

# Just Open Your Sketchpad

This is the first exercise on what I hope will become your new journey. A journey with two goals: Firstly, to get a regular practice habit established and secondly, to develop your drawing skills.

Behind those goals is the true meaning of these exercises and what this journey is really about – what this journey has been and still is for me, and what I hope it becomes for you: A journey back to your true self – the artist you’ve always felt you had within you.

It all starts with opening your sketch pad.

It’s a small act. In itself it doesn’t make us better artists. But committing to the journey and showing up every day is the prerequisite for everything else we do.

You’ll have heard the proverb, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. We’re about to put that into action in a very real way.

If you already draw every day (and I do mean **every day**) then you can skip this exercise. But make very sure you’re being very honest with yourself before you do. The method of building drawing and painting skills that I've evolved in my own practice, and that I'm recommending to you, is based entirely on regular, focused practice

in bite-sized, enjoyable chunks. It really is the most effective way to make progress over the long haul.

## Let's get started

There are **two really simple tricks** to getting a daily habit established.

1. Make it really, really easy to begin with
2. Anchor it into your daily routine by connecting it to a very specific act that you already do. This act will be your **trigger**.

So your first job is to pick your trigger.

## The Trigger

Your trigger is something you already do every day, preferably once a day.

Morning is best. It can be evening, but in my experience it's a little harder to get a habit established in the evening; we're more tired at the end of the day.

Here's some examples:

- **Washing your face** in the morning when you get up
- **Putting your morning coffee on**

- **Cleaning your teeth** in the morning
- **Getting dressed** in the morning
- **Clearing up** after finishing breakfast

Make sure it's a **specific action**, not something more vague like 'after breakfast'. That's not an action. I've bolded the action parts of the triggers above.

## The Habit

You'll do your habit **immediately after** your trigger. With enough repetitions, the two will become inextricably linked in your mind. You won't be able to do one without thinking of the other. The trigger **anchors** your habit into your daily routine.

If possible, get yourself a new sketchpad specifically for this challenge. This is a new start we're making so let's make it feel like one.

## How to do it:

## Step One: List your daily routine

Write down your usual morning routine, one step at a time. Mine looks something like this:

- Get up
- Wash my face
- Drink a glass of water
- Exercise
- Juice some fruit and vegetables
- Practice Chi Kung
- Shower
- Put the morning coffee on
- Sit down at the computer and start work

Any one of those actions would make a great trigger. I've been doing this trigger/habit method for a little while, so I have a few already going on there. My morning routine is the same every day, and is a series of triggers and habits that I've evolved over time. Here's the actual triggers and habits, triggers are **red**, habits are **blue**:

**Drinking the glass of water** is the trigger for **getting the exercise mat out** ready to exercise. Notice that the habit isn't the exercise itself, it's getting the mat out. But once I've got the mat out, I always do the exercise. Getting the mat out takes no effort, but gets me started – just like opening our sketchpads.

**Putting the exercise mat away** is the trigger for **making the juice**. **Washing the juicer** afterwards is the trigger for **going into the garden** for my Chi Kung practice. **Putting the coffee** on is the trigger for **sitting down at the PC** and starting work.

In the evening, my trigger for drawing practice is making a cup of tea after putting my young son to bed. These are all very specific actions so make good triggers.

I'd recommend you start with just one trigger and habit to begin with – your drawing habit.

## **Step Two: Choose a trigger**

Now go over your list of actions and look for a likely trigger. It's best if you can choose something that you have a little spare, uninterrupted time immediately afterwards.

*Choose carefully.* Make sure it's something that you do every day. you can always change it later if you find you're struggling with it. Sometimes it takes a few goes to find the right trigger.

## Step Three: Put it into action

Now, immediately after your trigger happens every day, sit down, open your sketch pad, pick up a pencil and write: “**Drawing habit completed**”, followed by the date.

Now, don't just dash it off and have done. Give it some consideration. Write it as *beautifully as you can*. This is important. Writing is design, just as picture making is design. As well as getting your daily drawing habit established, this is your first design exercise. From this point forwards, make a commitment to yourself to try to create beauty with every mark you make in your sketch pad.

Every day you do this exercise, try to write it more beautifully than you did the day before.

Once you've done it, take a moment to feel good about the fact that you just kept your appointment with yourself. Smile if you like. Smiling helps a lot. The positive feelings reinforce the habit.

You can draw something too if you want to, but I'd advise not force yourself to for the first week. We're just trying to get that first stage really established – sitting down and getting ready to start. That's your biggest hurdle, right there. If you can get over that, then the rest is considerably easier. If you give yourself too much to do – like saying you'll draw for 30 minutes, say – you'll find it harder to keep going.

The point here is to remove barriers by making this really, really easy.

By repeating this action every day, we'll get our regular practice habit established much more effectively.

It will help you if you have your sketch pad and pencil set up ready. If you have to spend half an hour finding a pencil, the moment will be gone and you won't make the mental connection between your trigger and your new daily drawing habit.

## **Step Four: Repeat**

Do this every day for seven days. Keep a log of how you do. In week two, move on to the next exercise and start doing some drawing in your regular practice session.

Good luck!

If this approach works well for you, and you want to keep it going, the **Creative Triggers art practice community** has a roadmap of drawing exercises for you to follow so that you're never stuck for what to draw.

It's called a practice community because there's a friendly and supportive bunch of artists of all levels there to help keep you focused.

As part of the community, we have regular monthly drawing challenges to keep you interested and keep your skills growing.

It's \$17 per month to join. Your first month is only \$1 so you can try it

out and see how you like it. You can cancel at any time.

[Click here to find out how to keep your drawing habit going.](#)