

RESCUE

The Study Companion That Gets You Started
when your brain says no.

"I can't start"

"I'm behind"

"Test tomorrow"

"I wasted the day"

"My brain is loud"

"Phone won't let go"

"I'm panicking"

START NOW →

A practical guide for anyone who knows what they
should do, wants to do it, and still can't press start.

RESCUE

The Study Companion That Gets You Started
when your brain says no.

This book exists because hundreds of teens described
the exact same problem in their own words.
It tries to respect that honesty.

SHIFTGLITCH.NET

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SECTION 00 //

How to Use This Book

This is not a book you read cover to cover. It is a manual you grab when you are stuck. Nobody is checking whether you finished it.

- **First time?** Read Sections 01–04 once. Then put it down.
- **Stuck right now?** Jump straight to the state that matches (Section 04) and do the one thing it says.
- **Bad week?** Read “When It Still Feels Hard” (Section 08). It was written for exactly that week.
- **Want ammo?** The science (Section 09) is there for the days you want to know why this works.
- **Keep one thing:** the Quick Reference Card at the back. Screenshot it. That page alone is most of the book.

You do not need to agree with everything here. Take what is useful. Leave the rest.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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- 02 Why Most Study Apps Make It Worse
- 03 The Six Rules
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SECTION 01 //

The Missing Start Button

You know what you need to do. You want to do it. And yet... nothing happens.

That gap between knowing and starting is not a motivation problem. It is not a discipline problem. It is definitely not a “just use Pomodoro” problem.

It is a **start button** problem.

“My start button is absent. I sit there staring at it and my brain just... won’t.”

Hundreds of teens described it in almost identical words. That is not laziness, and it is not you being broken. It is your brain protecting you from something it has learned feels dangerous: the shame that shows up after you try and still fall short.

Most study apps make this worse. They open with goal wizards and cheerful dashboards that assume you already started. They punish absence with streaks. They talk like a life coach who has never sat frozen in front of a textbook at 11pm the night before an exam.

Rescue was built from the opposite direction. It starts with the stuck moment. It names the state you are actually in — “I can’t start”, “I wasted the day”, “I’m panicking” — without judgment. Then it gives you one tiny, specific action you can do right now.

No lectures. No “you should have started earlier.” No requirement to feel motivated first.

Open the app. Pick the sentence that matches. Do the one small thing. Stop when the timer ends if you want. Come back tomorrow with nothing held against you. **That is the entire product.**

SECTION 02 //

Why Most Study Apps Make It Worse

Before the how, it helps to see what usually goes wrong. Five patterns, over and over:

They assume you already started

Dashboards, progress charts, “set your goals for the week.” If you are in the shame spiral, those screens are evidence that you are behind. You close the app and feel worse.

They weaponise streaks

A broken streak does not make people try harder. It makes them avoid the app entirely. One teen described the dread of opening an app after a 498-day streak died. The meta-game had replaced the actual goal.

They talk like adults who were never stuck

Cheerful life-coach energy. “You’ve got this!” affirmations. Reminders that feel like parental surveillance. Teens clock fake encouragement instantly, and the reaction is always the same: this is not for me.

They add complexity before value

Onboarding surveys. Deck-building before you can study anything. Projects, tags, subjects. By the time the app is configured, the small window of willingness you had is gone.

They punish absence

Red bars. “You missed 7 days” counters. Anything that makes opening the app after a bad week feel like walking into a room where everyone knows you failed.

| Rescue was built to do the opposite of all five.

SECTION 03 //

The Six Rules

The app is organised around states, not features. You do not wake up thinking “I need spaced repetition today.” You wake up thinking “I can’t start” or “it’s 8pm and I’ve done nothing.” Every screen in Rescue obeys six rules:

- 01 Validate first, then act.** The app names how you feel — without judgment — before it suggests anything.
- 02 One clear next step.** No menus of options when you are already overwhelmed. One thing.
- 03 The timer is yours.** 15, 25, 45 or custom. No forced Pomodoro religion. Stopping early is allowed.
- 04 Zero penalty for gaps.** Coming back after a bad week feels warm, not accusatory.
- 05 Peer voice, not adult voice.** Brief, honest, slightly dry. No cheerleading. No life lessons.
- 06 One more than zero.** The goal is never perfection. It is one real thing on a day you felt like doing nothing.

