

SLEEP

SUPPLEMENT FOR ORGANIZING CREATIVITY (3RD ED.)

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MECHANISM

Few things matter as much as good sleep — sleep that leaves you sufficiently restored, predictable, and not damaging next-day focus. Yet it is often ignored. After all, we do it automatically and usually reasonably well. But without enough good sleep, stress goes up, focus suffers, and creative work gets worse.

Sleep also creates feedback loops. If you sleep well, you are more focused, get more done, and are more likely to go to bed on time. If you sleep badly, performance drops, junk food becomes more tempting, and bedtime drifts later. In that sense, the day starts and ends with sleep. Getting enough sleep determines much of what follows. Too much sleep can also be detrimental — you crave more of it. The relevant issue is the right quality and quantity.



This is a supplement to «*Organizing Creativity*» (3rd edition). It is not included in the book because it is more specific and focused, and therefore not relevant to all readers. If the topic is relevant to you, it provides additional information. It was developed with AI input.

More Information: <https://www.organizingcreativity.com/oc3>

APPLICABILITY

The issue is relevant to almost everyone. Sleep is one of those background factors with a huge effect. It becomes especially relevant if you:

- usually stay up too late,
- cannot fall asleep,
- wake up badly,
- crash midday, or
- sleep but remain unfocused.

As with creativity, there is no perfection here. Not even a baby sleeps like a baby. Sleep varies with personal and situational factors. But you can improve your average sleep quality.

INTERVENTION VARIABLES

The relevant intervention variables include sleep hygiene, getting out of bed, and naps.

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene means shaping the conditions that make regular, restorative sleep more likely. The suggestions below are divided into person and environment. If you track your sleep, e.g., automatically with a smartwatch, you can monitor changes. However, assess what the device actually measures and how you feel. Also, changes usually show up over time. The average of several days is usually more reliable than a single night.

Sleep Hygiene: Person

Aim to establish routines or rituals you can do regularly.

- **Be Willing to go to Bed:** If the work is going well, interrupting it for sleep can feel like sacrilege. However, jotting down what you want to do next and then going to sleep usually leads to better work long-term. Staying up late leads to diminishing returns and usually sacrifices the next day.
- **Bedtime Routine:** Use a relaxing bedtime routine to signal that it is time to wind down. For example, reading for an hour, meditation, etc.
- **Peace of Mind:** It is harder to fall asleep if your mind is occupied. A fifteen-minute investment can strongly reduce these issues. For example:

Things you need to do: Do a brain dump of todos. If you remember things in bed, write them down or use a voice memo, e.g., on a smartwatch.

Things that need to be solved: If you cannot realistically solve them well in the next thirty minutes, treat them as things you need to do — after a good night of sleep.

Things that stress you out: Try out what calms you down and makes you relaxed. You cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time, so focus on relaxation, not on «not being stressed out». For example, meditation, prayer, gratitude/appreciation, journaling, a warm shower, washing your face, or a cup of tea.

- **Consistency:** Go to bed and get up at the same time, even on weekends. That consistency takes a bit to build, but it makes falling asleep and getting

up easier. You can get used to an earlier bedtime in increments, e.g., by setting a calendar reminder to go to bed and moving it closer to your desired bedtime every few days in 15-minute steps.

- **Productive Day:** Falling asleep is usually easier if you feel you had a productive day. If the day was really unproductive, it might be better to call it a dud, get to sleep early, and not make it worse by staying up late in a vain attempt to save it. Getting up after a well-rested night allows you to be productive the next day. Sometimes a small productive closure action is better than going to bed dissatisfied. For example, prepare everything for the morning or clean the dishes. This way, the day was not all bad, and the last memory is one of accomplishment.
- **Go to Sleep on Time:** You likely know when you need to get up, e.g., for work, appointments, hygiene, food, and buffer time. You also roughly know how much sleep you need. Teens often need 9–10 hours, adults 7–8 hours. You can test it by not using an alarm clock for a week and measuring how long you sleep, then using the average. Together, wake time and sleep need allow you to calculate when you need to go to bed, including buffer time. Do not stay up late for no other reason than ruining the next day.
- **No Alcohol, no Problem Foods:** An alcoholic nightcap usually has too many side effects. Warm _calming_ tea usually works much better. Use caffeine-free herbal teas/infusions such as Chamomile, Lavender, Passion-flower, Lemon balm, or Rooibos. Avoid black tea, green tea, white tea, oolong, pu-erh, chai, Earl Grey, jasmine green tea, and matcha, as they contain caffeine. Large meals and some foods are also likely to impair sleep, e.g., chocolate can keep you awake.
- **Medical Conditions:** This sheet is for ordinary sleep-environment and routine adjustments, not diagnosis. If sleep is severely impaired, chronic, or accompanied by breathing interruptions, dangerous sleepiness, panic, or major mood changes, treat that as a medical issue, not a creativity-system issue.

