a consistent context and found that it became automatic on a curve, over weeks and for some people months, and that missing a single day didn't set the curve back. So the sweep will feel like effort for a while, and then it won't, and one missed sweep doesn't matter.

A timer. Fifteen minutes on the phone. When it goes, you stop, even mid-item, and write a dated line for where you got to. Chapter 14 is about why the timer is what makes it safe to start.

The list. One place. A notebook by the kettle, a note on the phone, the back of an envelope that never moves. Every item that failed the ten-minute test is on it, and every item on it has a date next to it, the day it'll be done or chased.

Dated lines. "Thursday, ring the garage for the document."
"Saturday, insurance, once the reset's come." "Wednesday, chase the school if nothing." The date is what Masicampo and Baumeister's participants had when their intrusive thoughts

stopped, a specific when and how, and it's what lets the carry stand down. An item without a date is still in the heap. It's just written down.

Work the list from the top. Oldest first, or nearest date first. Don't choose the pleasant one. There isn't a pleasant one. Do the one whose date it is, and when it's done, cross it out, and let yourself notice the crossing out.

Chase on the date. If a dated line says Thursday and Thursday comes and nothing's happened, the chase is the item. Two sentences, chapter 8. Then a new dated line.

Stop at the timer. Even if there's one item left. Especially then. The sweep exists tomorrow, and the one item will be there, and the reason the sweep works is that it never becomes the all-nighter that made you afraid of the heap in the first place.

Clear the heap once

The rule stops the heap growing and the sweep works it down. But you've got a heap now, and this chapter is the one hour that deals with it, once.

One hour, this weekend. Not fifteen minutes. An hour, with a coffee, and the timer set for sixty. This is the only time this book asks for a chunk, and it's because the heap was built without the rule and needs clearing before the rule can take over.

List everything. All of it. The tabs, the envelopes, the things in bags, the replies owed, the things you've promised, the items you can only half remember. Write them all on one page. Most people find it fits on one side and has fewer items than they feared, because the carry from chapter 3 has been making eleven feel like forty.

Run the ten-minute test on each. Mark the ones that would take under ten minutes. In my observation that's most of them. Then do those, now, in the hour, one after another, crossing each out. Don't stop to feel anything about how long they've been there. Chapter 17 said why. "Three weeks, done now." Next.

Dated lines for the rest. What's left is the items that need something, a document, a call in office hours, a longer sitting. Each gets a dated line, and the dated line goes on the list that the sweep will work. Nothing stays on the page without a date.

Close the tabs. All eleven. The ones that were done are done. The ones that weren't are on the list with a date, and the tab was never the reminder. It was the carry made visible. Closing them is the physical form of the carry standing down.

Notice the size. At the end of the hour, look at the list. What was the heap is now a handful of dated lines, and the handful is what it always was. The rest was dread, added by delay, and it's gone, and it went in an hour. That's the actual size of the heap, and it's worth seeing once, because it's what you'll remember the next time the felt size starts to grow.

Then the rule takes over. From Monday, the ten-minute test at every ping, and the sweep at the same time. The heap doesn't come back, because nothing's allowed to leave the moment of arrival without being done or dated, and the clear-out is the last chunk you'll need.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and you can do it in one sentence.

If it takes under ten minutes, do it when it arrives. Everything else goes on the list, and the list gets fifteen minutes every day at the same time.

Three parts.

The first is the ping. The ten-minute test, run at the moment of arrival, with the item in your hand. Pass, and it's done now, standing up. Fail, and it's on the list with a date. No third exit.

The second is the sweep. Fifteen minutes, the same time, a timer, the list, dated lines, oldest first, stop at the bell.

The third is the clear-out. One hour, once, this weekend, to bring the existing heap down to a handful of dated lines so that the rule starts from clear.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When something arrives, I'll ask "under ten minutes?" and if it is, I'll do it before I put it down.

When the kettle goes on after the children are down, I'll set fifteen minutes and open the list.

When the timer goes, I'll stop and write a dated line for whatever I'm in the middle of.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The clear-out will take less than the hour and you'll be surprised by how many items were under two minutes. The first week of the rule will feel officious, doing a form at the counter with your coat on, and you'll do it anyway because it's twenty seconds. The first sweeps will feel like a chore and one of them will be missed, and Lally's finding is that the miss doesn't matter. By the second week, the relief of the closed tab will start landing on time, and you'll notice an evening with nothing on the side and no tabs open, and not quite know what to do with it. By a month, the list will mostly be dated lines waiting on other people, and the carry will have gone quiet, and you'll only notice it went by how loud it turns out to have been.

ADHD, the avalanche, other people's admin, the big one, and when it's more than admin

The rule holds for every ping. Some situations need their own paragraph.