Everything else — the timer, the checklist, the brain dump, the comeback screen — exists to serve those six lines.

SECTION 04 //

The Seven States

Open Rescue and you see seven honest sentences. No account wall. No survey. Pick the one that matches right now — or hit Start Now, which skips everything and launches a 5-minute timer.

rescue

how's it going, really?

"I can't start"

"I'm behind"

"Test tomorrow"

"I wasted the day"

"My brain is loud"

"I'm on my phone too much"

"I'm panicking"

START NOW

01

"I can't start"

STATE // THE MOST COMMON ONE

THE FEELING

The most common one. The work is right there. You want to do it. Your body will not move.

WHAT THE APP DOES

It validates — “Yeah. That happens.” — then offers Shrink the Task. You type the thing you are avoiding (“study biology”, “write the essay”) and it hands back the smallest possible first action: “Open the textbook to page 47 and read the first paragraph.” Then one tap starts a timer on that paragraph.

WHY IT WORKS

Your brain treats “study biology” as one enormous, dangerous block. “Read one paragraph” is small enough that the resistance drops. Most people who read the first paragraph keep going. The ones who stop have still beaten the version of tonight where they did nothing.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN Type the thing you're avoiding. Shrink it twice. Do only the second version.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: **Shrink it until the resistance drops.**

02

"I'm behind"

STATE // THE MOUNTAIN

THE FEELING

Everything has piled up. Starting anywhere feels pointless. Watching other people cope makes it worse.

WHAT THE APP DOES

It refuses the framing: "We're not catching up today. We're doing one thing." Pick the most urgent — or least-worst — item, and it routes you to Shrink the Task or straight to a timer.

WHY IT WORKS

A mountain stays a mountain if you try to climb it all at once. One finished thing is evidence that you are not frozen. That evidence matters more than the size of the pile.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN Write the pile down. Circle one item. The rest officially waits until tomorrow.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: You don't owe the pile. You owe today one thing.

03

"Test tomorrow"

STATE // THE TRIAGE

THE FEELING

Real panic. You are not ready. The responsible plan started weeks ago — and is therefore useless right now.

WHAT THE APP DOES

Fast triage. Pick the subject. Instead of a perfect study plan you get three concrete moves for the next 60–90 minutes:

"Don't reread everything. 1. Brain-dump what you already know on one page. 2. Open the past paper and do the first question only. 3. Check it against the memo and write down the one thing you missed."

WHY IT WORKS

When time is short, perfect studying is the enemy of any studying. Three focused actions beat an all-nighter that collapses into doomscrolling at 2am because you could not decide where to begin.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN Blank page. 8 minutes. Everything you remember about the topic. Go.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: **Three moves. In order. Nothing else.**

04

"I wasted the day"

STATE // THE 8PM SPIRAL

THE FEELING

It is evening. You have done nothing. The guilt is loud, and starting now feels pointless because the day is already ruined.

WHAT THE APP DOES

It names it without adding shame: "Yeah, that sucks. The day isn't over." Then it offers one thing worth doing in the next 20 minutes. Not a salvage plan. One thing.

WHY IT WORKS

The spiral feeds on the story that the day is lost. One small win rewrites the ending. You go to bed having done something instead of nothing — and that changes which day tomorrow starts from.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN Late already? Perfect. One page of notes before bed. Start it now.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: The day ends at midnight, not at 4pm.

05

"My brain is loud"

STATE // THE NOISE

THE FEELING

Racing thoughts. Every sound is a distraction. Your mind invents reasons to do anything else.

WHAT THE APP DOES

A 2-minute brain dump. Type or voice-note everything spinning in your head — no organising, just out. Then one question: "Now pick one thing from that list."

WHY IT WORKS

Writing the noise down turns the volume down. Research on expressive writing shows it frees working memory. You do not need a meditation retreat. You need the thoughts out of your skull for two minutes so the next step becomes visible.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN 2-minute dump — the notes app counts. Then do line one for 10 minutes.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: Noise on the screen beats noise in your head.

06

"I'm on my phone too much"

STATE // THE SCROLL

THE FEELING

You know you are doomscrolling. You have said "ten more minutes" three times already. You can feel the brain rot setting in.

