

# Deep Work | Summary and Notes

**Author:** Cal Newport

**Topic:** Productivity, Focus

**Rating:** ★★★★★

**Commentary:** Loved the information and strategies provided in this book. Definitely found practical advice that I can apply to my own life.

**GoodReads Review:** <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3170782583>



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## Part I: The Idea

### 1. Deep Work Is Valuable

The 3 groups for whom deep work will be valuable during the tech era

- **The High Skilled Workers** → can use machines and complex programs
- **The Superstars** → are the best at what they do (everything is available so only the best will stand out)
- **Owners** → can buy/hire the previous two groups

Two core abilities for thriving in the new economy

#### Master hard things quickly

- Deliberate Practice: deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain
  - Attention focused on the skill
  - Feedback
- Same concept as *The Mindful Athlete*.

#### Produce at an elite level (quality and speed)

- $High\ Quality\ Work\ Produced = Time\ Spent \times Intensity\ of\ Focus$

#### Attention Residue

"When you switch from some Task A to another Task B, your attention doesn't immediately follow—a residue of your attention remains stuck thinking about the original task."

- By doing deep work you reduce the amount of time you switch tasks.

### 2. Deep Work Is Rare

#### The Metric Black Hole

- In business, there is not a method to measure how valuable/how much profit deep work creates

#### Busyness as a Proxy for Productivity

"In the absence of clear indicators of what it means to be productive and valuable in their jobs, many knowledge workers turn back toward an industrial indicator of productivity: doing lots of stuff in a visible manner."

- Separate deep work from busy work. Have a designated time to work on administrative tasks.

*"In such a culture, we should not be surprised that deep work struggles to compete against the shiny thrum of tweets, likes, tagged photos, walls, posts, and all the other behaviors that we're now taught are necessary for no other reason than that they exist."*

### 3. Deep Work is Meaningful

Neurological Argument	<p>“Who you are, what you think, feel, and do, what you love—is the sum of what you focus on.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are what we focus on → if you focus on the deep you will regard life as one with deep meaning.</li> </ul>
Psychological Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs create struggle, goals and feedback. People assume they are happier when they have free time but in reality they are happier when they've succeeded in those struggles.</li> <li>• Same concept as <i>The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F***</i> → "suffering" is how you create happiness.</li> </ul>
Philosophical Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep work lead to growth an success.</li> </ul>

## Part II: The Rules

### #1 Work Deeply

**Eudaimonia** A state in which you're achieving your full human potential

*"You have a finite amount of willpower that becomes depleted as you use it.' Your will, in other words, is not a manifestation of your character that you can deploy without limit; it's instead like a muscle that tires."*

<b>Depth Philosophy</b>	<p><b>MONASTIC</b> → Eliminates all shallow obligations</p> <p><b>BIMODAL</b> → Long period of time in depth (months at a time), then normal life.</p> <p><b>RHYTHMIC</b> → Scheduled time for deep work (every day at the same time)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most approachable philosophy in my experience</li> </ul> <p><b>JOURNALISTIC</b> → Switching into deep work mode whenever you get a change. Varies on a day to day basis to work around your schedule. This is for pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In this case planning it ahead of time can help → <i>calendar blocking!</i></li> <li>• Might eventually switch to this</li> </ul>
<b>Ritualize</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define: Where you will work, for how long and how you will support your depth mindset.</li> </ul>

*"There is a popular notion that artists work from inspiration—that there is some strike or bolt or bubbling up of creative mojo from who knows where... but I hope [my work] makes clear that waiting for inspiration to strike is a terrible, terrible plan. In fact, perhaps the single best piece of advice I can offer to anyone trying to do creative work is to ignore inspiration."*

**Make Grand Gestures**

- Radical life/environment changed in order to commit to your depth philosophy.

**Don't Work Alone**

- This doesn't mean group work, more like surround yourself with people that are also doing deep work. Whether in your same are or not. This spiker creativity and collaboration can create great ideas.
- Modern Office: open floor plan does not work. People are too distracted and it does not allow for depth. While spontaneous collaboration is something to be almost expect from this design it can also be achieved by having private offices with connecting hallways or common areas.

**Execute Like a Business**

1. **Focus on the Wildly Important**
  - Implementing the One Big Thing I'll accomplish today to my to-do list.
2. **Act on the Lead Measures (input)**
3. **Keep a Compelling Scoreboard**

- One of the principles that drive out behavior is monitoring our progress and keeping track!
- Idea: "As each week progressed, I kept track of the hours spent in deep work that week with a simple tally of tick marks in that week's row. To maximize the motivation generated by this scoreboard, whenever I reached an important milestone in an academic paper (e.g., solving a key proof), I would circle the tally mark corresponding to the hour where I finished the result."

