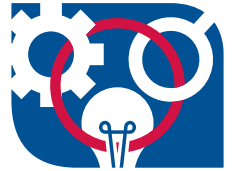




**Luther
College**



**TED Hub
Luther College**



Work, Rest, Play, Repeat

Why routines and self-regulation are essential for student growth.

Work, Rest, Play, Repeat

Why routines and self-regulation are essential for student growth.

Rhiannon Ward
Head of Research and Development

Routines and self-regulation

What is routine?

It's the same every 'school day' morning.....the alarm starts us awake with a *beep, beep, beep*, and the first decision of our day needs to be made. Do I get up immediately, or hit snooze and steal a few precious extra minutes of slumber? Once you commit to getting out of bed, the decisions continue. Tea or coffee? What's for breakfast? What should I wear? What should I take for lunch? These small but busy decisions comprise so much of our mental time and are crucial for our daily functioning. To make these trivial decisions seem easier, and to minimise the mental load, enter: a routine.

A routine is defined by Cambridge simply as being “the things that you do every day at the same time”, but what is important about a routine is why and how we use them to our benefit. Psychologists and educators tell us that children who arrive to school punctually, organised and presenting in a calm and unperturbed manner are far more likely to concentrate and engage with the work set for them in their lessons. In juxtaposition, a child who is often late, is disorganised and presents as stressed and anxious, may in fact be lacking from a sufficient morning routine which only compounds their feelings of overwhelm. Generally speaking, humans are creatures of habit, and we crave “a routine to provide structure and discipline in (our) lives”, (Skilled at Life, 2025). On a broader scale, feeling empowered and in control of our own selves can bolster our personal wellbeing, as we feel positive that we are moving through the processes of our day with ease, rather than wading through the muck to get to the end of our busy schedule.



Psychologist Kendra Cherry has identified five key reasons why people need routines to be successful:

- They provide structure and a sense of control.
- They improve focus, organisation, and productivity.
- They contribute to better mental health.
- They reduce stress and promote mood stability.
- They support creativity and boost overall health.

(Cherry, K., 2025)

Without a regular routine, an established set of conditions, the simple decisions required in any given day can seem mountainous. A routine can lead to better student outcomes, but it can also lead to more harmonious family life, as everyone has an expected sequence of events to follow. Below are some tips and strategies that you might like to consider:

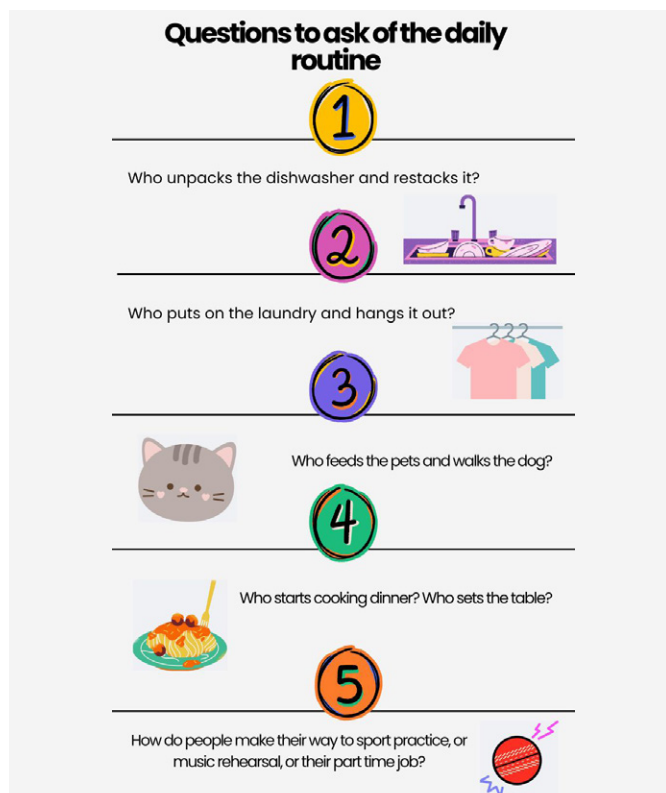
- Are bags, lunchboxes and uniforms arranged the night before, so that everyone may leave the house without these complications in the morning?
- In starting your day, do all members of the household get up at the same time? Do they all have breakfast before they leave?
- When you return of an evening, is there a routine around housework?