WHAT THE APP DOES

No lecture — you already know. Just light friction: put the phone across the room, then start a 15-minute timer on one thing.

WHY IT WORKS

The hard part is the decision, not the studying. When a prompt makes the decision for you, the next action gets cheap. Friction beats willpower — every time.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN Phone across the room, screen down. 15-minute timer. One task.

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: **Move the phone. The rest follows.**

07

"I'm panicking"

STATE // THE RED ZONE

THE FEELING

Physical symptoms. Tight chest, shaking, tears close. The exam is in an hour or tomorrow and your brain is in full threat mode.

WHAT THE APP DOES

A 90-second reset first — box breathing or 5-4-3-2-1 grounding. No "just calm down"; that has never worked on anyone. After the reset: one small thing you can still control right now.

WHY IT WORKS

Panic narrows your thinking to "I am failing." Ninety seconds of physiological reset widens the lens just enough to see one controllable action. You do not need to feel calm. You need 90 seconds of not spiraling.

TRY IT NOW // 2 MIN In 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4 — four rounds. Then write the three points you DO know.

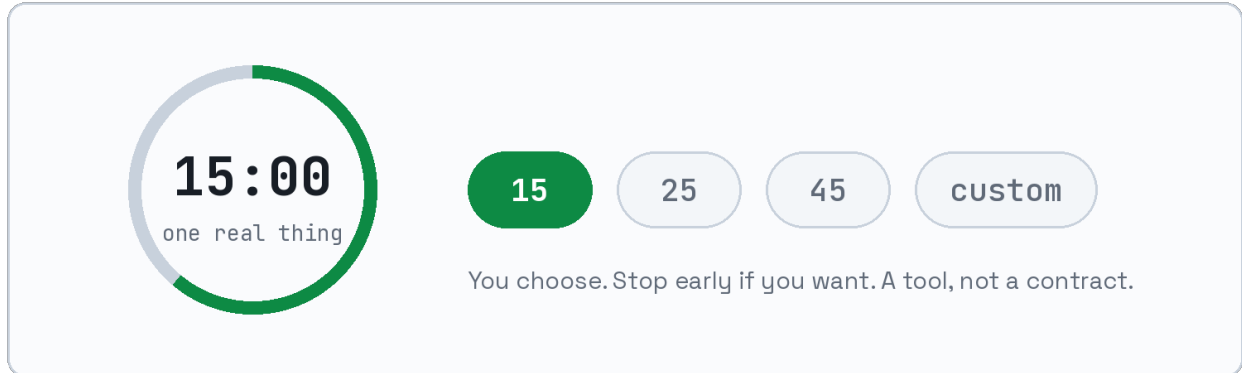
IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING: **Body first. Brain second. Then one thing.**

SECTION 05 //

The Toolkit

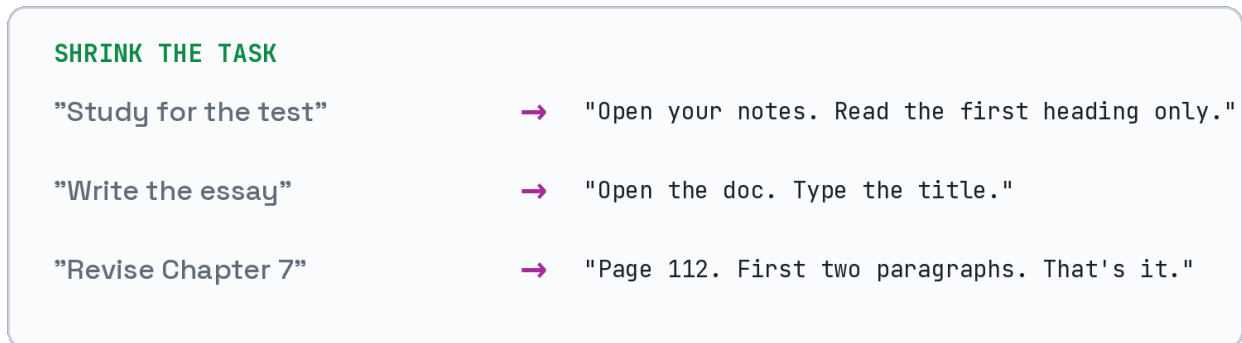
Six tools. Each one exists for a specific stuck moment — nothing is decoration.