#### 4. Create a Cadence of Accountability

##### Be Lazy

- The unconscious mind is good at untangling decisions/problems-sleep on it
- **Resting recharges your energy**
  - Focusing requires our **directed attention**, resting (walking through nature) replenished our directed attention resources
- Downtime work is not important
  - Implement a Shutdown Ritual → shut down for the day by going over the tasks and having a plan for each one of them.
  - **Zeigarnik effect: the ability of incomplete tasks to dominate your attention**

*"When you work, work hard. When you're done, be done. Your average e-mail response time might suffer some, but you'll more than make up for this with the sheer volume of truly important work produced during the day by your refreshed ability to dive deeper than your exhausted peers."*

##### TAKE AWAY

**You have to plan in order for this to become a part of your life. You have to set schedules and protect your deep work time. It's a skill you develop over time, with practice.**

## #2 Embrace Boredom

*"Once your brain has become accustomed to on-demand distraction, it's hard to shake the addiction even when you want to concentrate."*

Deep Work  
Training

1. **Improve ability to concentrate intensely**
2. **Overcome the desire for distraction**

**Don't take break from distraction, take break from focus.**

- It's not just the amount of time spend in a distraction that affects our ability to concentrate but the fact that at the slightest hint of boredom or cognitive challenge we turn to distraction → this teaches out mind to never tolerate the absence of novelty
  - The period of time work deeply doesn't matter as much as respecting this time and resisting distraction

*"To succeed with deep work you must rewire your brain to be comfortable resisting distracting stimuli. This doesn't mean that you have to eliminate distracting behaviors; it's sufficient that you instead eliminate the ability of such behaviors to hijack your attention."*

Give yourself time constraints to complete tasks

- Parkinson's Law

**Productive Meditation**

Thinking about something while doing something that occupies your body but not your mind.

Memorize a Deck of Cards

- **Indulge in other practices that train your brain to go deep**
- **IML → this can be done by playing thinking games, solving puzzles**

##### TAKE AWAY

**It's important to train ourselves to resist mindless distraction in order to be able to work deeply.**

### #3 Quit Social Media

#### The Any-Benefit Approach to Network Tool Selection

You're justified in using a network tool if you can identify any possible benefit to its use, or anything you might possibly miss out on if you don't use it.

#### The Craftsman Approach to Tool Selection

Identify the core factors that determine success and happiness in your professional and personal life. Adopt a tool only if its positive impacts on these factors substantially outweigh its negative impacts.

- Analyze the opportunity costs of everything that you are doing.

#### Quit Social Media

- Do this as a test to how it affects your "business" and to see how much you can pare down

"Part of what fueled social media's rapid ascent, I contend, is its ability to short-circuit this connection between the hard work of producing real value and the positive reward of having people pay attention to you. It has instead replaced this timeless capitalist exchange with a shallow collectivist alternative: I'll pay attention to what you say if you pay attention to what I say—regardless of its value."

#### The Day Within The Day

"The great and profound mistake which my typical man makes in regard to his day, is that even though he doesn't particularly enjoy his work, he persists in looking upon those hours from ten to six as 'the day,' to which the ten hours preceding them and the six hours following them are nothing but a prologue and epilogue." This is an attitude that Bennett condemns as "utterly illogical and unhealthy."

- He suggests that his typical man see his sixteen free hours as a "day within a day"
- "During those sixteen hours he is free; he is not a wage-earner; he is not preoccupied with monetary cares; he is just as good as a man with a private income and should instead use this time as an aristocrat would: to perform rigorous self-improvement."
- Don't use the internet as for entertainment, instead find something more valuable to do with your time once your day within the day is over.
  - If you have something scheduled it'll be easier to do something leisurely yet valuable.
  - If you want to eliminate the addictive pull of entertainment sites on your time and attention, give your brain a quality alternative.

#### TAKE AWAY

**Don't go into social media blindly. Think of the opportunity cost of anything that you are doing.**

### #4 Drain the Shallows

#### Schedule every minute of your day

*"It's undoubtedly easier to continue to allow the twin forces of internal whim and external requests to drive your schedule. But you must overcome this distrust of structure if you want to approach your true potential as someone who creates things that matter."*

#### Other techniques:

- Qualify the depth of every activity
- Ask your boss for your shallow work budget
- Finish your work by 5:30 pm
- Let your default answer be no
- Become hard to reach
  - Make the people who send more email do more work
  - Do more work when you send or reply to email
  - Don't respond → people should make it easy to answer



**What is one thing that I'm going to change because of this book?**

I will view my schedule as: Deep Work, Busy Work, Leisure Time.

**Source:** Newport, Cal. *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. Grand Central Publishing. Kindle Edition.