



What do you hope to get
out of this workshop?



How to “Sit Down & Write”

A Writing Guide Presentation by CK Kirch

Writing Guides:

Kirkwood Adams

Maria Baker

CK Kirch



Think of a project you're currently working on:

What is the next step?



“Sit down and write”

Brushing teeth in the morning:

1. Enter bathroom
2. Put toothpaste on toothbrush
3. Brush teeth

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How I brush my teeth in the morning:

1. 6:45 - Alarm A
2. Remove sleep mask & turn off alarm
3. 7:15 - Alarm B (app allows me 2 snoozes)
4. Take meds & open shades
5. 7:30 - Alarm B (first snooze)
6. Boop around on phone
7. 7:45 - Alarm B (second snooze)
8. Scan barcode inside medicine cabinet to keep alarm from going off again
9. Put toothpaste on toothbrush
10. Brush teeth

Going under the hood



Automatic transmission:

1. Put key in ignition
2. Turn key to start engine
3. Press gas pedal to drive forward

Automatic transmission:

1. Put key in ignition
2. Turn key to start engine
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Manual transmission:

1. Make sure car is in neutral
2. Push clutch all the way in
3. Turn key to start engine
4. Keep clutch pressed in while moving gear stick into first gear
5. Release parking brake
6. Ease off clutch while giving engine a little gas
7. Drive forward in first gear



Going under the hood

1. Why our engines won't start
2. What makes our transmission run
3. How to use the mechanics of our own engine to get ourselves moving forward.



Going under the hood

1. Why we might struggle to initiate writing
2. How the motivation & reward system works in the brain
3. How to use that knowledge to hack our brain & more easily initiate the writing task

Why the engine won't start

Executive dysfunction and the struggle to initiate writing



Executive Dysfunction

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

- Directing attention
- Planning & organization
- Decision making
- Working memory
- Initiating/switching tasks

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

Executive
Dysfunction
= impairment in
these functions

- Directing attention
- Planning & organization
- Decision making
- Working memory
- Initiating/switching tasks

Executive Dysfunction

- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Dementia/Alzheimer's
- Epilepsy
- Learning Disabilities
- OCD
- Schizophrenia
- Substance abuse/withdrawal
- Trauma/PTSD

Executive Dysfunction

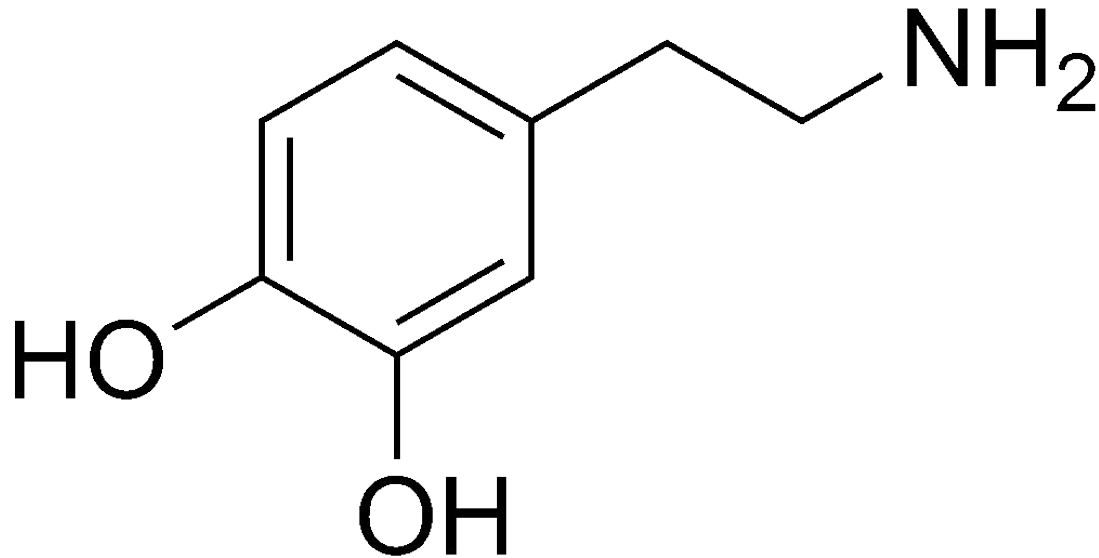
- Hypo/hyperglycemia
- Hypo/hyperthyroidism
- Kidney/liver problems
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Parkinson's
- Traumatic brain injury
- Tumor/Stroke
- Sleep Disorders (e.g. insomnia, sleep apnea)
- Vitamin B12 deficiency
- Electrolyte abnormality
- **Exhaustion**
- **Stress**
- **Boredom**

