

The Shutdown Ritual: 10 Minutes That Separate Work from Home

Ritual that tells your brain: work is done, now you're here

Good engineering teams run a shutdown checklist at the end of every deploy, closing loose threads so nothing carries risk overnight. Your commute used to be that checklist for your brain, except nobody designed it, it just happened because you were stuck in a car for 30 minutes with nothing to do but decompress. Remote work deleted that buffer. Now you go from Slack to pickup line to bedtime with zero transition, and you wonder why you're short-tempered by 6:15. A shutdown ritual rebuilds the buffer on purpose.

What you need: 10 uninterrupted minutes at the end of your work day, before you see your kids.

The steps

1. **Review what you actually did today.** (3 minutes) Not your to-do list, your done list. This closes the loop your brain is still chewing on.
2. **Write down what carries over to tomorrow.** (2 minutes) One line per item. Getting it out of your head and onto paper is the whole trick.
3. **Close every open tab and app.** (1 minute) Physically close them. An open Slack tab is an open loop, even if you're not looking at it.
4. **Say a shutdown phrase, out loud or in your head.** (10 seconds) "Shutdown complete." Feels silly. Works anyway, ask any engineer.
5. **Change something physical.** (3 minutes) Shoes, shirt, splash water on your face, step outside for a minute. Your body needs the cue as much as your brain does.

Your shutdown checklist

- ☐ Reviewed what I did today
- ☐ Wrote down what carries to tomorrow
- ☐ Closed all tabs and apps
- ☐ Said the shutdown phrase
- ☐ Changed something physical

When it goes sideways

A work fire happens during your 10 minutes. Fine, handle it, then do the ritual anyway before you walk in the door. The ritual is what closes the loop, not the timing.

You feel too rushed at pickup to spare 10 minutes. Shrink it to 90 seconds: write the carryover list, close the laptop, one deep breath. Even the compressed version beats zero.

Your family interrupts you mid-ritual. Let them. The ritual isn't sacred, the intention behind it is. Finish what you can and let the rest go.

It sounds silly until you try it and realize you stopped bringing the stress-fog into the kitchen.



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