The Focus Timer



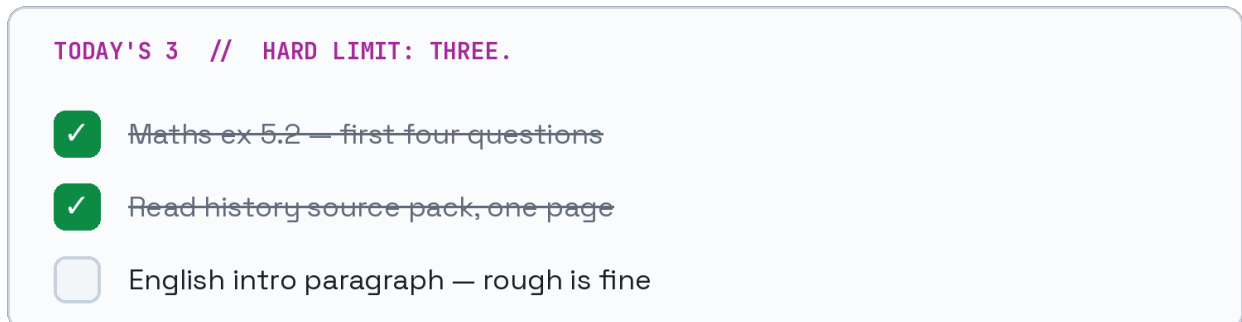
Most people who start a 15-minute timer keep going. The ones who stop have still done 15 minutes they would not have done otherwise. That counts.

Shrink the Task



The single most useful tool in the app. The magic is not the suggestion itself — it is that your brain stops treating the task as one giant unmovable block.

Today's 3



A checklist with a hard limit of three, because long checklists are just overwhelm with checkboxes. Unfinished items do not carry over with guilt attached. Finish all three and you may add more — but the default stays small, because small is sustainable.

Brain Dump & Panic Reset

Brain Dump (for “My brain is loud”): two minutes, type everything, no structure. Then pick one thing from the list and start it.

Panic Reset (for “I’m panicking”): 90 seconds of box breathing — in 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4 — or 5-4-3-2-1 grounding. Then one small controllable action.

The Comeback Screen

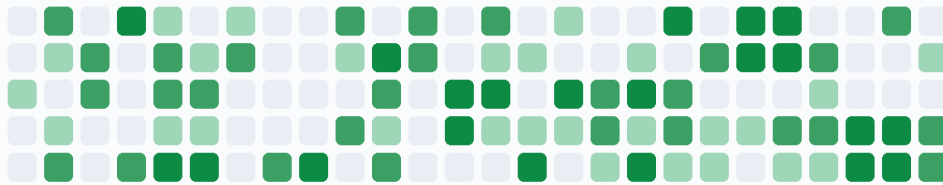
THE COMEBACK SCREEN

Good to see you back.
Yesterday didn’t happen. Today does.
[one tiny action >>]

Non-negotiable for long-term use. Gone for a week? The first screen is not a streak funeral or a guilt tally. It is a calm welcome and one tiny action. The app is on your side, not keeping score.

The Heatmap

YOUR MINUTES // NO XP. NO STREAKS. NO LEAGUES.



Gaps are just gaps. Nothing resets. Nothing is lost.

A quiet record of minutes spent. No XP, no leagues, no badges — nothing that can be “lost.” Just proof of effort, owned by you. You decide what it means.

SECTION 06 //

Real Moments

Sometimes it helps to see the exact words and the exact next step. Four realistic runs:

SUNDAY 19:42 – TEST ON WEDNESDAY

You pick “Test tomorrow” (it’s Wednesday, but the panic feels the same). The app: pick the most urgent subject. Life Sciences. Then three moves: brain-dump the circulatory system for 8 minutes, do question 2 of the June past paper in 12, check the memo and write down the one fact you missed. You do the first one. You feel slightly less doomed. You stop there. That is enough for tonight.

TUESDAY 16:17 – 47 MINUTES INTO YOUR PHONE

You pick “I’m on my phone too much.” The app: “Yeah. Put it across the room. Then 15 minutes on one thing.” You do. Fifteen minutes later you have finished four maths questions and feel like a person again.