What makes the transmission run

Dopamine and the reward system

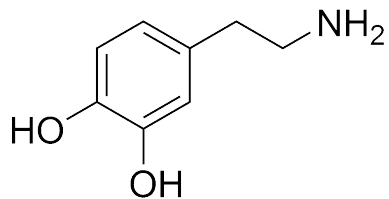


Dopamine: the “feel-good” chemical

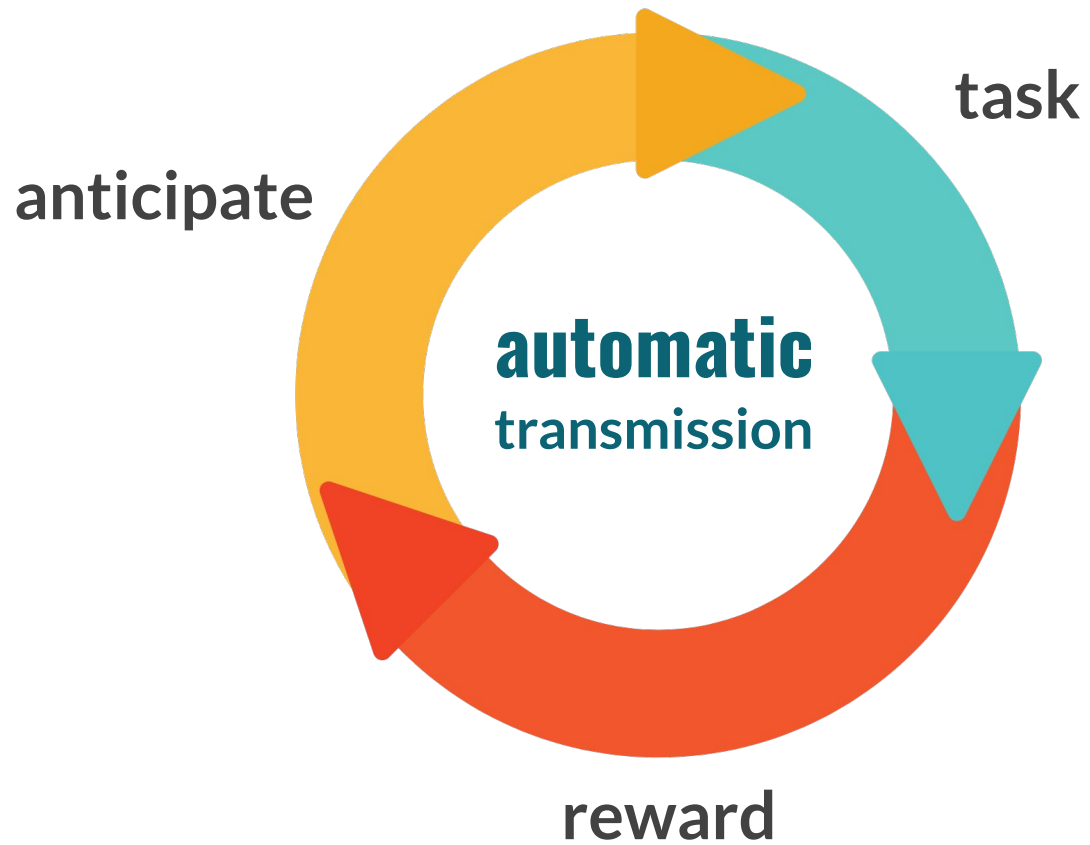


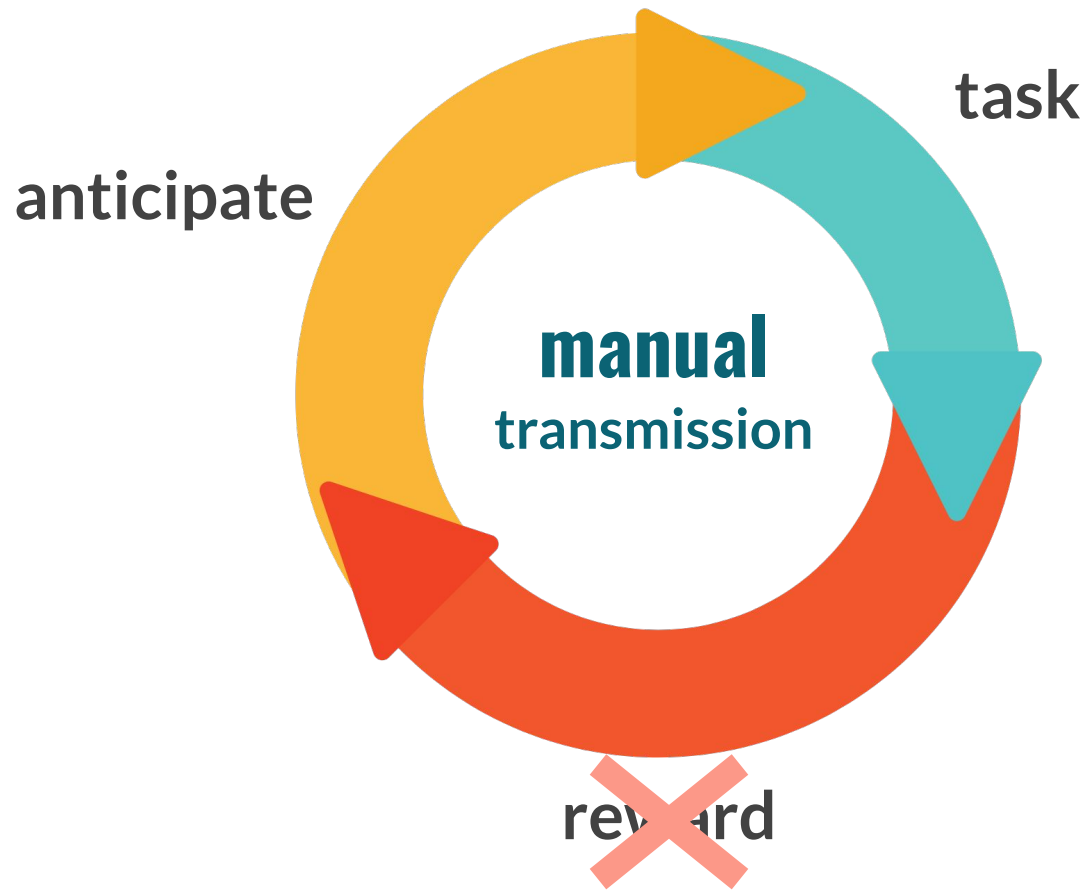
Anticipate

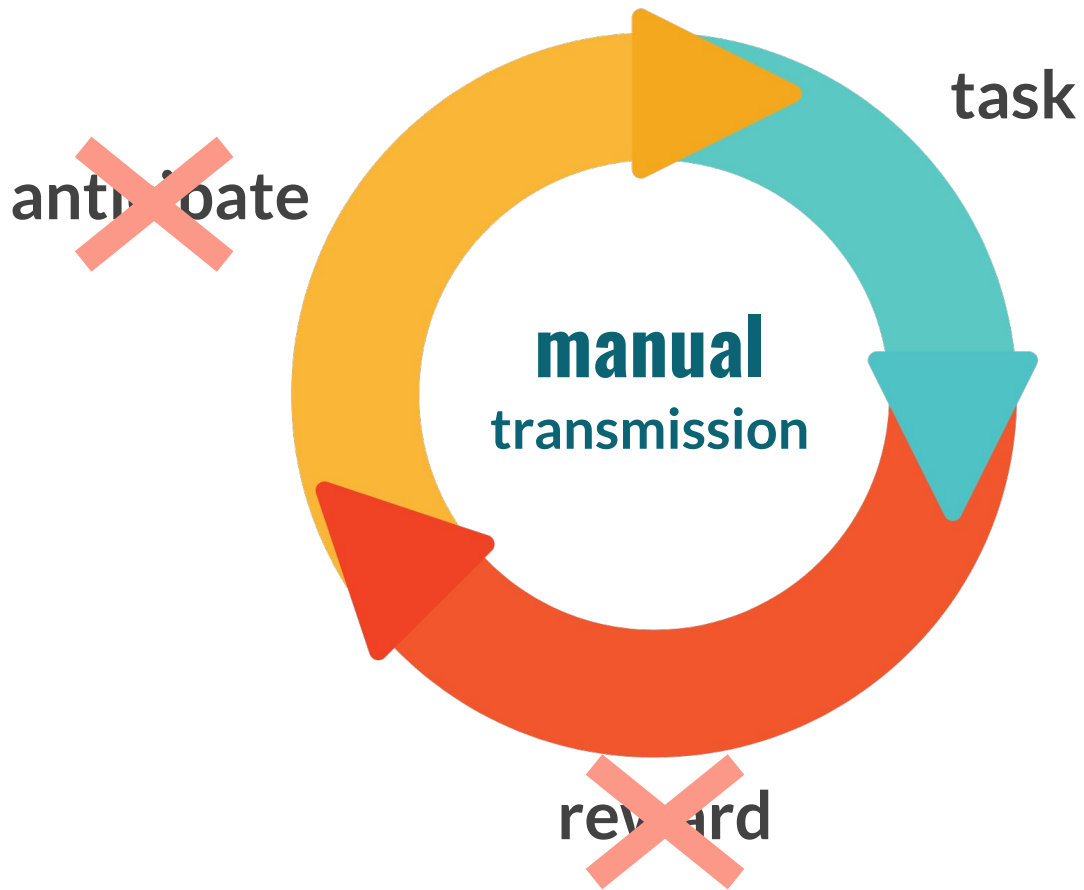
