Closing the Day

A fifteen-minute routine to mark the end of the workday.

You are home. But your head stayed at the office, replaying the day and getting ready for tomorrow. This guide offers a boundary: fifteen minutes between your day and your evening. A five-step routine and a page to fill in each evening.

1 Capture

Get everything that is still going round in your head onto paper: tasks, ideas, worries. Do not sort it yet.

2 Sort

For each line, make one decision: tomorrow, later, or never. It is not yours to carry tonight.

3 Tomorrow, in three lines

Write down tomorrow's three priorities. Tomorrow is already planned - on paper, not in your head.

4 The closing signal

One simple gesture, the same every evening: close the notebook, put the work phone down, tell yourself "the day is done."

5 The transition

Ease into your evening with something that feels good: a shower, a walk, setting the table. Your evening starts here.

Why close the day

Researchers call mentally switching off from work "psychological detachment". In a diary study, it was associated with positive mood and low fatigue. This does not test this five-step routine or prove that it improves sleep.

Sonnentag, S., & Bayer, U.-V. (2005). Switching off mentally: Predictors and consequences of psychological detachment from work during off-job time. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10(4), 393-414. DOI: 10.1037/1076-8998.10.4.393.

My page for closing the day

Fifteen minutes each evening. Fill it in by hand, before the closing signal.

Evening of

What is still going round in my head

Tomorrow's three priorities

1

2

3

Later, or never

Closing signal: "the day is done."

COMPLETED EXAMPLE · FICTIONAL

Tuesday, 6:47 pm

Claire, a project manager for three months, just before she walks through her front door.

What is still going round in my head

Reply to client D. about the delay on batch 2. Just thinking about the email annoys me.

Prepare the 9 am meeting with senior management and work out the figures for option B.

Call the school back about Friday's trip.

Worried I forgot to approve the supplier's invoice.

Tomorrow's three priorities

1. 9 am: management meeting - option B with figures, one page.
2. Email client D.: propose a time to talk, no apologies.
3. Check the supplier's invoice - five minutes, at 2 pm.

Later, or never

School: a phone call on Thursday at noon is enough.

Rethink how the team is organised: next week, not tonight.

Closing signal: notebook closed, phone left in the hallway.

The door closes. So does the day.