It is important for families to encourage and activate routines in their lives to better support all members of their household. A routine can provide that sense of control, strength and order to the daily rhythm so that when things get tough, the insignificant decisions do not need to loom. By establishing a common approach to household tasks, this may make such domestic chores seem less onerous and in turn, provide stability. And whilst we've all heard the idiom, 'best laid plans....', by and large, if we are conscious to engage daily routines, we are far more likely to support every member of our household in feeling calm, controlled and empowered to be the best versions of themselves that they can be. Routines are important, but at their cornerstone is self-regulation.

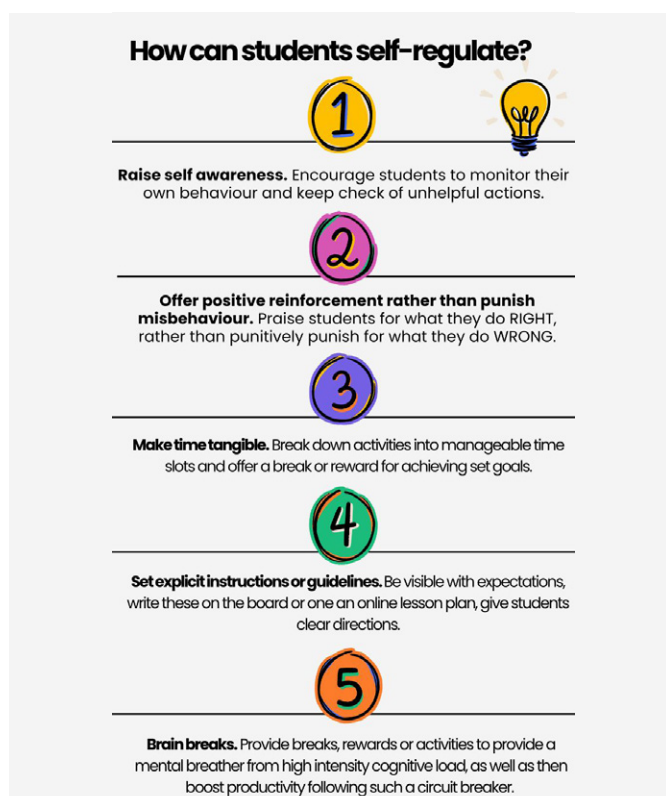
What is self-regulation?

At the kernel of a good routine is an individual's capacity to self-regulate. A self-regulated person will understand the necessity to get out of bed even if they still feel tired, will pack their lunch the night before even if they arrive home late, will ensure that their uniform is ready to avoid the stress of finding it in the morning. Self-management, or self-regulation, means being able and willing to do all the things that may not necessarily be 'fun and games' but are crucial to functioning successfully.

Educational psychologist Andrea Bell has defined self-regulation as being, "able to have control [of oneself] by oneself", (Bell, A., 2016), in that being able to harness our emotional responses to situations and keep them in check, tends to bring calmer interactions and a more successful ability to adapt. Now while this might sound like a difficult thing to expect of our toddlers and very young children, by the time adolescence sets in most children should be well underway to harnessing their own personal regulation. Whilst primary school aged children are still often very reactive, rambunctious and unable to recoil their own responses to distractions in the



TED Hub 2025



TED Hub 2025

classroom, developmentally this does start to shift as time marches on. A VCE classroom for instance will look and feel very different to a Year 3 learning space, and much of this is due to the child's ability to self-regulate with greater efficiency.