ADHD. If organising time and finishing tasks has always been hard, since childhood, along with losing things and being easily distracted, and it affects your work or relationships, the NHS says to see a GP, because it may be attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and the wait for assessment can be long, so the sooner the better. The method in this book is useful alongside that and not instead of it. The ten-minute test and the same-time sweep are the kind of external structure that many people with ADHD find helps, and none of it depends on remembering, which is the point. But it's a tool and not a treatment, and the difficulty isn't a character fault.

The avalanche. A death, a house move, a divorce, a new baby. There are months when the heap isn't a habit but a weather event, with forty items arriving a week, most of them big and some of them painful. The rule bends. The ten-minute test still runs, because the two-minute things are still two minutes and clearing them is the only relief available. The sweep grows to thirty minutes or an hour, for the duration. And ask for help, specifically. "Can you ring the utilities?" is an item someone can take, and most people want to be given one.

Other people's admin. If you're the one in the house who does it, or the one who doesn't, the heap is a shared thing and the rule has to be too. Agree who takes what, and agree the sweep as a

household thing, ten minutes at the table after dinner, together. And if your partner's heap is the problem, this book is a gift and not a lecture, and the difference is whether you hand it over with the sentence "I thought this might help" or the sentence "you need to read this".

The big one. The tax return. The passport. The insurance claim with the photographs and the three phone calls. These fail the ten-minute test honestly and chapter 4 says you'll underestimate them. They don't go in the sweep. They get a booked sitting, two hours, a date, and an earlier book in this series on putting off work that matters has the method for starting one. What the sweep does is the chasing and the gathering round it, so that when the sitting comes, the documents are there.

Email. If the heap is mostly an inbox, the rule is the same. Read it once, ten-minute test, reply now or date it. The unread message is the shut envelope from chapter 16, and the reply is the same size read or unread.

Debt. If the envelopes are about money you can't pay, please stop here and go to the earlier book in this series on opening them, and to StepChange, Citizens Advice or National Debtline, who are free and have seen everything. The ten-minute test doesn't apply to a debt, and pretending it does would be unkind.

When it's more than admin. If the heap has grown because you've felt low most of the day, most days, for two weeks or more, and everything, and not only the forms, has become heavy, the NHS

says to see a GP. The heap is a symptom in that case and not the problem, and the method will be there when you're ready for it, and the GP comes first.

When the heap came back

It'll happen. A busy fortnight, a couple of missed sweeps, a week of "I'll do it tonight", and there's an envelope on the side again and seven tabs and the feeling, and with it the thought that you're back where you started.

A fortnight isn't the habit back. It's a fortnight. Lally's finding was that a missed day didn't undo a forming habit, and a missed fortnight is more than a day, but the sweep you built is still there, and so is the list, and so is the knowledge from the clear-out that the actual size is an hour. The heap came back because the rule stopped running for two weeks, and the rule starts again the next time something arrives, which will be today.

Forgive the fortnight. Chapter 17 and Wohl's students. The ones who forgave themselves put off less next time, and the ones who dwelt on it didn't change. "Two weeks, done now." That's the sentence, and then the next thing.

Do one clear-out. Not a full hour if the heap's only a fortnight deep. Twenty minutes, this evening, the list, the ten-minute test, the tabs closed. The heap has an actual size and you've measured it before, and it'll be smaller than the carry says, and finding that out again is the fastest way to remember why the rule was worth having.

Work out which belief got through. Was it "I'll do it tonight", because you were busy and tonight seemed close? Then chapter 20's "now means now", because tonight is where the heap is made. Was it a missed sweep that became two and then a week? Then the

same time again from tomorrow, and nothing else, because the sweep is the part that keeps the list honest. Was it an avalanche? Then chapter 24, and the rule bends, and asking for help.

No streaks. Don't count days without a heap. Count sweeps done, and let a missed fortnight be a gap in a list that's mostly ticks. And notice, because it's the whole book in one observation, that the heap in the fortnight cost you more than the fortnight's sweeps would have, and that you knew that, and that knowing it is why you're clearing it tonight and not next month.

The brown envelope, opened

There's a brown envelope on the mat, some months on. You pick it up on the way in, with the bag on your shoulder, and open it at the door. It's from the council. It wants a form back by the end of the month, with a signature and a date. You put the bag down, sign it against the hall table, and put it in the envelope it came with, and it goes on the shelf by the door where things that go out go. Ninety seconds. You haven't taken your coat off.