Do/Experience



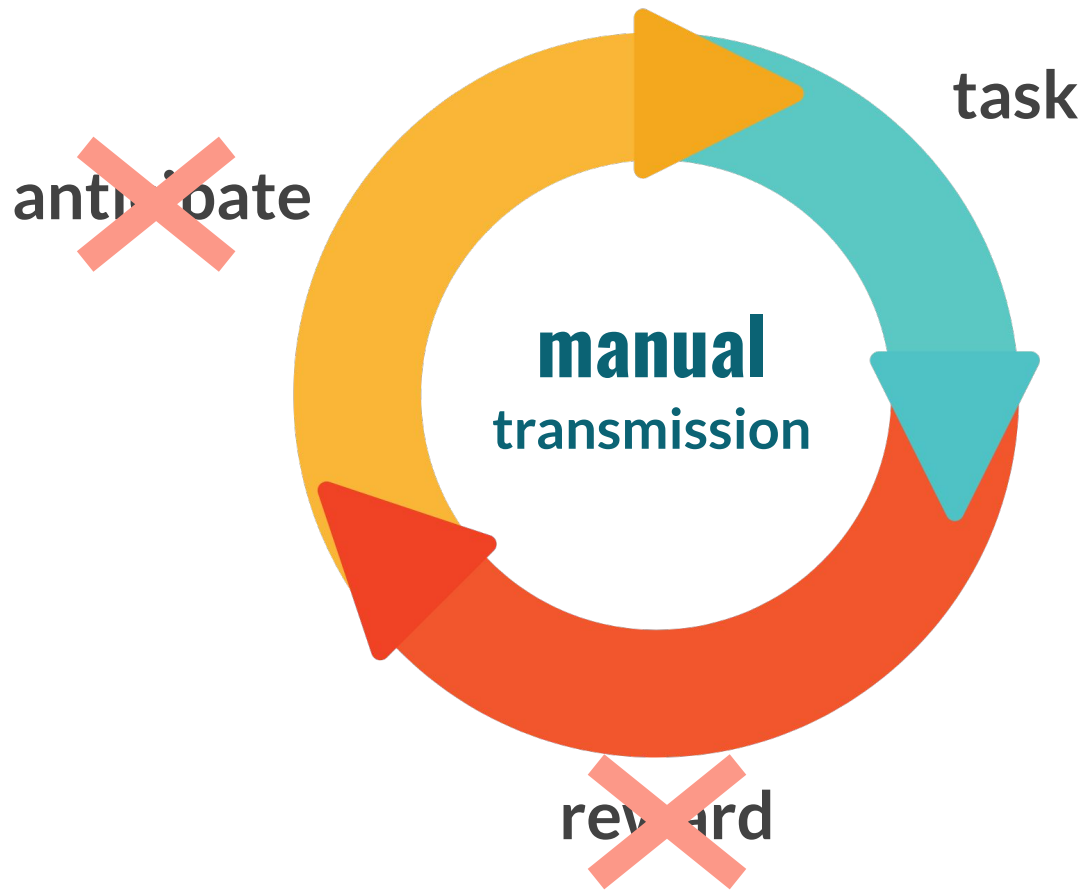
Feel Good

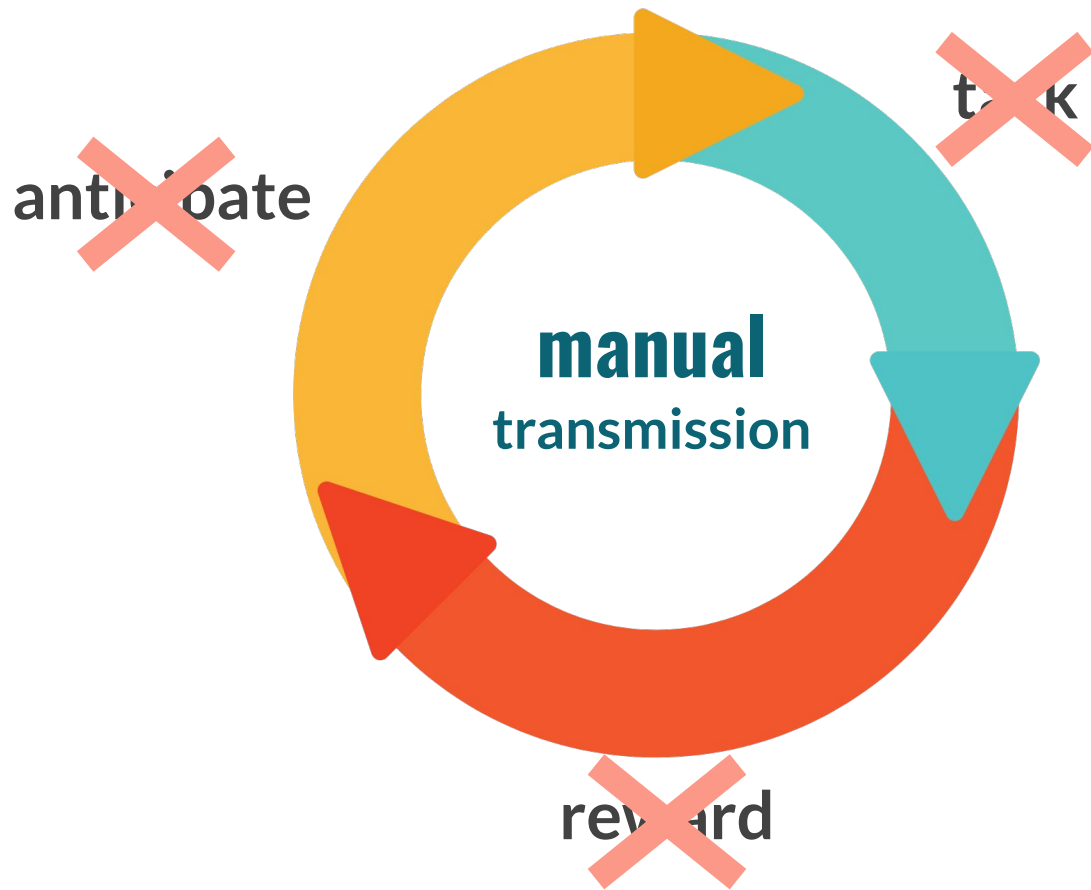


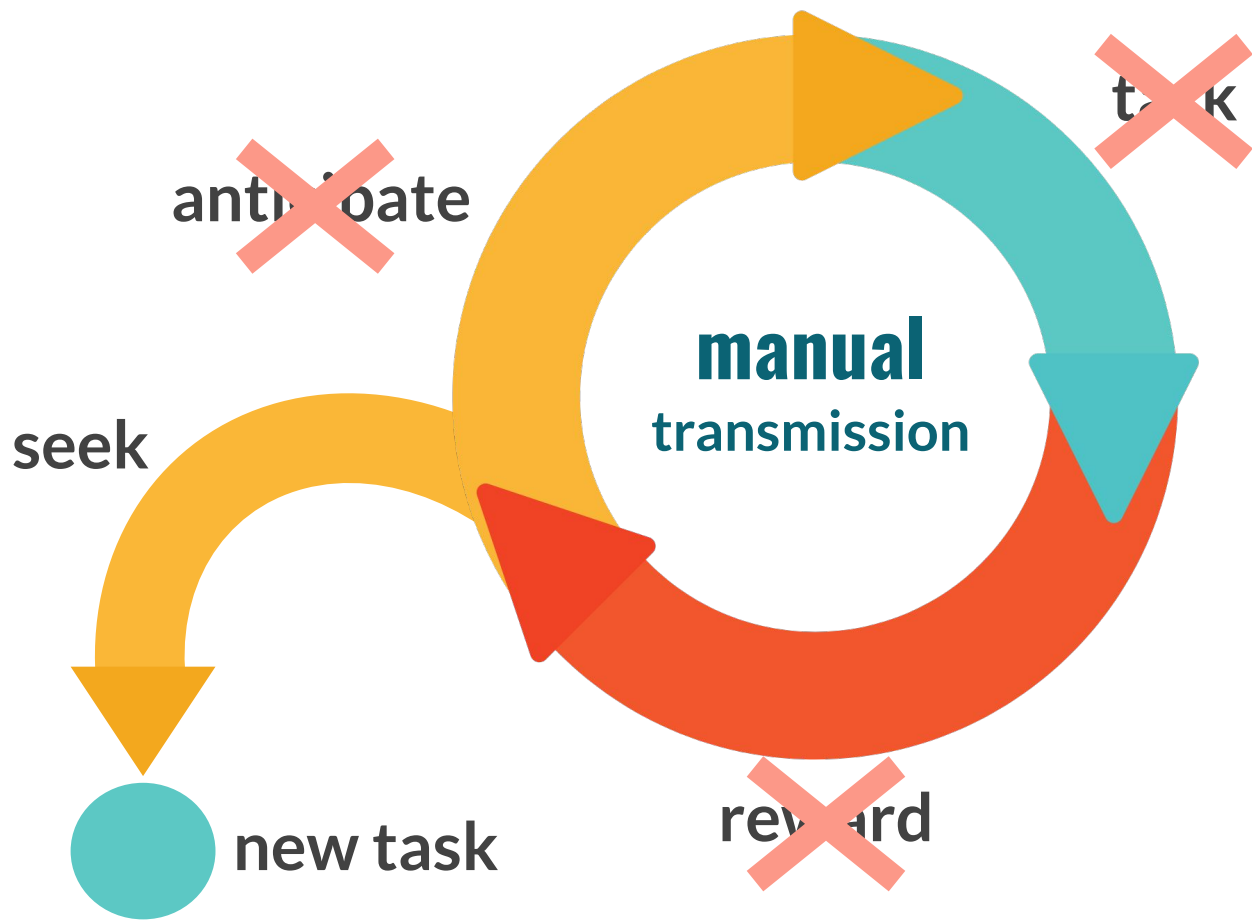




This can make it difficult
to **start** the task of writing
and difficult to **complete**
the writing projects that
we do start