Leading researcher in the field of self-regulation, Dr Shyam Barr, has become a thought-leader when it comes to teaching the next generation of students to better self-regulate. His research documents the rise in awareness that has emerged over recent years, beginning with the Gonski Report of 2018 which clearly detailed the necessity for Australian schools to "give more prominence to the acquisition of the general capabilities, (such as) critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability", (Gonski, D., et al 2018), and outlined the ways in which these skills are fundamentally grounded first, by individual self-regulation. Dr Barr's work outlines that self-regulated learning is really an 'umbrella term', (Panadero, E., 2023) that incorporates:

Metacognition: how a learner thinks about and regulates their cognition

Cognition: how a learner thinks

Motivation: a learner's reason to act

Barr, S., (2024)

Barr articulates self-regulated learning using a metaphor, as he describes the 'living room of the mind' to always be controllable through our own self-regulated 'TV remote'. Each button represents a different channel or state that we might take, and these will change over the course of the day or even over the timespan of a single lesson. Barr articulates that having a strong ability to self-regulate gives students a more robust capacity to engage in the learning cycle of planning, monitoring and then evaluating their interactions, (Barr., S., 2024). And whilst yes, there is a direct correlation between academic results and students who have stronger capacity to self-regulate, academic outcomes should not be the sole motivator here. Rather, students who can activate self-control, manage their emotional responses and review their own learning, are in a strong position to become more confident learners, which in turn, may become the new classroom 'routine'.

What's motivation got to do with it?

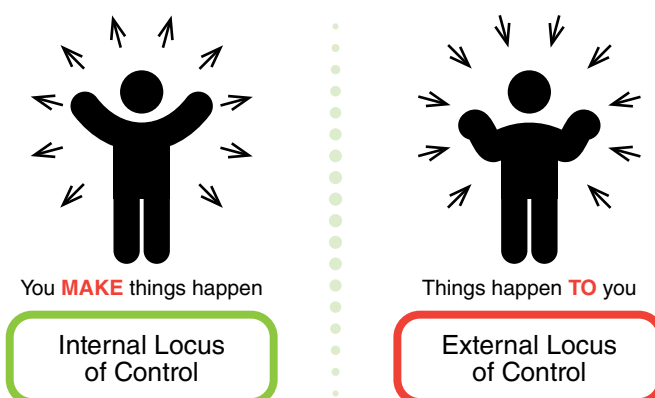
One of the main platforms from which self-regulated learning can launch is motivation, with cognition and metacognition being the other two elements to close the trinity. Dr Barr's thesis fundamentally states that students with a high level of intrinsic motivation, or internal locus of control, will be able to, "begin tasks promptly without external prompting... maintain focus...(and) take responsibility for their learning and outcomes", (Barr, S. 2024).

Ultimately, as parents, you likely expect your children to show up to school each day with this attitude; you want them able and willing to focus their attention and in fact want to do the work for themselves, rather than just to please the teacher. This intrinsic drive is often referred to as an 'internal locus of control', which articulates that people with this drive, who believe that their life and choices are in their own hands, can and will make things happen. In juxtaposition, those among us with an 'external locus' of control will be far more likely to blame external forces for their shortcomings or failings and are far less likely to take charge of their own decisions.

Self-regulation theory is designed to encourage students to recognise the integral part they play in their own learning journey and encourage this agency through deliberate classroom and life learning experiences.

Angela Duckworth's groundbreaking work, '*Grit: Why Passion and Resilience are the Secrets to Success*', details the dangers of being 'distracted by talent' but rather urges people to lean into the things in life that are hard. She articulates

Which is your Locus of Control?



Locus of Control

that routines and self-discipline can be enriching for the soul, but furthermore, can reveal to an individual their purpose. *Grit* posits that people need more than “determination, they need direction”, (Duckworth, A., 2017), and she believes that this is often only exposed through trial, error, failings and tenacity. By following routines, completing tasks despite their difficulty and always looking ahead rather than wallowing in what can no longer be changed, this will expose a person’s grit, and will set them in good stead for the years ahead.