Sleep Hygiene: Environment

The bedroom and your bed should be a sanctuary used for two things: sleep and sex. Reading, watching TV, or listening to music in bed often impairs sleep long-term — they are better done outside the bed. The environment usually allows for easier and more lasting changes. A one-time investment with lasting effects can have a large payoff, e.g., preparing calming music and the infrastructure to play it without friction.

- **Invest in your Bed and Bedroom:** You spend roughly one third of your life there. Go for good-quality bedding, e.g., hypoallergenic materials or memory foam.
- **Safe Environment:** We are completely helpless when we sleep. So aim for an environment that feels safe — and is safe. This can include actual risk reduction, such as smoke detectors or placing the bed in a corner so you only need to guard two sides. It can also include felt safety, e.g., having objects nearby that make you feel safe and relaxed.
- **Dark and Quiet:** Sleep works best when it is dark and quiet. Dimming the lights is usually a good start. If your bedroom cannot be darkened, e.g., with blackout curtains, or if noise is a problem, try a sleep mask, the kind usually used for travel. Earplugs can work well. If full-length foam earplugs create too much pressure, cutting off the narrow cone tip can make them sit less deeply and reduce pressure. Keep the remaining piece large enough to remove easily (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Earplugs with shortened tips. The removed tips on the left are discarded; only the shortened earplugs on the right are used.

- **Right Temperature:** A good bedroom temperature is around 17–19°C, though this also depends on your preferences and your sleep microclimate: room temperature, duvet, pajamas, mattress, and whether your feet or hands are cold. Body temperature has to drop a little, so remove blankets when it is hot. A hot water bottle can be useful during winter, including to warm the bed and your pajamas.
- **Keep your Bed/Bedroom Clean:** Daily: air bedding and the room, make your bed. Weekly: change bedding, bi-weekly is okay, wash pillow covers, vacuum. Monthly: flip mattresses.
- **Air:** CO₂ can become a problem if you sleep with closed windows, leading to worse sleep and headaches. A CO₂ measuring device can provide some insight here.
- **No Work Reminders:** Make the bedroom a sanctuary from the obligations and stress of work. Avoid reminders of work, e.g., bags or a smartphone with eMail or Instant Messengers. Turn down the work at least an hour before going to bed.

- **Wind-Down Routines:** These routines prepare your mind for sleep. They should usually happen before going to bed; otherwise, you begin associating the bed with something other than sleep and sex. Common routines are quieting music and reading. For music, go for quiet, slow, predictable, low-drama, and preferably instrumental music. Use music you like but do not care about too much. Options to look into are ambient / drone / sound-scape music; slow instrumental piano; soft classical / neo-classical; lo-fi instrumental; soft acoustic guitar or harp; chant, very slow sacred music, or overtone-like vocals; or nature sounds mixed with quiet music. For reading, eInk readers are usually better than tablets. Tablets have too much back-light, often blue light, and can keep you awake even if you are only reading a book. They are also tempting for other purposes, e.g., social media. An eInk reader is easier on the eyes and more focused.

Getting Out of Bed at the Same Time

Even if you set an alarm to wake up at the same time, the activation energy to get out of bed might be hard to find. The following options can help:

- **Clear Purpose:** Getting up, especially early in the day, is usually aversive. You are leaving a warm bed. Having a clear purpose for the day can provide activation energy. A positive first task helps, e.g., drink coffee, be at the gym when it opens, etc. Even better is a chain of positive events: coffee, then gym, then shower, then breakfast. An accountability partner, e.g., a person you meet at the gym, can help as well.
- **Consistency is Key:** Your body can adapt to different sleep schedules, as long as they are consistent. This means getting up at the same time, including on weekends.
- **Force Yourself to Leave the Bed:** Once you are out of bed, it becomes much easier to stay up. One of the easiest ways to ensure that is placing the alarm clock out of reach, requiring you to leave the bed to stop it. This is one issue with using a smartphone as alarm and a smartwatch in bed — you can often use the watch to silence the smartphone alarm. A separate alarm clock bypasses that issue.
- **Light is on Your Side:** While you might not like it in the morning, light gets and keeps you awake. If possible, open the curtains or turn on the lights.
- **Avoid Snooze:** The snooze button has been described as a way of reliving the worst moment of your day over and over. There is something to that view. Worse, it trains you that getting up is optional. While a secondary alarm makes sense in case you miss the first one, snooze is usually a bad idea.

Stay awake for at least 10 minutes. Instead of falling asleep again, look forward to going to bed after the current day.