THURSDAY 22:58 – ZERO WORK ALL DAY

You pick “I wasted the day.” The app: “Yeah, that sucks. The day isn’t over. One thing worth 20 minutes.” It suggests one page of history notes — just the causes, stop after a page if you want. You do it. You go to bed having read one page instead of nothing. The day ends differently in your head.

FRIDAY 15:30 – LOAD-SHEDDING, PROJECT DUE MONDAY

Power is off, laptop is flat, phone has 20%. You pick “I’m behind.” The app: “We’re not catching up today. Pick the one thing you can do with the battery you’ve got.” You pick the section that works offline. It shrinks it: write the heading plus three bullets of what you already know. Twelve minutes, done, phone dies. When the power returns, you have something to build on instead of a blank page.

SECTION 07 //

A Day in the Life

Not a prescribed routine — just one honest example of Rescue inside an ordinary, slightly chaotic day.

07:40 Wake up already behind

Pick “I’m behind” on the way to school. One thing that matters most today: the maths homework due period 3. Shrunk to “first three questions only.” You screenshot them. Slightly less doomed.

10:15 Free period, brain is loud

Two-minute brain dump. The English essay intro rises to the top. 15-minute timer. 180 words. Not the whole essay — enough to feel human.

15:45 Home, phone in hand

“I’m on my phone too much.” Phone across the room. 25-minute timer on the history source analysis that has been glaring at you for three days. You do 18 minutes and stop. You earned the evening.

21:50 One more thing before bed

“I can’t start” on the revision you promised yourself. Shrunk to “first five flashcards only.” Done. The day had four small wins instead of one long avoidance.

SECTION 08 //

When It Still Feels Hard

Rescue is simple on purpose. Sometimes even simple hits resistance. Field answers:

“I picked a state but I still can’t do the thing.”

Shrink it again. The suggestion might still be too big for tonight. Run Shrink the Task on the suggestion itself: “read one page” becomes “open the book to page 47.” There is no floor below which shrinking stops working.

“I did 15 minutes but feel guilty it wasn’t more.”

That is the old shame pattern trying to reattach. The app has no opinion about whether 15 minutes was enough. You did 15 when you felt like zero. That is the win. Close the app.

“I keep picking the same state every day.”

That is information, not failure. If “I can’t start” is your daily state, the resistance is real and consistent — and Rescue is built for exactly that. Consistency of the tool matters more than variety of states.

“It helped once, but now I’m avoiding the app too.”

Normal. Tools that help with avoidance can themselves get avoided once shame builds. The comeback screen exists for this exact loop. Open it. Pick any state. Do one thing. The counter resets to now.

“It feels too basic.”

That is the point. Most systems are too complex for the moments you are already overwhelmed. Rescue stays basic so it still works when your brain is at its most resistant. The sophistication is in the simplicity.

“The small thing felt like cheating.”

That voice is all-or-nothing thinking wearing a disguise. One real thing on a zero-energy day is not cheating — it is the entire point. The easy win still rewrites the story of the day.

“I forget the app exists when I need it most.”

Put the icon where the avoidance happens — on the home screen, next to Instagram and WhatsApp. Finding Rescue must cost less friction than staying stuck.

“My friends swear by streaks and leaderboards.”

Different tools for different brains. If gamification works for them without creating dread, great. Rescue is for the people it breaks. You can even use both — whatever works on the day.

SECTION 09 //

The Science, in Plain Language

You do not need the research to use Rescue. But on the days you want to know why this works, here it is — short version.

Starting is the expensive part

Resistance peaks at the very beginning of a task and usually collapses once you cross the threshold. That is why “two-minute rule” advice keeps resurfacing: it is not about motivation, it is about making the threshold cheap. Shrink the Task and one-tap timers are that principle, automated.

Decisions made in advance actually happen

Research on implementation intentions — “when X happens, I will do Y” — shows they dramatically increase follow-through. Rescue installs one for you: when I feel stuck, I open the app and pick the state. The decision is pre-made; you just execute it.

