

Community Body-Doubling Guide

A practical guide for hosting free, low-pressure co-working sessions in person or online.

WHAT BODY DOUBLING IS

Body doubling means doing a task alongside other people who are also working. Nobody has to coach, supervise, or even work on the same thing. The shared presence can make starting, returning to, and staying with a task easier.

The goal of the session

Create a room where people can bring the thing they have been avoiding, choose a realistic next step, work quietly beside other humans, take breaks without apology, and leave with more done than they had before. This is not a productivity contest, class, therapy group, or accountability boot camp.

What you need

- ☐ A predictable start and end time. 60-120 minutes works well.
- ☐ A host or facilitator. Their job is to hold the structure, not monitor people.
- ☐ A low-distraction work area. Tables, chairs, outlets, water, and a quieter corner if possible.
- ☐ A visible timer. A phone timer, projected timer, kitchen timer, or video-call timer is enough.
- ☐ Optional supplies. Scrap paper, pens, sticky notes, chargers, fidgets, headphones, and extension cords.
- ☐ A clear free-entry policy. People should know whether drop-ins, late arrivals, and early exits are welcome.

THE CORE RULE

People are allowed to work differently. Sitting, standing, pacing, headphones, snacks, silence, doodling, taking a break, changing tasks, arriving late, leaving early, or doing something that looks “unproductive” can all be part of getting the task done.

A Simple 90-Minute Session

Use this as written or stretch/compress the work blocks to fit your group.

0:00-0:10	ARRIVAL + SETTLE	People enter, choose a seat, gather supplies, and decide what they are working on.
0:10-0:15	OPENING	Host explains the format and invites people to name or write down one goal.
0:15-0:40	WORK BLOCK 1	25 minutes of quiet work.
0:40-0:50	BREAK	10 minutes. Bathroom, stretch, snack, talk, stare at the wall.
0:50-1:15	WORK BLOCK 2	25 minutes of quiet work.
1:15-1:25	BREAK	10 minutes. Reset or switch tasks if needed.
1:25-1:30	CLOSE	Quick check-out: done, partly done, changed plans, or simply showed up. All count.

Sample opening script

Welcome! This is a body-doubling session. The basic idea is that we are all here to make it a little easier to do things beside other people.

You can work on paperwork, school, email, cleaning up files, making art, job applications, reading, planning, or anything else that makes sense in this space. You do not have to tell anyone what you are working on.

We will work quietly for 25 minutes, take a 10-minute break, then do another 25-minute block. You can take extra breaks whenever you need them. Headphones, movement, snacks, fidgets, standing, changing seats, and leaving early are all fine.

Before we begin, choose one tiny starting point. Not “finish the application,” maybe “open the application and answer the first question.” If your plan changes halfway through, that is allowed too. We are here to make doing things easier, not to prove that we can suffer through them.

I will start the timer. When it ends, I will let everyone know the break has started.

Optional check-in: “If you want, write your goal on a sticky note or say it out loud. Passing is completely fine.”

Quiet Work Rules

Post these on the table, wall, event page, or video-call chat.

- ☐ Quiet work is the default. Keep conversation for breaks or move to a designated talking area.
- ☐ Headphones are welcome. Do not assume headphones mean someone wants to be interrupted.
- ☐ No productivity policing. Do not comment on how much another person has completed.
- ☐ No unsolicited advice. Ask before troubleshooting someone else's task.
- ☐ Movement is allowed. People may pace, stretch, stim, stand, change seats, or step outside.
- ☐ Breaks are allowed anytime. Scheduled breaks are invitations, not the only permitted rest.
- ☐ Private work stays private. Do not read screens, paperwork, or documents that are not yours.
- ☐ Participation can be silent. Nobody has to introduce themselves, share a goal, or report progress.
- ☐ Leaving is not failure. People can arrive late, leave early, or come for one work block.
- ☐ Different kinds of work count. Resting, organizing, deciding, reading instructions, or asking for help may be the task.