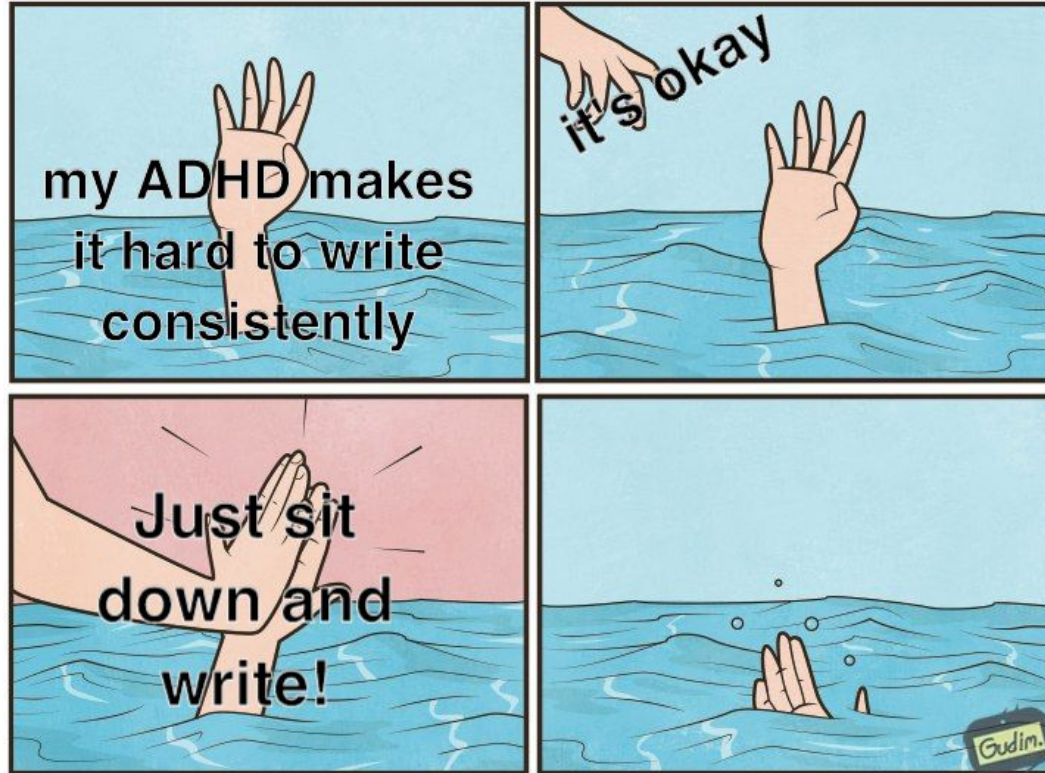




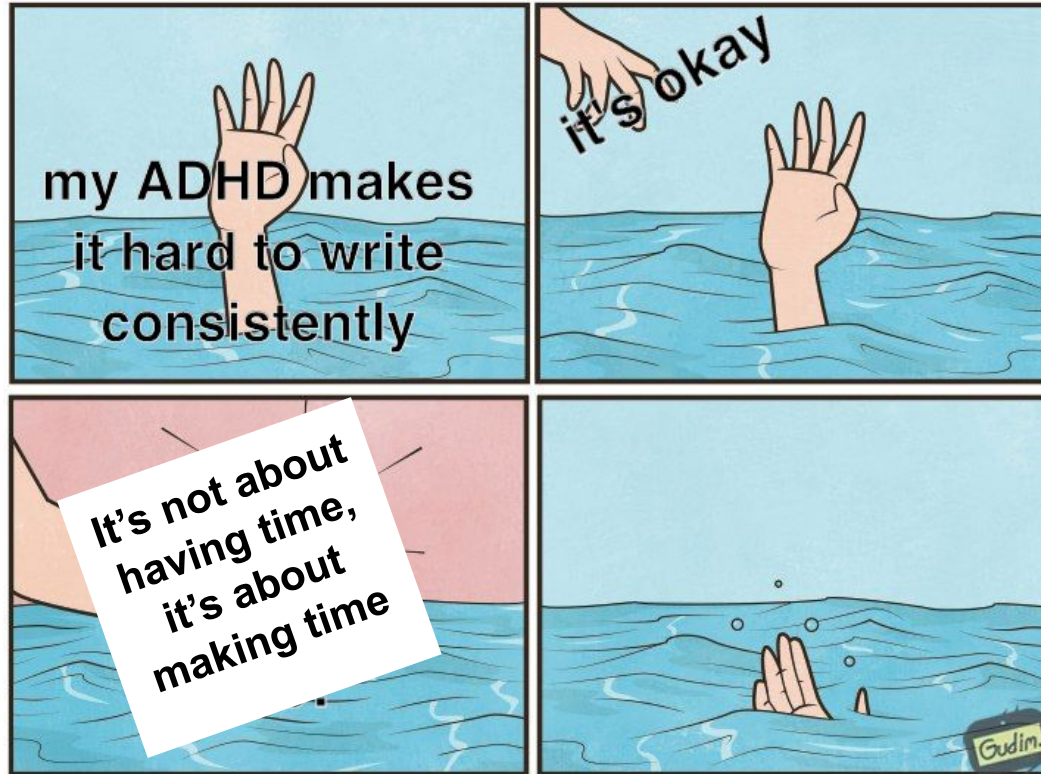




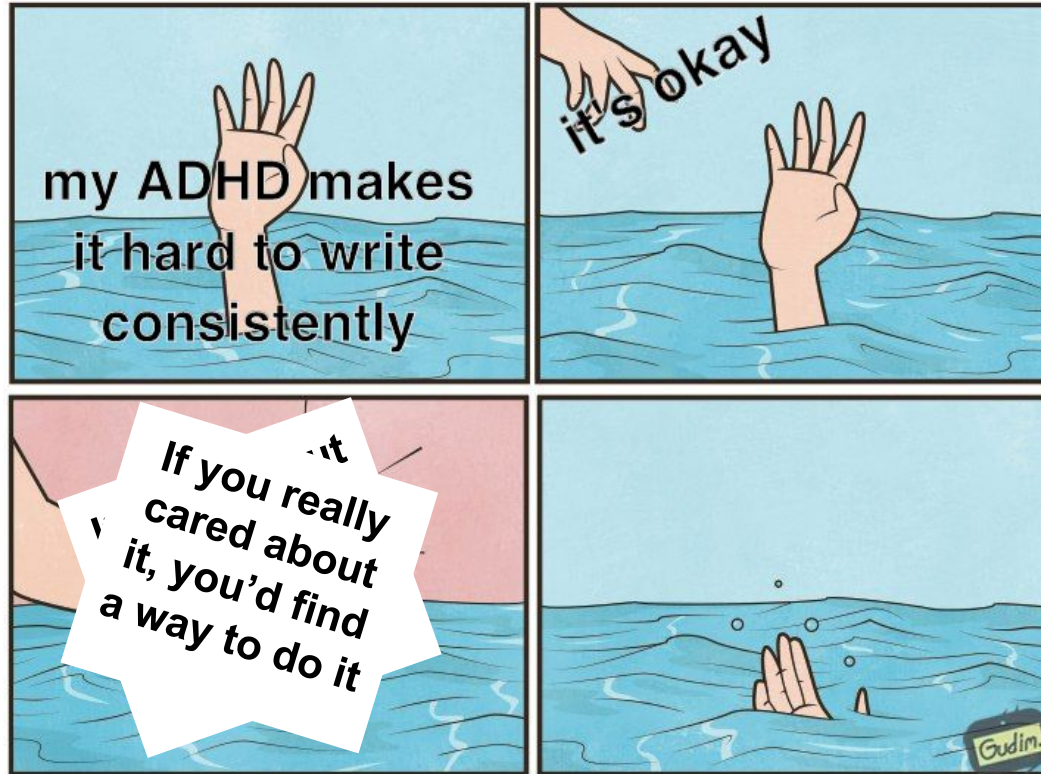
The Problem with Traditional Writing Advice



The Problem with Traditional Writing Advice



The Problem with Traditional Writing Advice



This type of writing advice assumes that the issue is one of **motivation**—that if we just want it enough, we'll be able to do it.