The laptop has one tab open, and it's the thing you're watching. The school form went back the day it came home, signed against the playground wall. The insurance was shopped around three weeks before the renewal, at the kitchen table, in eleven minutes, and the price was better. The friend who asked about November got a reply from the pavement, four sentences, and there's a date in the diary. The list by the kettle has three dated lines on it, all waiting on other people, and one of them says "Thursday, chase", and it's Tuesday.

At half past eight, after the children are down, the kettle goes on and the timer goes on and you open the list. One line is done in six minutes. Two are waiting. The timer goes at fifteen and you close the notebook, and the evening is yours, and there's nothing on the side.

None of this is a transformation. There was a fortnight in the spring when it all came back, and a twenty-minute clear-out on a Wednesday, and the sentence, and then the rule again. You still find forms boring. You still feel the small pull to put the envelope

down and deal with it later, and you still, sometimes, do, and then you write a dated line for it, because that's the other exit and there isn't a third. The heap hasn't gone because you've become organised. It's gone because nothing's allowed to leave the moment it arrives without being done or written down, and that's a rule and a clock, and you had both all along.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. The next thing that arrives, ask whether it would take under ten minutes, and if it would, do it before you put it down. That's the whole method. Everything else is detail.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't medical or financial advice, and it's no substitute for a GP or a debt adviser who knows you. The services I mention are for the UK as I found them in September 2026.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 6, 12, 14, 19, 20, 22 and 26. The brown envelope, the eleven tabs, the school trip form, the renewal, the dentist and the expenses claim are invented.

Before you start. The ADHD wording is from the NHS pages on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in adults, and the two-week guide for low mood from the NHS pages on depression, both as verified for earlier books in this series. StepChange, Citizens Advice and National Debtline are named on the NHS page on coping with financial worries. The earlier book on money post is Open the envelope.

Chapter 2. The earlier book on housework is The dishes take four minutes.

Chapter 3. Masicampo and Baumeister, "Consider it done! Plan making can eliminate the cognitive effects of unfulfilled goals", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 101, 2011, pages 667 to 683. Laboratory studies with student participants. The claim that the chunk never comes is my observation. The earlier book on work that matters is Start it badly.

Chapter 4. Roy and Christenfeld, "Effect of task length on remembered and predicted duration", Psychonomic Bulletin and Review 15, 2008, pages 202 to 207. Tasks of one to fifteen minutes. Roy, Mitten and Christenfeld, "Correcting memory improves accuracy of predicted task duration", Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied 14, 2008, pages 266 to 275. Three experiments. The claim that delay inflates the estimate is mine.

Chapter 5. Steel, "The nature of procrastination: a meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure", Psychological Bulletin 133, 2007, pages 65 to 94. Sirois and Pychyl, "Procrastination and the priority of short-term mood regulation: consequences for future self", Social and Personality Psychology Compass 7, 2013, pages 115 to 127. The arithmetic of boredom is mine.

Chapter 7. Steel as above.

Chapter 8. Masicampo and Baumeister as above. The claim that most waiting is a chase not sent is my observation.

Chapter 9. Sirois and Pychyl as above. Tice and Baumeister, "Longitudinal study of procrastination, performance, stress, and health: the costs and benefits of dawdling", Psychological Science

8, 1997, pages 454 to 458. Two studies of students. The claim about forms and tiredness is mine.

Chapter 10. Masicampo and Baumeister as above.

Chapter 11. Masicampo and Baumeister as above.

Chapter 13. Tice and Baumeister as above. Their finding concerns academic work, and the chapter's claim that admin has no quality dimension is mine.

Chapter 15. Steel as above.

Chapter 16. Golman, Hagmann and Loewenstein, "Information avoidance", *Journal of Economic Literature* 55, 2017, pages 96 to 135, as verified for the earlier book *Open the envelope*. The claim that a fair proportion of unopened post needs no action is my observation.

Chapter 17. Wohl, Pychyl and Bennett, "I forgive myself, now I can study: how self-forgiveness for procrastinating can reduce future procrastination", *Personality and Individual Differences* 48, 2010, pages 803 to 808. 134 first-year students, correlational. Sirois, "Procrastination and stress: exploring the role of self-compassion", *Self and Identity* 13, 2014, pages 128 to 145. Four samples. Sirois and Pychyl as above.

Chapter 18. Masicampo and Baumeister, and Tice and Baumeister, as above. The rest is mine.

Chapter 21. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96

volunteers, 82 with usable data, and the time to plateau ranged from 18 to 254 days. Masicampo and Baumeister as above. The earlier book on switching tasks, referred to in chapter 14, is One thing at a time.

Chapter 23. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule hasn't been tested as a package, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 24. The NHS ADHD and depression pages, and the debt charities, as above. The earlier book on work that matters as above. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any service.

Chapter 25. Lally and colleagues, and Wohl and colleagues, as above.