Break timing that works

DEFAULT: 25 WORK / 10 BREAK

A 25-minute block is long enough to get momentum without turning the session into an endurance test. Ten-minute breaks allow enough time for bathrooms, snacks, movement, medication, sensory recovery, or conversation.

15 / 5	Good for high-fatigue groups, first-time sessions, or tasks with a very high activation barrier.
40 / 10	Good for reading, writing, art, coding, or other tasks where interruptions can break concentration.
50 / 15	Good for experienced groups that want longer deep-work periods and generous recovery time.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Do not shorten a promised break because people “seem ready.” Predictability is part of the accommodation. If the group wants a different rhythm, change it for the next block and announce the new timing clearly.

Virtual Body Doubling

The same structure works on Zoom, Google Meet, Discord, or another video platform.

Set up the room

- ☐ Camera optional. Being physically visible should never be required for participation.
- ☐ Microphones muted during work blocks. People can unmute during breaks if they want conversation.
- ☐ Put the schedule in the chat. Example: "Work 7:10-7:35 | Break 7:35-7:45 | Work 7:45-8:10."
- ☐ Use a visible timer if possible. Screen-share one, pin a timer participant, or announce time remaining in chat.
- ☐ Let chat stay low-pressure. People can post "starting," "stuck," "switching tasks," or celebratory updates without requiring responses.
- ☐ Allow silent entry. Do not make late arrivals verbally introduce themselves when they enter a work block.
- ☐ Offer an audio-only option. A blank screen with a room full of quiet people still works as body doubling.

Useful virtual extras

CO-WORKING CHAT PROMPTS

Before a block: "What is the smallest thing you can start?"

Midway: "No response needed: you are halfway through."

At the break: "Break time. Water, bathroom, food, movement, stare into space - pick what your body wants."

At the end: "What changed? Finished, moved forward, learned something, changed tasks, or just stayed in the room all count."

Host troubleshooting

Nobody talks at check-in.	Good. Silence is allowed. Start the timer.
Someone keeps chatting during work.	Gently redirect: "Let's save conversation for the break so the room stays usable for quiet work."
Someone is stuck.	Offer a choice: "Want help breaking it into a smaller first step, or do you want quiet company while you figure it out?"
Someone finishes early.	They can leave, rest, choose another task, or simply remain in the room.
The group has mixed energy.	Create zones if possible: quiet table / talking table, or quiet main room / optional social breakout room.

Host Quick Reference

A one-page sheet to keep beside you while you facilitate.

Before people arrive

- ☐ Timer is ready and the work/break schedule is visible.
- ☐ Quiet-work rules are posted or ready to paste into the chat.
- ☐ Water, restroom, outlet, and quieter-space information is easy to find.
- ☐ Virtual link, microphone, and timer are tested if the session is online.
- ☐ You have decided whether drop-ins, late arrivals, and early exits are welcome.
- ☐ You are prepared to treat breaks, movement, silence, and changing tasks as normal participation.

Opening in 30 seconds

SAY THIS

“Welcome. We are going to work quietly beside each other for 25 minutes, take a 10-minute break, and then do another work block. You can work however you need to. Headphones, movement, snacks, extra breaks, changing tasks, arriving late, or leaving early are all fine. Pick one tiny place to begin. Sharing your goal is optional.”

While people work

- ☐ Start and stop the timer when promised.
- ☐ Keep conversation low or move it away from the quiet work area.
- ☐ Give time reminders without requiring anyone to respond.
- ☐ Offer help only when asked, or ask permission before troubleshooting.
- ☐ Model taking breaks. The host does not have to perform constant productivity.

Closing

SIMPLE CHECK-OUT

“That is the end of our work time. If you want, notice what changed. Maybe you finished something, moved it forward, figured out the next step, changed tasks, or simply stayed in the room. All of those count.”