Procrastination is emotion, not laziness

Avoidance is mostly emotion-regulation: the dread about the task feels worse than the task, so the brain dodges the feeling by dodging the work. Shame makes the dodge stronger — which is why streak-guilt and red progress bars backfire. Rescue lowers the emotional price of returning, and the comeback screen exists so the price never compounds.

Externalising quiets the noise

Expressive-writing studies show that dumping worries onto a page frees working memory, especially for anxious students. Two minutes of brain dump is not journaling as a lifestyle. It is taking the tabs your brain has open and moving them somewhere they cannot autoplay.

SECTION 10 //

Built for Real School Life

Rescue was shaped by South African school reality, not a Silicon Valley demo day.

Load-shedding & data

The core flows work offline once the app is installed. Power off, data finished — you can still open it, pick a state, and run a timer. History and heatmap sync when you are back online.

Late nights

Plenty of learners only get real study time after 21:00, after transport, chores and supper. Rescue does not lecture about better routines. It meets you at 22:30 and helps you do one useful thing before bed.

Shared phones & privacy

No school name, no profile, no social login. Your history stays on your device. No notification will announce “Time to study!” in front of the whole family. Nothing reports to parents or teachers — ever.

What Rescue is not

- **Not a full study system.** Flashcards, spaced repetition, past-paper strategy — that is the full ShiftGlitch OS. Rescue is what gets you to the point where opening it feels possible.
- **Not a motivation machine.** It will not make you excited about studying. It helps you act without excitement — which is the more useful skill.
- **Not therapy.** The grounding and brain-dump tools help with racing thoughts and panic, but they are not a substitute for professional support when that is needed.
- **Not a surveillance tool.** No reports, no “we noticed you didn’t open the app” messages. It is on your side, not watching you.

Where it fits: use Rescue to do the first 15 minutes. Then, if you want, switch to the deeper ShiftGlitch tools — or stay in Rescue. Both are fine. The goal was never to make you dependent on an app. It is to make you less dependent on perfect motivation.

SECTION 11 //

Straight From the Research

Rescue was not designed from what experts think teens need. It came from what teens actually said — in Reddit threads, app-store reviews, and StudyTok comments. Each quote below built a feature.

| **"My start button is absent."**

→ Why the app opens with states instead of a dashboard. Name the stuck moment, give one small door out.

| **"I feel too guilty to open the app after skipping a week."**

→ Why the comeback screen exists and why there are no streak-loss screens anywhere.

| **"I can spot my buddy-GPT from a mile away."**

→ Why the voice is dry, brief, and older-sibling — never cheerful coach.

| **"The guilt is so overwhelming it paralyses me."**

→ Why every state validates first. Naming the guilt without adding to it lowers the wall.

| **"I have a test tomorrow that I know 100% I'm going to fail."**

→ Why "Test tomorrow" gives three next-hour actions instead of a plan and a lecture.

| **"I used to feel guilty my notes didn't look like the ones online."**

→ Why there are no aesthetics, no comparison features, no 'that girl' energy. One more than zero beats pretty notes.

ONE MORE THAN ZERO



ONE MORE THAN ZERO. THAT IS THE STANDARD.

That is the standard. Not “I studied for three hours.” Not “I was perfectly focused.”

One more than zero.

If you open Rescue and do one real thing — one paragraph, one question, one 15-minute block — you have already beaten the version of today where you did nothing.

Some days it turns into more. Some days it stays one thing. Both are fine.

The app will be here when you need it. No judgment. No score to settle.

Just a start button that works.

SHIFTGLITCH.NET

RESCUE // QUICK REFERENCE

Screenshot this page. Keep it where you'll see it.

"I can't start"

Shrink the Task >> one tiny first action

"I'm behind"

One thing only >> shrink it or start a timer

"Test tomorrow"

Three concrete next-hour actions

"I wasted the day"

One thing worth 20 minutes

"My brain is loud"

2-min brain dump >> pick one thing

"I'm on my phone too much"

Phone across the room >> 15-min timer

"I'm panicking"

90-sec breathing >> one controllable thing

— CORE RULES —

Validate first. Then one action.

Timer is yours: 15 / 25 / 45 / custom. Stop early if you want.

No penalty for gaps. Ever.

One more than zero is the win.

Open it when you can't start.

RESCUE is part of the ShiftGlitch study system.

Grades and aura fall up.

SHIFTGLITCH.NET