- **Solve a Sleep Deficit by Going to Bed Earlier, Not Sleeping Later:** Things happen, and you acquire a sleep deficit. If you are testing a stable wake time, prefer recovering by going to bed earlier rather than repeatedly sleeping in. If you are seriously sleep-deprived, recovery matters more than preserving the schedule.
- **Jump-Start your Body:** A routine of drinking a glass of water can get your day going. A physical trigger as reminder is useful, e.g., an empty glass in the kitchen that is always in the same place. Caffeine can help, but with too much of it, you are only awake, not much more. Think *Zombie*. It can also lead to crashes and disrupt normal sleep. Other kinds of stimulation usually work better, e.g., music, shower, walk.
- **Make the Morning Easier on You:** Preparing everything you can the evening before makes the morning less stressful, e.g., clothes laid out, gym bag packed. It also ends the day with a productive task.

Naps

Naps can be useful, especially if you need to work late or need a break. However, duration matters. Try out what works for you. Start with 20–30 minutes during the early afternoon.

- Use 10–20 minutes when you need to wake sharp.
- Use 30 minutes only if you can tolerate 15–30 minutes of grogginess afterward.
- Use 60–90 minutes when you are sleep-deprived or want deeper memory/learning benefits and have recovery time.

Avoid late-day naps if they interfere with nighttime sleep. If you have kids at home and want to nap uninterrupted, tell them you will do something unpleasant with them when you wake up, e.g., clean the house. They are unlikely to wake you up.

«This is your gentle reminder that one time in the Bible Elijah was like <God, I'm so mad! I want to die!> so God said <Here's some food. Why don't you have a nap?> So Elijah slept, ate, & decided things weren't so bad. Never underestimate the spiritual power of a nap & a snack.»

Joy Clarkson

TRIAL DEFINITION

Given that you sleep about one third of your life, and given the consequences of good vs. bad sleep, improvements are usually worth the time. If you want to improve your sleep hygiene, first determine the baseline. Otherwise, you might solve the wrong problem or misread the effect of a change. Invest one week to track your sleep (see Table 1). Keep it simple.

Influencing factors include naps, caffeine/alcohol late day, stress, etc. If tracking makes sleep more tense, reduce it to bedtime, wake time, and next-day focus — or stop tracking and use a simpler proxy. If you use a smartwatch, you can get sleep information that way.

After the baseline week, identify the issue and check the Intervention Variables for possible options.

For example:

- Trouble going to bed → bedtime boundary / shutdown ritual
- Trouble falling asleep → mind dump / light / stimulation / bedroom cues
- Trouble getting up → wake trigger / light / first task / alarm location
- Daytime crash / naps → nap protocol / caffeine timing / workload
- Bedroom/workspace creates friction → environment
- Sleep but remain unfocused → baseline, workload, recovery demands, and possible medical/environment check

Bedtime	Wake Time	Time Slept	Subjective Sleep Quality	Influencing Factors	Focus

Table 1: Sleep Baseline Table.

Decide on one intervention variable. Do not change everything — if you change everything, you learn nothing.

Possible trial candidates:

- «No work communication after 21:00 for 14 days.»
- «Same wake time ± 30 minutes for 3 weeks.»
- «20-minute nap before 15:00 on workdays for 2 weeks.»

The □ Integration Worksheet can be used to design a trial and watch for short- and long-term effects on your life and your creative system.

Example Trial: No Work Communication After 21:00

- Trigger: 20:45 alarm.
- Start Action: Put work devices away.
- Behavior: No email, messages, or work platforms after 21:00.
- Time Source: Replaces evening work checking / reactive communication.
- Duration: 14 days.
- Success: At least 11 of 14 evenings.
- Abort: Missed obligations or increased next-day work chaos.
- Ambiguity: Emergency contact does not count as work communication.

Example Trial: Bedtime Closure Note (staying up because the work feels unfinished)

- Trigger: 30 minutes before planned bedtime.
- Start Action: Open notebook or note file titled «Tomorrow».
- Behavior: Write three lines: what was stopped, what comes next, and where to restart.
- Time Source: Replaces the last check of email, messages, or open-ended work.
- Duration: 14 days.
- Success: Closure note completed on at least 10 of 14 evenings, and bedtime delayed by less than 20 minutes on those evenings.
- Abort: The note turns into planning for more than 10 minutes on three evenings, or causes renewed work.
- Ambiguity: If an actual emergency interrupts the evening, that night does not count.

Define the trigger, start action, behavior, time source, success, abort, and ambiguity criteria. Stop criteria are highly relevant when it comes to sleep, as sleep inter-

ventions can backfire. For example, worse sleep for three nights, increased daytime sleepiness, missed obligations, anxiety around sleep tracking, or naps interfering with bedtime.

Afterwards, run the trial, log only what is needed to apply the success and abort criteria, and then decide what to keep, modify, or abort.

HAND-OFF

Sleep has huge effects on your focus, attention, and energy — and thus on your creative system. Especially when things are stressful, getting a good night's rest is invaluable. Investing in your sleep can have surprising benefits.

Choose one issue in one bounded trial. Do not redesign your whole sleep life. Take the selected behavior into the Integration Worksheet and define success, abort, ambiguity, and duration before starting.

