# The Morin Z-Reduction Task (M-ZRT)

**A Behavioral Instantiation of a Constraint-Based Model of Ease**

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## 1 Operational definition (M-ZRT effect).

The M-ZRT effect is defined as a threshold-like, discontinuous transition into a distinct high positive affect regime, occurring under monitoring-disruption constraints. A positive hit requires: (i) repeated clean failures prior to first access, (ii) abrupt onset (discontinuity rather than gradual improvement), (iii) qualitative distinctness from ordinary good mood/arousal, (iv) cross-context generalization beyond the task within 24 hours, and (v) at least one instance of persistence beyond acute stimulation when caffeine or other pharmacological enhancer is used. This definition is intended to prevent post-hoc relabeling of ordinary enjoyment as a "threshold transition".

This protocol was initially derived from intensive self-experimentation conducted over extended daily sessions, and subsequently formalized into a constraint-based behavioral framework.

## 2 Aim

To test whether evaluative monitoring (Z) suppresses access to a distinct high positive affective regime ("ease"), producing a threshold-like pattern characterized by repeated failures followed by abrupt discontinuity. Monitoring is defined as any process involving evaluation, comparison to a standard, outcome anticipation, or internal state checking. The central claim is that access to high positive affect is not limited by insufficient activation, but by evaluative monitoring acting as a gating constraint.

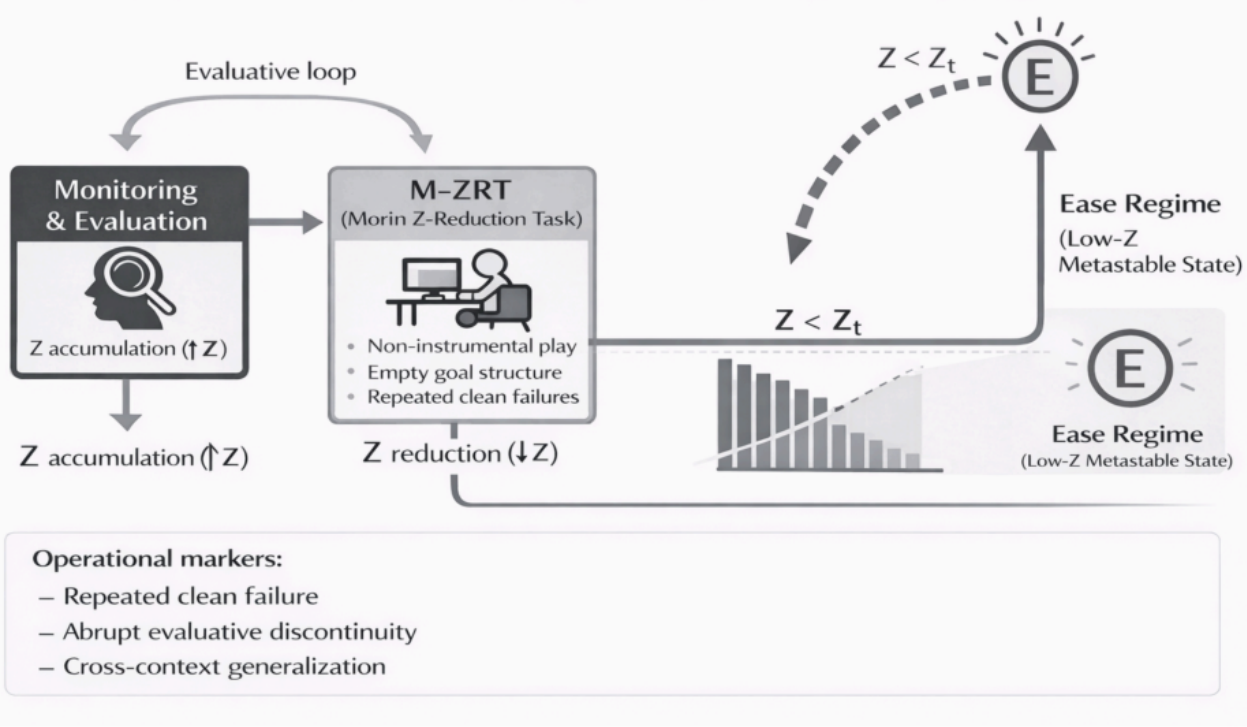


Figure 1: Schematic illustration of the M-ZRT framework. Evaluative monitoring increases Z through a self-reinforcing loop, whereas constraint-based intervention (M-ZRT) reduces Z. When Z falls below a threshold (Z < Z), the system enters a low-Z metastable "ease" regime. Operational markers include repeated clean failures, abrupt discontinuity, and cross-context generalization.