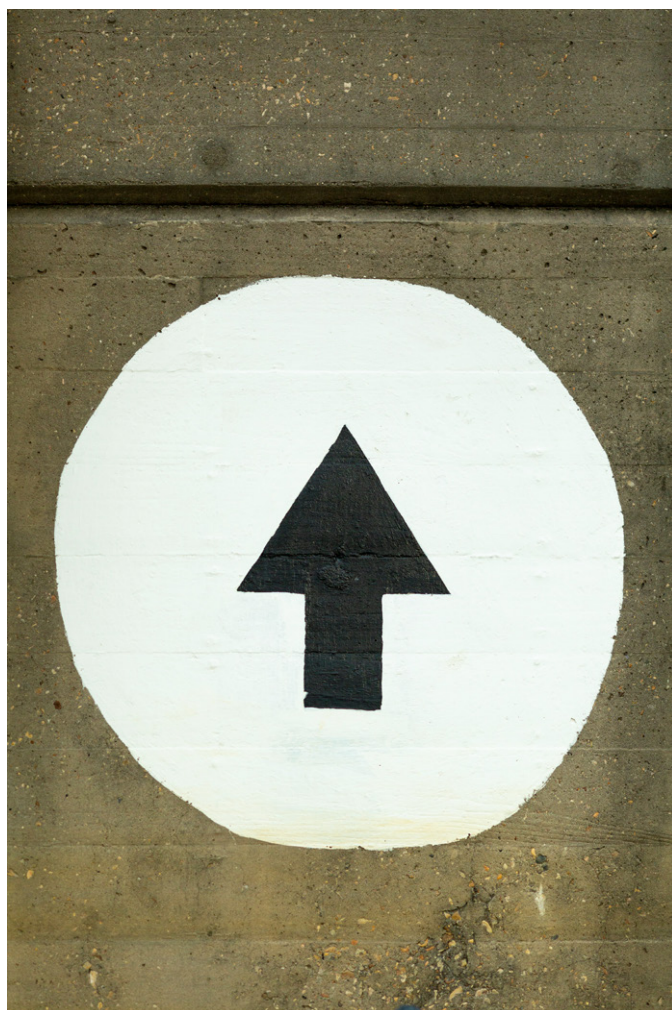
There is no use basking in ‘natural talent’ or ‘high IQ’, if there is no drive to propel you into your future. In class, we must be encouraging our students to use their gifts to strive to be their best, and at the same time, these messages should be transferred at home. Effort over talent will bring out your best on a Maths test, effort over talent will bring out your best on the sporting field, effort over talent will give you that edge over another candidate when applying for that part time job. Ultimately, we must be teaching our children to try and try again. And whilst of course natural ability and a predilection of skill in certain areas can be a great starting point for human success, at the end of the day, this will only get us so far. What we need in spades is “high motivation and perseverance”, (Duckworth, A., 2017), to propel us towards our goal and strive to achieve the best that we can, for ourselves.

To accelerate, or not to accelerate?

At Luther College, when it is time for a middle years student who has shown tenacity, grit and growth over their three-year journey, to enter the world of the red-tie senior years, the conversation of academic acceleration is often raised. Should a high achieving student be encouraged to accelerate through a particular pathway? Should a student with a strong work ethic and highly developed level of motivation be allowed to step up? And if so, is this really the right choice?

Mr Tim Lee, Luther College’s Head of Year 12 and VCE Coordinator, has this conversation with families year after year, and he suggests that whilst *“the program is a great option for students (in Year 9 going into Year 10) with a very strong work ethic”*, it is *“not for everyone and we would recommend against (acceleration) for students with many competing interests...or who are yet to think about their potential pathways.”* Mr Lee agrees that academic acceleration will suit highly motivated students who *“are ready for the challenge and rigour the experience entails. It really helps students develop skills for VCE early and understand what is required to achieve compelling results”*.