But **executive dysfunction** is not about motivation.

Good news!

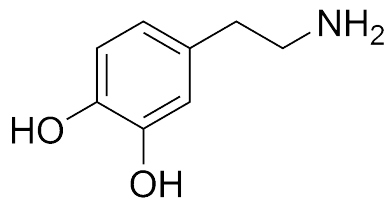
How to hack the system

Writers, start your engines!

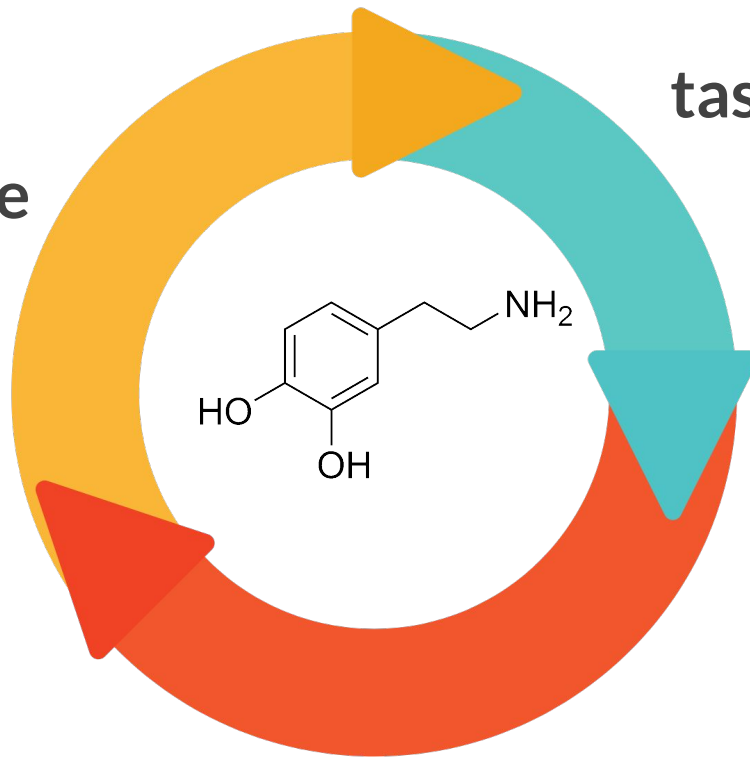


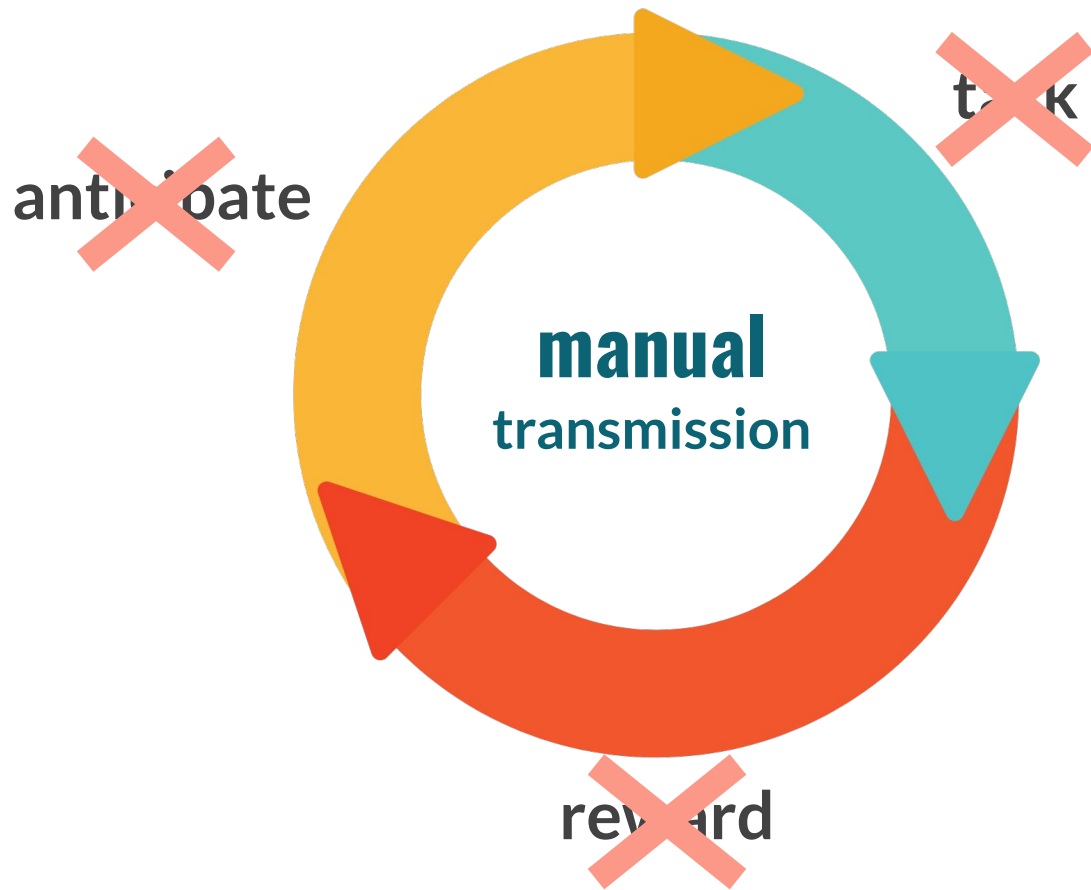
anticipate

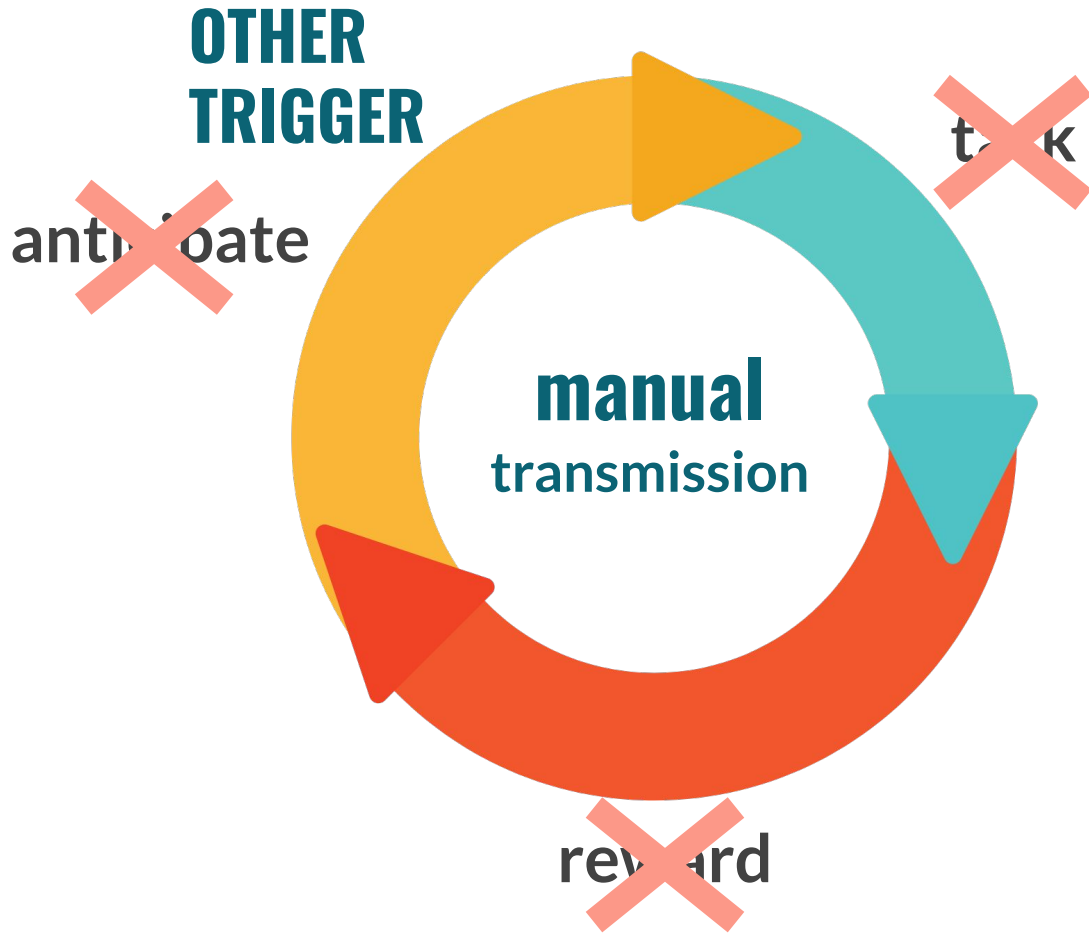
task

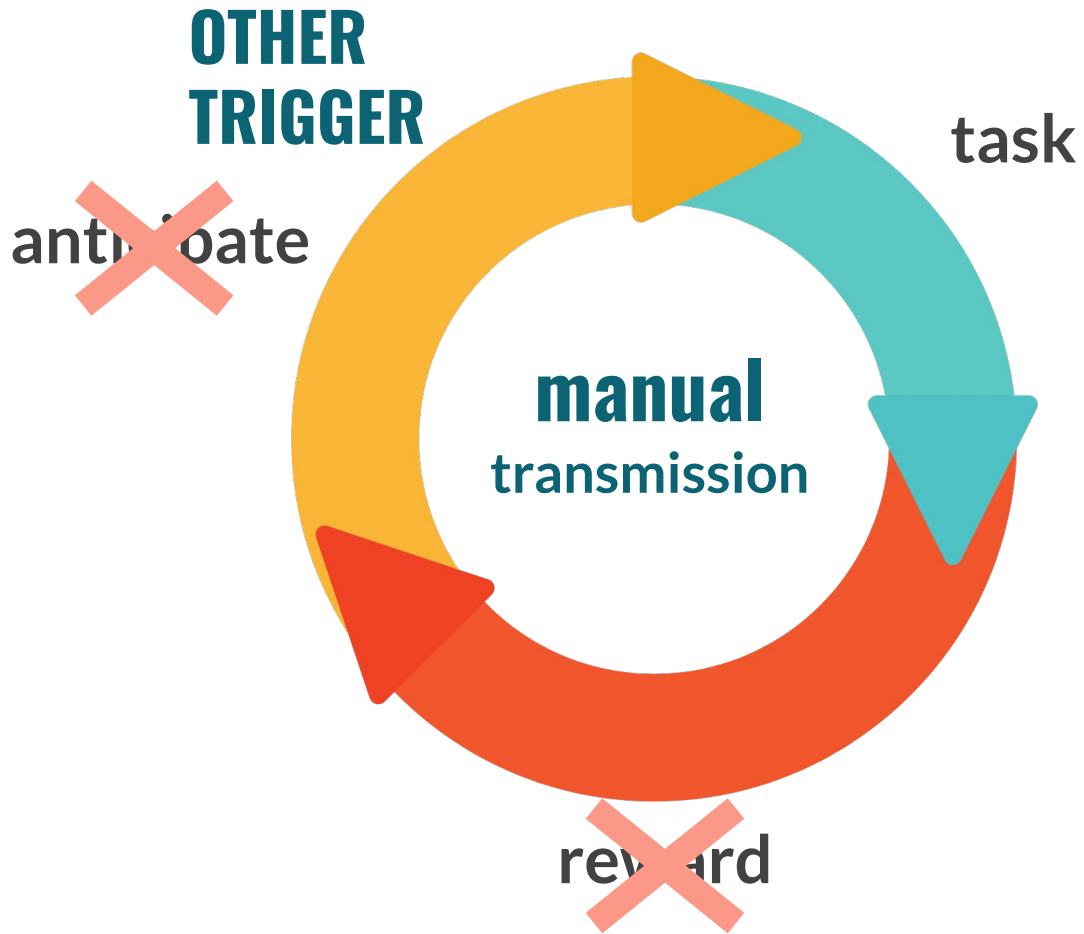


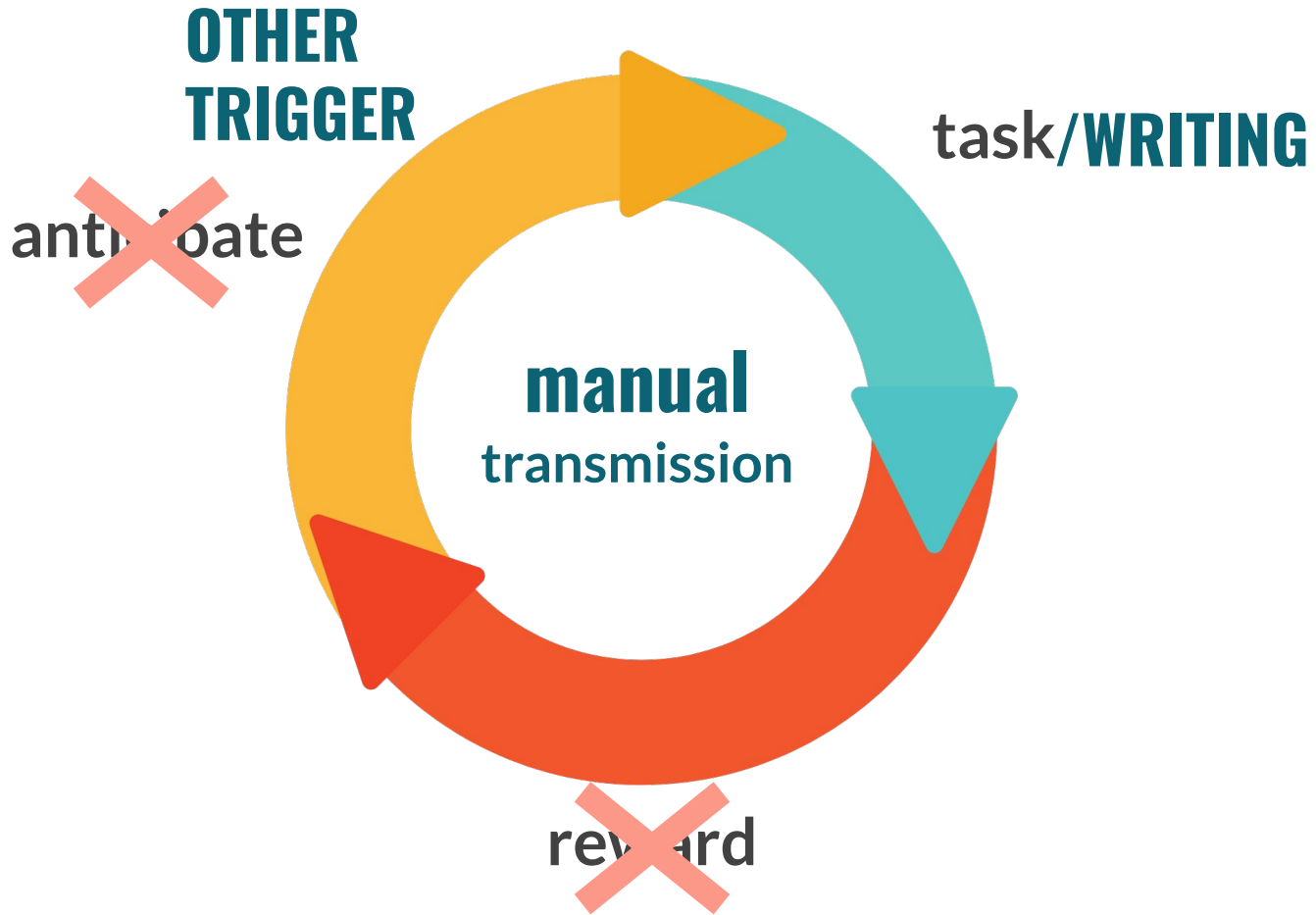
reward

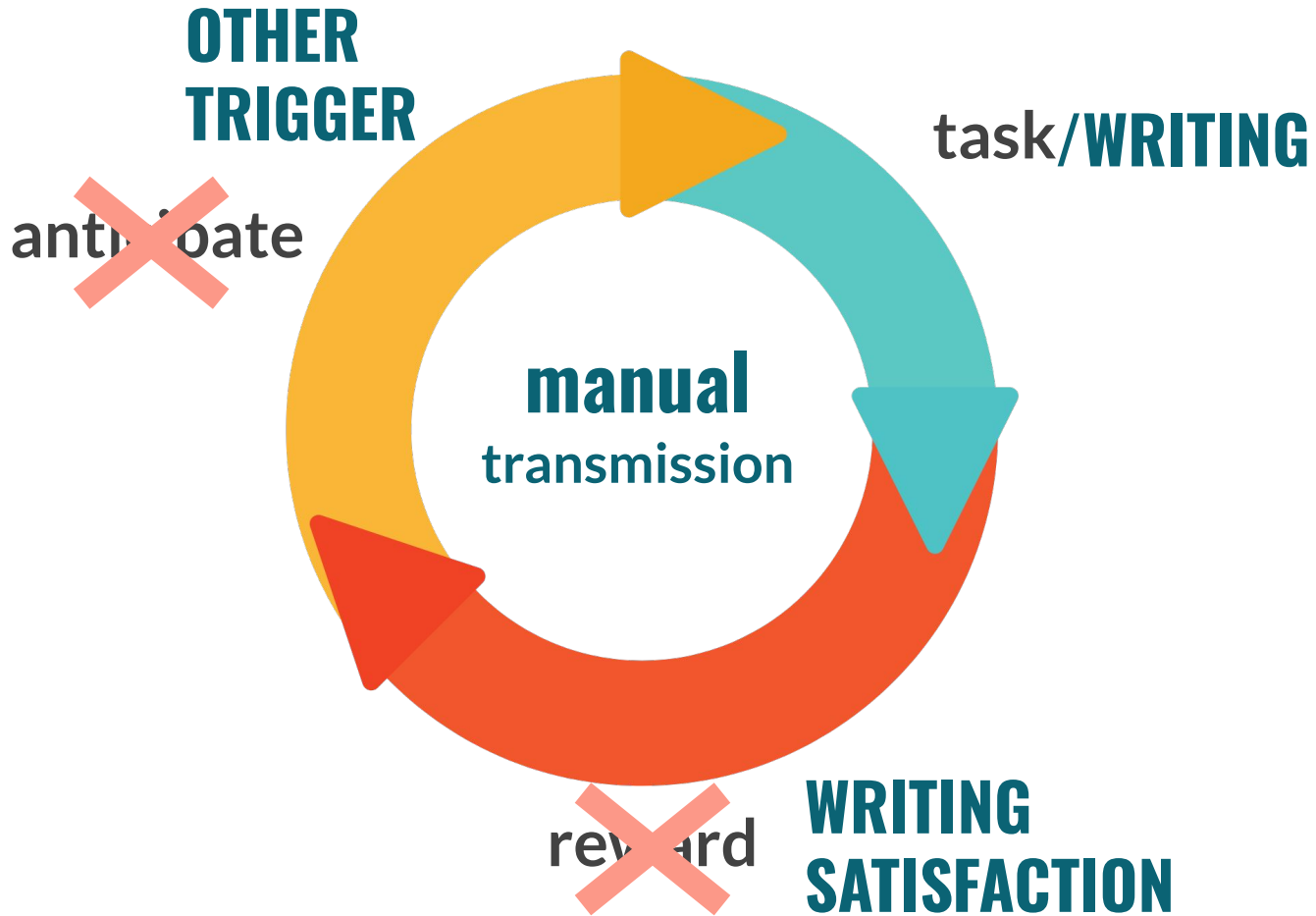










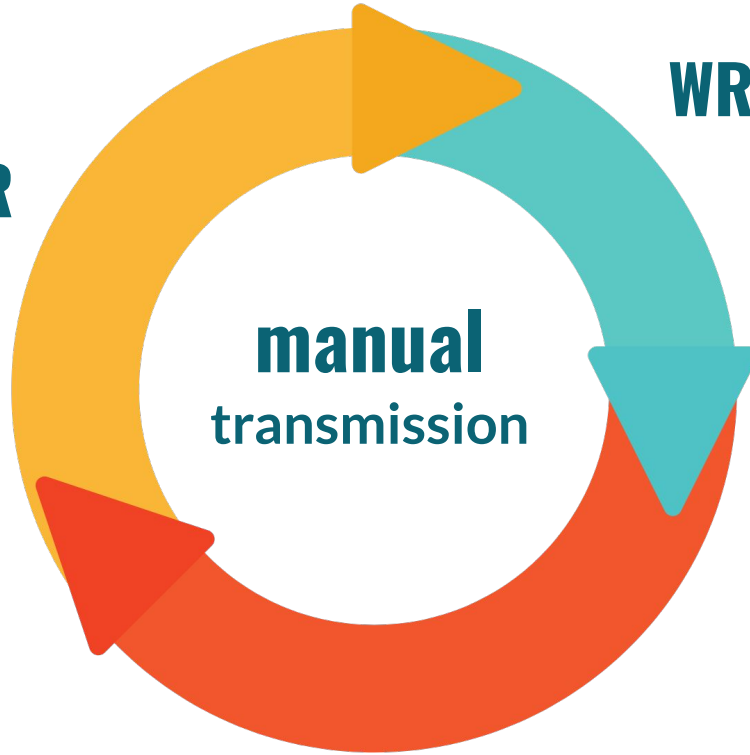


**OTHER
TRIGGER**

WRITING

**manual
transmission**

**WRITING
SATISFACTION**

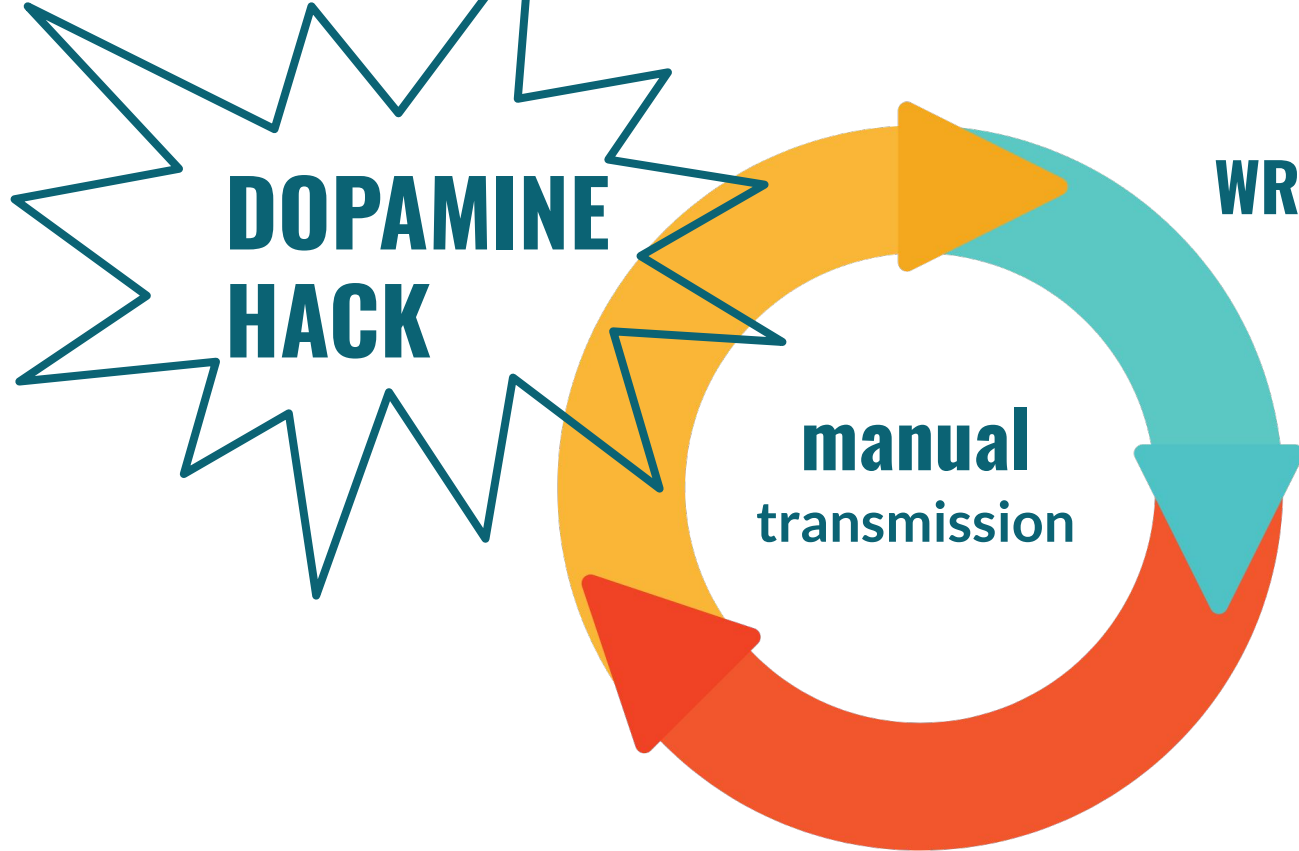


**DOPAMINE
HACK**

WRITING

**manual
transmission**

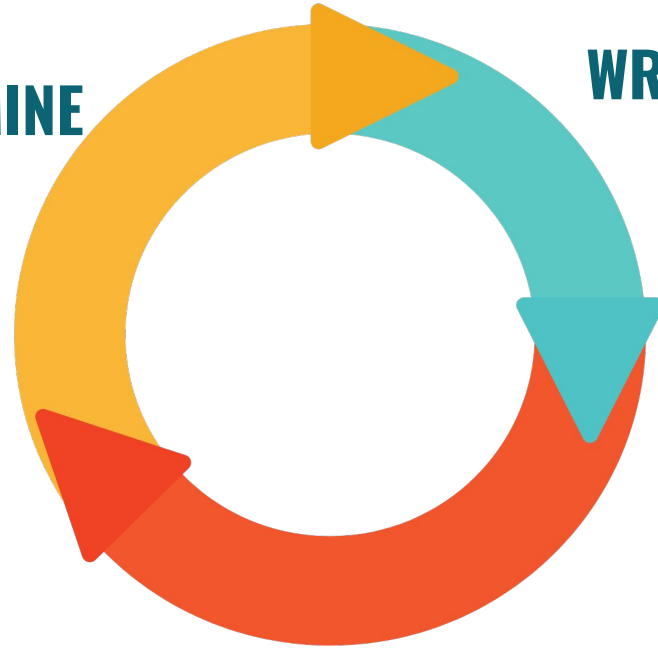
**WRITING
SATISFACTION**