## Core manipulation

Reduction of evaluative monitoring, performance checking, and micro-optimization during a standardized low-stakes task. The manipulation is defined functionally rather than procedurally; specific implementations are interchangeable provided that they satisfy the same constraints.

## Duration

7 days

## Primary outcome (minimal log)

Daily access (0/1), latency (min), duration (min), intensity (0–10), and context.

## Canonical signature (M-ZRT effect)

Repeated clean failures prior to first access, abrupt discontinuity, qualitative distinctness from ordinary mood or arousal, cross-context generalization within 24h, and persistence beyond acute stimulation (when contextual modulators such as caffeine are present).

## Key falsifiers (non-negotiable)

1. Monitoring does not reduce success probability,
2. Contextual modulators alone reliably reproduce the effect without constraint conditions,
3. The effect correlates primarily with performance (e.g., winning or task success),
4. Reports are indistinguishable from ordinary arousal or mood improvement.

## Operational threshold marker (optional)

For lightweight logs, a transition may be flagged when access = 1 and intensity $\geq 7$. This serves as a standardized discontinuity marker rather than a full measurement model.

# 3 Evaluative load (Z) and salience

Z denotes the level of evaluative monitoring, including checking, control, and outcome-oriented processing. High Z constrains access by structuring experience around evaluation. Reducing Z increases permissiveness, but only if salience is maintained. If salience collapses, the system shifts toward low-arousal states rather than the target regime. The relevant configuration is therefore defined by $Z \downarrow$ with salience preserved or increased. The figure below illustrates these complementary conditions.

# 4 Methods

## Pre-exposure (non-instrumental framing)

Prior to the task, a brief exposure phase may be used to reduce the tendency to interpret actions in terms of goals, optimization, or outcomes. This phase is not intended as training, as repetition and proceduralization may increase evaluative monitoring and reduce the probability of access.

Instead, a short non-instrumental script may be read once or twice, without memorization or repetition:

> *There is nothing to achieve. Nothing to produce. There is nothing to optimize here. No thought has operational authority.*

The script is not a technique and should not be repeated, analyzed, or used as a method. Its only function is to weaken habitual evaluative framing without introducing a new procedure. This script is not intended to induce a state but to transiently weaken evaluative framing

# 5 M-ZRT Implementation Parameters

## Implementation Notes and Contextual Modulation

Fast-paced first-person shooters such as *Unreal Tournament 99* or *Quake* may be effective implementations, as they combine continuous attentional capture with frequent prediction errors and a partial suspension of explicit optimization.

Low-dose caffeine may be used as a contextual modulator. The dose should remain minimal so that it does not become salient enough to trigger monitoring or explicit interpretation as a regulatory aid. Repeated use is discouraged, as it may be incorporated into the monitoring process.

More generally, the M-ZRT can be implemented in any low-stakes environment satisfying a set of functional constraints: absence of performance feedback, absence of optimization goals, low instrumental salience, compatibility with attentional drift, and a monitoring stop rule. Any explicit performance-checking or feeling-checking operation terminates the session (or renders it invalid).

Participants are encouraged to minimize high-load obligations and socially evaluative contexts on test days. Intrusive imagined social scenarios, such as anticipated arguments or confrontations, should also be reduced where possible.

More broadly, reducing exposure to news consumption, scrolling, comment reading, and social-media metrics may help limit re-engagement of evaluative monitoring. Similarly, reducing repeated time-checking and unnecessary muscular tension (e.g., jaw tension) may contribute to lowering baseline evaluative load. This includes avoiding a persistent goal-directed or "mission-oriented" mode of engagement, which tends to reinstate evaluative monitoring and increase Z.

Repeated exposure to the protocol may decrease, rather than increase, the probability of entry. Sessions are therefore spaced by approximately 24 hours, not as a training schedule, but to reduce procedural carryover and allow monitoring processes to settle between attempts. Occasional omission of scheduled sessions is recommended to reduce temporal predictability and prevent expectancy formation.

The first successful transition may occur only after several null sessions. Within a threshold framework, such delay is not interpreted as gradual improvement, but as evidence of an entry barrier. Repeated failure followed by abrupt discontinuity is therefore treated as expected behavior rather than as an anomaly.

## 6 Example M-ZRT sequence with partial ordering constraints.

The following schematic illustrates an example implementation of the M-ZRT under partial ordering constraints.