Luther College’s Head of Year 10, Mrs Angelina Eysers, works with students and families as they grapple with these questions, and agrees with Mr Lee’s feedback, keen to remind students that they must have a strong work ethic to manage additional study, warning *“acceleration requires students to balance both the accelerated subject and Year 10 studies. With the demands and rigour of VCE, students may be inclined to prioritise their accelerated subject. However, to build a solid foundation for VCE long term, students must give equal time to their VCE accelerated study and Year 10 subjects.”* Eysers and the VCE teaching team at times do see students try to give more weight to the single VCE subject of study over their mainstream coursework, and ultimately this is not what is advised. This sort of self-selection is detrimental to the long-term academic successes for those students, as they may be depleting themselves at the Year 10 level more broadly. Overall, accelerating can be highly successful for the right students, but only when grit, perseverance and a determination to succeed are already present.



The research supports the Luther College perspective, because if the student is capable and willing, then yes, “each child has a right to realise his or her potential”, (Merrotsy, P., 2025). But these foundations are laid during the middle years and can be reflected in things like classroom attention, application to challenging situations, and capacity to complete homework in a detailed and timely manner.



Homework, or ‘home learning’, as it is sometimes referred, is designed by teachers to strengthen the neural connections that students have with content in between lessons. Over the course of a timetable, we understand that most subjects do not run over consecutive days, or if they do, they will then have a break of multiple days before the next session. Homework is a teachers’ way of addressing these gaps, by setting brief but tangible tasks to do in between these face-to-face learning sessions to deepen knowledge and skills. Educational researcher Eva Moskowitz argues that homework is not only important, but it is “a linchpin to effective K–12 education”, (Moskowitz, E., 2022). Moskowitz reminds us that the time a child spends in the classroom is minimal compared to the hours in a day, and through her research she has found that “the learning that does or does not take place in the many hours outside of school has a monumental effect on children’s academic success and is a root cause of educational inequity” (Moskowitz, E., 2022). Building from this, she asserts that home learning helps to build grit, perseverance and tenacity in students in a highly

scaffolded way, and when a teacher does not set homework, “it reflects an unconscious conviction that kids can’t learn without adults”, which is the direct opposite to the concept of perseverance, (Moskowitz, E., 2022). This research proves that striving for success outside of the classroom and independently of the adult teacher can strengthen a student’s motivation, determination and ultimately, boost their grit.

So, if we return to the start of our ‘school day’, when the alarm wakes us with that artificial ‘beep, beep, beep’, wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could all leap into our day, routine at the ready. We would minimise the mundane decisions, show up to school and work in a confident and efficient manner, and then be ready to tackle the more complex components of our day, with ease. Fundamentally, our determination, our perseverance, our grit, would **always** shine through, and we would **always** be poised and ready to make an impact.

References

- Barr, S., (2024), *Educate to Self-Regulate: Empowering learners for lifelong success*. Ambra Press.
- Cambridge online dictionary, retrieved from: [ROUTINE | English meaning - Cambridge Essential British](#) (2025)
- Cherry, K., (2025), *The Importance of Maintaining Structure and Routine in Stressful Times*. Retrieved from: [The Importance of Keeping a Routine During Stressful Times](#)
- Duckworth, A., (2017), *Grit: Why Passion and Resilience are the Secrets to Success*. Penguin Random House.
- Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., et al (2018), *Through growth to achievement: report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools*. Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Merrotsy, P., (2025), retrieved from: [Sage Reference - Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology - Acceleration](#)
- Moskowitz, E., (2022), *Why Homework Matters*. Retrieved from: [Why homework matters](#)
- Panadero, E., Jonsson, A., Pinedo, L., et al, (2023). *Effects of rubrics on academic performance, self-regulated learning and self-efficacy: A meta-analytic review*. Educational Psychology Review, 35. Retrieved from: [Effects of Rubrics on Academic Performance, Self-Regulated Learning, and self-Efficacy: a Meta-analytic Review | Educational Psychology Review](#)
- Skilled at Life, retrieved from: [18 Reasons Why a Daily Routine Is So Important - Skilled at Life](#) (2025)

Luther College
Plymouth Road
Croydon Hills Vic 3136
Phone: (03) 9724 2000
www.luther.vic.edu.au



**Luther
College**