**systems,
structures,
routines,
rituals,
and cues
that help give
us a reliable
ping of
dopamine**



**DOPAMINE
HACK**



WRITING

**WRITING
SATISFACTION**

It's not about **finding motivation** to write.

It's about **creating infrastructure** to help initiate the steps of the writing process.

Question 1:

**What makes
writing feel
satisfying?**

Question 1:

What makes writing feel satisfying?

Examples:

- Seeing how much I've written
- Crafting a really good sentence
- Writing to music

Question 2:

What routines, rituals, or structures can make it easier to initiate writing?

Question 2.0:

What can trigger the ping of dopamine so I can “start the ignition” and move out of a state of executive dysfunction?

Question 2.0:

What can trigger the ping of dopamine so I can “start the ignition” and move out of a state of executive dysfunction?

- Seeing how much I’ve written → printing out finished pages after writing and keeping a stack on my desk
- Crafting a good sentence → adding new great sentences to a “wall of fame” or phone background
- Writing to music → setting a repeating alarm that kicks off my Spotify writing playlist

Goal: create infrastructure that doesn't also depend on executive functioning to initiate writing tasks.

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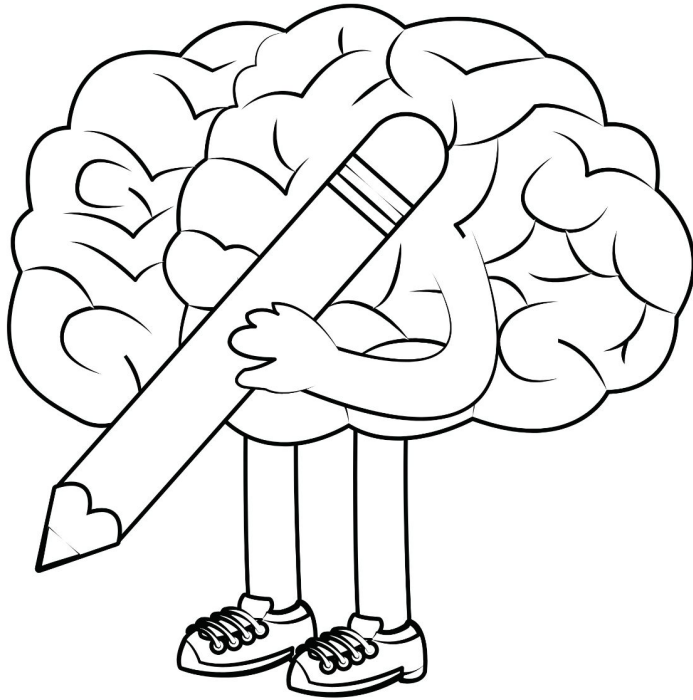
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What can trigger the ping of dopamine so I can initiate writing?

- Printing out finished pages (happens after writing has already occurred, when there's already satisfaction)
- “Wall of Fame” (also happens after writing, directly contributes to dopamine ping)
- Music alarm (alarm repeats automatically)

Recap:



- We can think of initiating writing like **starting an engine**
- Understanding **how the brain works** can help us move forward, whether we're driving an automatic or manual transmission
- Instead of telling ourselves to "just sit down and write," we can ask: **How can we give ourselves a reliable ping of dopamine – without relying on our executive functioning – to initiate the writing task?**

References & Further Reading

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