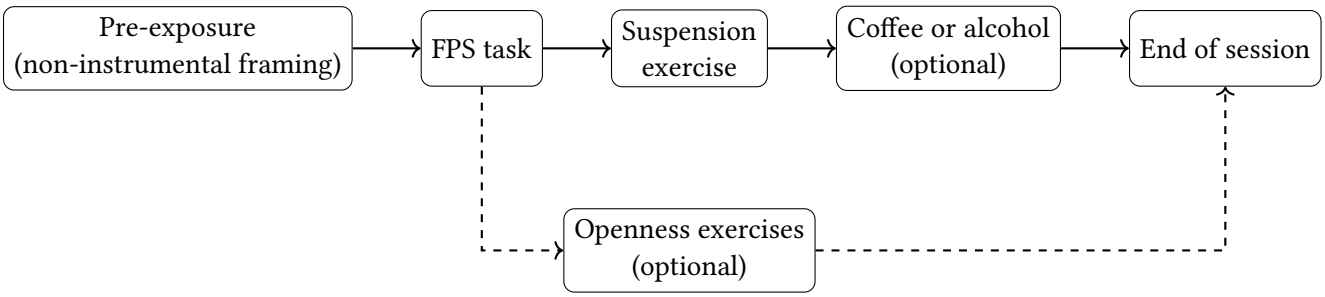


Figure 2: Example M-ZRT sequence with partial ordering constraints. Openness exercises are optional and may occur at variable points between FPS onset and session end.

The schematic below illustrates the two complementary conditions hypothesized to increase access to the ease regime.

## 7 Non-monotonicity (U-shaped constraint)

Micro-perturbations are expected to follow a U-shaped profile: too little has no effect, too much becomes structured and reintroduces monitoring. For instance, a single micro-movement may be insufficient, whereas repeated movements (e.g., three or more) risk forming a pattern and becoming evaluable. Effective perturbations lie in a narrow intermediate range.

## 8 The task : Game with HUD off (ex : unreal tournament 1999)

## Functional Constraints

Any admissible implementation must satisfy the following functional constraints:

1. **Low instrumental stakes.** The action must not carry meaningful cost, reward, or consequence for the participant. Once success matters, evaluative control is likely to re-engage.

2. **Brief suspension without explicit deliberation.** The task may introduce a short interruption, hesitation, or deviation, but not in a way that recruits sustained comparison, planning, or conscious problem-solving.

3. **No performance criterion.** There must be no internal standard of correct execution. If the participant begins to ask whether the procedure is being performed properly, the relevant condition is lost.

4. **No immediate self-evaluation.** The task must not be followed by checking, interpretation, or retrospective appraisal. Post hoc thoughts such as "was that right?" or "did it work?" count as invalidating resumptions of monitoring.

5. **Minimal predictability without explicit surprise-seeking.** The implementation may contain mild arbitrariness or non-optimization, but it should not become a deliberate search for novelty, intensity, or effect.

6. **Non-rhythmic and non-ritualized execution.** If repeated, the action must not stabilize into a rhythm, routine, or familiar induction sequence. Ritualization converts perturbation into a monitored technique.

7. **Single-step permissiveness.** The participant should be able to perform the action and move on without correction, repetition, or refinement. Re-doing, improving, or adjusting the act reintroduces evaluative control.

8. **Non-dependence on task-specific content.** No specific game, object, movement, or setting is theoretically essential. Any implementation is only an example if it satisfies the same functional constraints.

9. **Absence of explicit expectation of effect.** The participant should not treat the action as a guaranteed trigger. Strong expectation, countdown logic, or "the effect should occur now" framing recruits anticipatory monitoring.

10. **Invalidity under monitoring capture.** Any implementation becomes theoretically irrelevant once it is tracked, measured, optimized, or repeatedly tested. At that point, the procedure no longer reduces the bottleneck but becomes part of it.

    Caffeine should be administered with variable timing, either prior to or following behavioral exercises.

## 9 Contextual Modulators: Monitoring Reduction vs Salience Preservation

Low-dose alcohol can be understood as a transient reducer of evaluative monitoring rather than a direct inducer of positive affect. At sufficiently low doses, it attenuates top-down control and self-evaluation, lowering Z while preserving experiential vividness. This allows mild mood elevation or subtle euphoria to emerge indirectly, through the relaxation of constraints rather than direct induction. The effect is strongly dose-dependent: beyond a narrow range, sedation and salience loss disrupt the permissive configuration.

Low-dose caffeine, by contrast, functions primarily as a salience-preserving or enhancing modulator. At minimal, non-salient doses, it increases attentional engagement and sensory vividness without substantially increasing monitoring. This can produce a mild sense of heightened presence, not as a direct mood effect, but by maintaining conditions favorable to spontaneous transitions. Higher doses tend to reintroduce monitoring through arousal and expectation, counteracting this balance. Contextual modulators alone are insufficient and act only under constraint conditions (see falsifiers).

Combining low-dose alcohol and caffeine may seem to jointly reduce monitoring and preserve salience, but it often reintroduces optimization. The pairing itself is easily interpreted as a deliberate strategy, shifting the system toward evaluation, timing, and dose-checking. This raises Z by triggering questions like whether the combination is working or optimal. As a result, two low-salience modulators can become a single monitored technique, undermining the permissive conditions they are meant to support.

