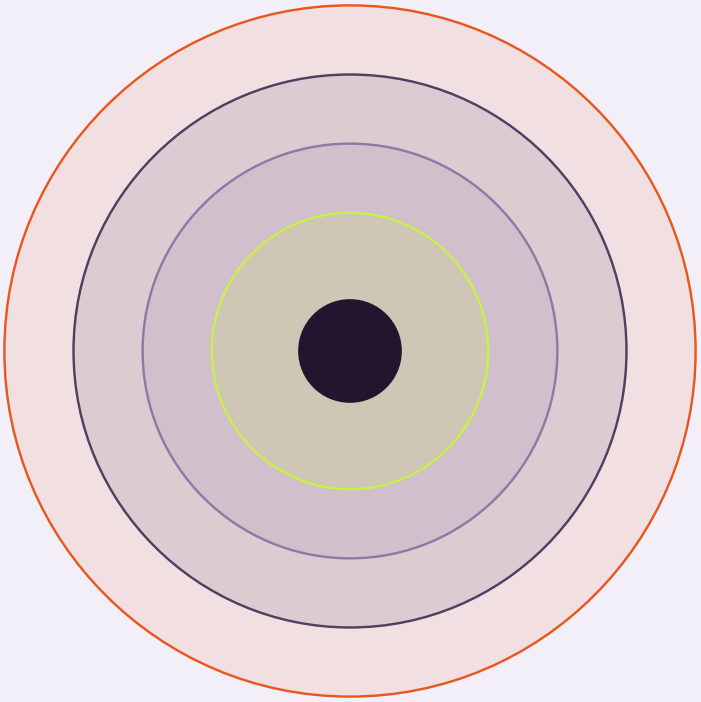


Wreck This Journal

A reading of the book by Keri Smith (2007)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Wreck This Journal, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Keri Smith is an illustrator and author whose books ask readers to make things rather than only read them. Wreck This Journal is a journal in which nearly every page gives an instruction to mess the book up: scribble on it, tear it, get it dirty, take it outside. The idea is that perfectionism and the fear of spoiling a clean page stop many people from making anything at all. By asking for damage, the book takes away the chance of doing it wrong, and the reader finds that accidents and process are often where the interesting work starts. There are no case studies or chapters to read; the reader's own wrecked pages become the content. An expanded edition with new pages followed, and Smith went on to write related books such as How to Be an Explorer of the World and Mess.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A page you are allowed to ruin is a page you will actually use.

Plenty of nice notebooks sit empty because the first page feels too important to spoil. The book removes that weight by asking for damage before anything else. Once the page is already a mess, there is nothing left to protect, and you start making things.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Perfectionism often looks like high standards but works like fear.

Waiting for the right idea, the right pen or the right mood feels like care. Most of the time it is a way of avoiding the risk of making something bad. The journal's instructions are silly on purpose, so there is no standard to fall short of.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Accidents are material, not mistakes to hide.

A spill, a smudge or a torn corner can be the start of something you would never have planned. Smith returns to this idea across her work, and her later book Mess is built around it. The habit to build is looking at what went wrong and asking what it could become.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The doing is the point, even when nothing finished comes out of it.

Most pages of the journal do not produce art anyone would frame. They produce a few minutes of making without judging. That practice is what carries over into the work you do care about.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A clear instruction can be more freeing than a blank page.

A blank page asks you to decide everything at once. A short, odd instruction decides the first step for you, so you can start straight away. Constraints lower the cost of beginning.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Making and breaking can be the same act.

Tearing, crumpling and staining are usually how you ruin something. In the journal they are how you add to it. Seeing destruction as one more way to make marks loosens the grip of keeping things neat.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Take your work out into the world and the world gets into your work.

Several of the journal's pages send it outside, into weather, pockets and everyday places. A journal that travels picks up dirt, found things and ideas you would not get at a desk. Ordinary places become somewhere you can make things.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Adults often need permission to play, and a book can give it.

Children scribble without asking whether they are good at it. Somewhere along the way most people stop. Having the permission printed on the page makes it easier to start again without feeling foolish.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A wrecked journal ends up as a record of the person who wrecked it.

Every stain and scribble comes from a real moment: a coffee, a bus ride, a bad day. By the end, the book holds a period of your life more honestly than a neat diary would. Readers have long shared their wrecked copies with each other for that reason.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Buy a cheap notebook to wreck
- [ ] Ruin the first page today
- [ ] Pack a small messy kit
- [ ] Write twenty prompts of your own
- [ ] Choose one outside spot

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Wreck one page in five minutes
- ◯ Keep the pages that went wrong
- ◯ Show one page without apologising

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Buy a cheap notebook to wreck

Get the plainest, cheapest notebook you can find, so it can never feel precious.

On the inside cover, write that this one is for wrecking.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Ruin the first page today

Before you write or draw anything good, spoil page one.

Scribble on it, spill a little coffee, or tear the corner. Now nothing after it can ruin the book.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Pack a small messy kit

Put a cheap pen, a crayon, a glue stick and a roll of tape in a pouch with the notebook.

Keep it where you will see it, by the door or on the table.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Write twenty prompts of your own

On the last page, list twenty short instructions in the same spirit, such as draw with your eyes closed or use only your other hand.

When you are stuck, pick one at random.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Choose one outside spot

Pick a place away from home, such as a park bench, a bus seat or a café table.

Take the notebook there this week and do one page.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Wreck one page in five minutes

Set a five-minute timer, pick a prompt and stop when it rings, however the page looks.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Keep the pages that went wrong

Never tear out a page because it looks bad.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Show one page without apologising

Once a month, show a friend a page as it is.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

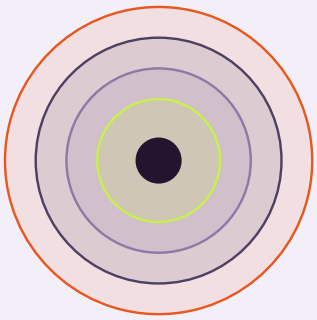
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Ruin the first page on purpose, and every page after it is free.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER KERI SMITH