## Illustrative micro-perturbations (non-exhaustive, non-procedural)

The following examples are provided as illustrative micro-perturbations. They are not intended to be repeated, refined, or combined into a stable procedure.

#### Openness-oriented perturbations (monitoring attenuation)

- Ask a question internally and leave it unresolved. It can be an incomplete question, or just "what if?".
- Form a simple mental image (e.g., a red apple). Do not refresh it or attempt to sustain it. Simply notice when it fades.
- Generate a brief sense of recognition or approval without a target or recipient.

**Salience-oriented perturbations (attentional capture without evaluation)**

- Select an object and label it as the most important in the game without looking at it directly.

**Suspension-oriented perturbations (brief disruption of ongoing control)**

- While playing, perform a brief, non-rhythmic micro-movement without purpose, and immediately return to the activity without correction or repetition.

These examples are interchangeable. Any attempt to repeat, optimize, or stabilize them transforms the perturbation into a monitored procedure, thereby negating its function.

The schematic below illustrates the two complementary conditions hypothesized to increase access to the ease regime.

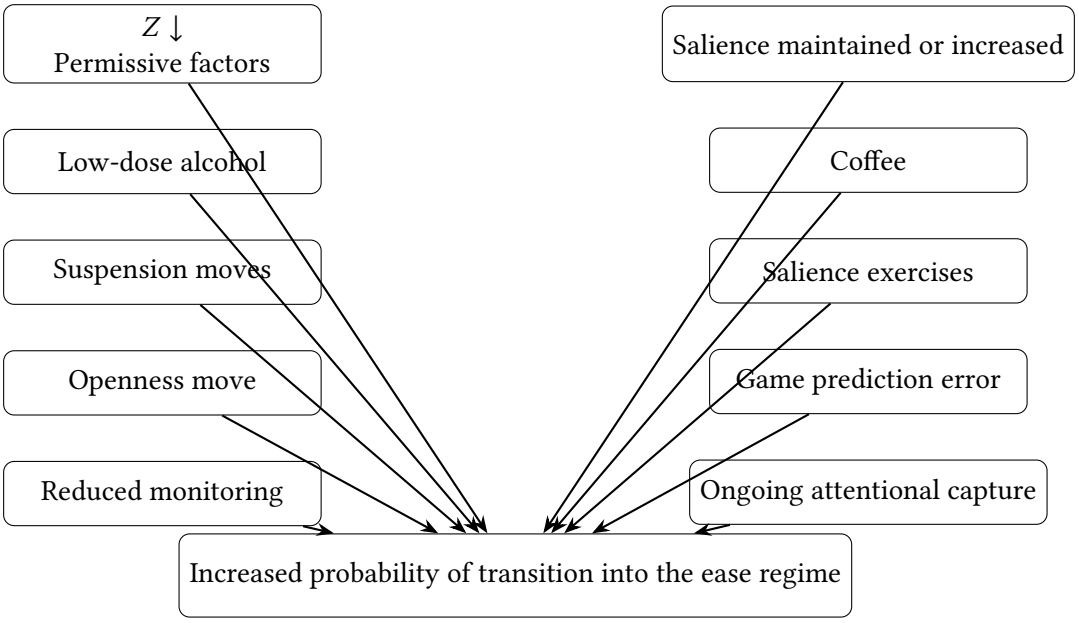


Figure 3: Illustrative schematic of two complementary conditions hypothesized to increase the probability of access to the ease regime: reduction in evaluative load ($Z \downarrow$) and maintenance of salience.

## 10 Standardized test conditions (minimal)

To reduce interpretive ambiguity while keeping the protocol lightweight, each session should be tagged using the following minimal condition grid. This does not aim to fully control the environment, but to prevent "same protocol" claims under substantially different

contexts. These tags are recorded post hoc and should not be actively tracked or monitored during the session.

| Variable | Levels (record one) | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Fatigue state | Low / Moderate / High | Sessions under "High" fatigue are expected to show reduced entry probability and may be postponed. |
| Caffeine | None / Low-dose / Moderate+ | Low-dose is treated as a contextual modulator. Avoid moderate+ due to arousal confounds. |
| Alcohol | None / Low-dose / Moderate+ | If used, restrict to low-dose only. Moderate+ invalidates interpretation (intoxication confound). |

## Optional Additional Tags

These tags are not required but may help clarify failure modes without increasing measurement burden.

| Variable | Levels |
|---|---|
| Sleep debt | None / Mild / Significant |
| Current load | Low / Moderate / High (work, obligations, unresolved tasks) |
| Rumination | Low / Moderate / High |